FORESTS OF THE GODS

SHINTO, NATURE, AND SACRED SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the notion of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship, said to contain important solutions for overcoming today's environmental crisis, has achieved paradigmatic status in academia and Shinto institutions. This has led to the transformation of Shinto self-definitions and shrine practices. However, the development of this 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm' has not yet been subjected to systematic, in-depth research. This study constitutes a first attempt to fill that gap. It consists of four parts. The first part is dedicated to a discussion of theoretical issues related to 'religion in Japan', processes of secularisation and sacralisation, and sacred space. The second part consists of an examination of the development of the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm'. This paradigm, I argue, rests on three pillars: notions of 'the Japanese experience of nature' that were developed as part of the modern nation-building project since the Meiji period; existing notions of Shinto as the primordial, indigenous ritual tradition of 'the Japanese'; and the global association between religion and environmental issues. The third part consists of a more in-depth examination of recent discourse on 'sacred forests' (*chinju no mori*), and ways in which they relate to popular understandings of Japan's civilisation and natural environment. The fourth part, finally, looks at concrete ways in which abstract notions of Shinto, nature and sacred forests are given shape and negotiated at shrines today. Based on ethnographic research in Japan, I discuss four cases of shrine-based forest conservation, followed by four cases of cultural and educational practices related to shrine forests. The significance of *chinju no mori*, I argue, extends far beyond ecological issues: they have come to possess profound symbolic capital, representing continuity between the (ancient) past, the present and the future. As such, they have become the focal points of various discursive and spatial practices, the purposes of which range from environmental advocacy to national resurrection.

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When I was an undergraduate student, I was told several times that doing doctoral research and writing a PhD dissertation is essentially a solitary endeavour, and that many PhD candidates end up feeling lonely. That is not at all how I have experienced the past three years, however. In the course of my journey, I have had the opportunity to meet, talk to, and learn from a great number of people. Without them, I could not have written this dissertation.

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NOTE ON STYLE

Japanese terms are written according to the common Hepburn transcription method. Long vowels are indicated by a macron, except for words that are normally written without, such as common geographical names (Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Kyushu, Hokkaido, Honshu, Ryukyu and Tohoku) and words that have come to be incorporated into English (e.g., 'Shinto' instead of '*shintō*'). Japanese and other East Asian names are written in the standard fashion (i.e., family name followed by given name), with the exception of names that are usually written differently (e.g., D. T. Suzuki).

I do not use Japanese script in the main text, unless necessary to convey the meaning of a particular argument. Japanese concepts are written in italics. The meaning of most concepts will be explained when they are first mentioned. There is also a glossary at the end of the dissertation, where all Japanese terms are listed, together with Japanese script (*kanji* and/or *kana*). In addition to the glossary, I have made a map and list of the shrines I mention in the text, as well as a list of Japanese historical periods. In contrast to the main text, in these lists I have provided Japanese scripts. The same applies to the bibliography, where I have written the names of authors and titles in the Roman alphabet as well as in Japanese, so that those interested in reading more can easily look up the sources to which I refer.

There are several trees and other plant species mentioned in the text. To avoid confusion, I have chosen to refer to them by their Japanese names, as the common English translations are not always botanically correct, and some species are translated in different ways. For instance, *sugi* (*Cryptomeria japonica*) is commonly translated as 'Japanese cedar' in English, but it is not actually a cedar. Similarly, *futaba aoi* (*Asarum caulescens*) is commonly translated as 'hollyhock', but it is not a hollyhock. For clarity's sake, when I first mention a tree or plant species, I will also give the scientific name.

SHRINES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

Map 1: Shrines mentioned in the text

JAPANESE HISTORICAL PERIODS

Jōmon period	縄文時代	Ca. 14,000 BCE-300 BCE
Yayoi period	弥生時代	Ca. 300 BCE-250 CE
Kofun period	古墳時代	Ca. 250-592
Asuka period	飛鳥時代	592-710
Nara period	奈良時代	710-794
Heian period	平安時代	794-1185
Kamakura period	鎌倉時代	1185-1333
Muromachi period	室町時代	1336-1573
Azuchi-Momoyama period	安土桃山時代	1573-1603
Edo period (Tokugawa period)	江戸時代（徳川時代）	1603-1868
Meiji period	明治時代	1868-1912
Taishō period	大正時代	1912-1926
Shōwa period	昭和時代	1926-1989
Heisei period	平成時代	1989-present

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PART I THEORY, METHOD, AND CONTEXT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Religion, sacred sites, and nature conservation

In August 2011, the University of Oxford announced a new collective research project. As stated on the university website, 'a research team from the Biodiversity Institute in the Oxford Martin School is now engaged in a project to scientifically measure the coverage of religious and sacred land.' Sacred land, it was asserted, accounts for 'about 15 per cent of the world's surface'; according to the researchers, 'many of these "religious forests" and sacred sites contain some of the richest biodiversity in the world, including some of the highest numbers of threatened species.' The researchers intend to create a database of 'sacred land' worldwide, and conduct research on 'the forests' biodiversity value[;] their use by local people over generations; their role in carbon dioxide absorption; and their value to local people by way of medicinal plants, and as spaces for cultural, recreational and religious activities' (University of Oxford 2011).

The Oxford University project is carried out in cooperation with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), a UK-based non-profit organisation, which defines itself on its website as 'a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices'.[1] The ARC was founded in 1995 by Prince Philip, and is managed by Martin Palmer, a scholar of religion specialised in the history of Taoism. Since its foundation, the ARC has regularly organised interfaith meetings related to nature conservation and environmental sustainability, working together with representatives of all so-called 'world religions' and helping them reconceptualise their worldviews in accordance with contemporary environmental concerns (see Palmer & Finlay 2003). It also works together with the United Nations Development Programme, the World Wildlife Fund, and the World Bank, among other organisations. In 2011, it launched the 'Green Pilgrimage Network', 'a global network of pilgrim cities and sacred sites around the world wanting to be models of green action and care'.[2]

These initiatives are illustrative of a trend that has influenced both the academic study of religion and religious organisations themselves: the reinterpretation of religious traditions and doctrines in the light of contemporary environmental issues, and the cooperation between scholars/scientists and religious actors on these issues. This development has been going on for several decades, and it has exercised significant impact on some religious organisations' practices and self-definitions. This so-called 'religious environmentalist paradigm', as Poul Pedersen (1995) has called it, has been advocated strongly by a number of scholars in the field of religious studies. Prominent examples include Harvard University's organisation of the 'Religions of the World and Ecology' conferences (1996-1998) and book series (e.g., Hessel & Ruether 2000; Tucker & Berthrong 1998;

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[1] From http://www.arcworld.org/about_ARC.asp (last accessed: July 31, 2013).
[2] From http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=629 (last accessed: July 31, 2013).

Tucker & Williams 1997), as well as the subsequent establishment of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.

In recent years, the focus seems to have shifted somewhat, from religious doctrine as a source of environmental ethics to 'sacred places' as sites of ecological importance. 'Sacred places' are redefined as 'natural heritage sites' and 'biodiversity hotspots' that are in need of protection and conservation. Accordingly, they have (re)captured the attention of scientists (not only scholars of religion, but also biologists and ecologists), environmental activists, and international conservation organisations such as UNESCO (Bhagwat, Dudley & Harrop 2011; Bhagwat & Rutte 2006; Lee & Schaaf 2003; Verschuuren et al. 2010; Wild & McLeod 2008). The new research project at the University of Oxford is in full accordance with this trend, and enforces it. Nevertheless, the project raises some questions. Most importantly, one wonders how the researchers intend to decide 'scientifically' which forests and other sites qualify for the predicate 'sacred', and which do not; and, considering the lack of any consensus on how to measure sacredness, on what 'scientific evidence' the assumption that sacred sites are exceptionally rich in biodiversity is based. Nevertheless, the fact that a reputable university such as Oxford sanctions a collaboration between biodiversity scientists and religious environmentalist organisations is significant, as it points to a growing academic interest in the ecology of 'religious' and/or 'sacred' places.

One religious tradition that has been reconceptualised in recent years as an 'environmentally friendly' tradition, allegedly characterised by centuries-old nature worship practices and ancient ecological worship, is Shinto. The umbrella organisation with which the majority of Shinto shrines in Japan today is affiliated, Jinja Honchō, has actively contributed to this development by means of various publications (e.g., Jinja Honchō not dated b). For several years, it has also been involved with a number of ARC projects, including the current Green Pilgrimage Network. But Jinja Honchō is not the only Shinto organisation explicitly associating Shinto worship traditions with nature and environmental issues. A number of Shinto scholars, shrine priests and other actors (volunteers, scientists, artists and others) have also been instrumental in this process. Consequently, in recent years, the notion of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship containing important solutions for overcoming today's environmental problems has come to constitute one of the main paradigms underlying conceptualisations and definitions of 'Shinto'. As this study will illustrate, it has also influenced contemporary shrine-based practices.

A core theme in this understanding of Shinto is the notion of *chinju no mori*, or (sacred) shrine forest. Many shrines are surrounded by small areas of woodland, or flanked by forested sacred mountains. Some of these shrine groves are said to constitute Japan's last remaining areas of primeval forest. More often, they have been (partly) planted or replanted by people in the course of history. Depending on size, species composition and geographical location, some of these shrine forests constitute important ecological resources. In the course of the twentieth century, however, the total amount of shrine-owned forest land has decreased significantly as a result of government policies and

construction projects. As a result, in the 1970s, a movement emerged focused on the protection of shrine forests. This *chinju no mori* movement has succeeded in drawing attention to the ecological value of shrine forests, and to the importance of conservation. In addition to their ecological value, however, shrine forests have considerable symbolic significance, as they have come to represent continuity between the ancestral past (i.e., 'traditional' values and cultural practices), the present and, if preserved well, the future.

In this dissertation, I will discuss these developments. I will map and analyse contemporary academic and religious-institutional discourse on Shinto, nature, and the environment, with particular emphasis on the topic of sacred forests. In addition, I will discuss some shrine-based projects, and examine ways in which abstract discourse is given shape and negotiated in local practices. Thus far, there has not been any systematic academic study of this topic in which the various discursive and institutional developments related to Shinto and the environment are mapped – neither in English nor in Japanese (nor, as far as I am aware, in other languages). There are some English-language texts asserting the significance of Shinto for environmental issues (e.g., Picken 2002; Shaw 2009; Sonoda 2000), but these are arguably 'emic' texts contributing to the reconceptualisation of Shinto as a nature religion, not 'etic' academic texts analysing contemporary discourse and practices. In their recent book on the history of Shinto (or rather 'Shintoisation'), Breen and Teeuwen devote a few pages to the topic of Shinto's alleged environmentalist character (2010, 207-210). In addition, there have been a few scholarly articles briefly addressing aspects of this development (Clammer 2010; Dessì 2012; Domenig 1997). All in all, however, there has been little research on the topic of Shinto's reconceptualisation as an ecologically sustainable tradition of nature worship. Nor, for that matter, have scholars outside Japan paid much attention to the topic of *chinju no mori*. This study constitutes a first attempt to fill that gap.

1.2   Core themes

1.2.1   *Forests of the gods*

This is a multi-layered story. First, it is about gods that dwell in forests. Or, more precisely, this is not actually a story about gods that dwell in forests; it is a story about stories about gods that dwell in forests. As the epistemological challenges inherent in saying anything meaningful about gods as such prompt me to adopt a position of methodological atheism (not to be confused with metaphysical atheism) and a social-scientific refusal to engage with the question as to whether these gods have any existence of their own (that is, independent of ways in which they have been conceptualised by human beings), I will discuss stories about gods, not the gods themselves. Thus, I will quote, summarise, interpret, analyse, deconstruct and compare several existing stories about gods dwelling in forests, in the process creating my own meta-story, rather than come up with a new story from scratch. Following

the classical, somewhat too simplistic yet arguably still relevant dichotomy often used by scholars of religion and anthropologists to distinguish between the narratives and vocabulary of religious practitioners and their own 'outsider' interpretations, we might call my approach to gods and forests 'etic' rather than 'emic' – provided that the label 'etic' is not understood as referring to a type of 'objective' analysis, but rather as an attempt to interpret subject matter intersubjectively, critically, comparatively and self-reflexively, in contrast to the self-justifying and self-referential character of 'emic' narratives.

The 'emic' vs. 'etic' (or 'insider' vs. 'outsider'; the terms 'emic' and 'etic' are derived from the linguistic categories 'phonemic' and 'phonetic') dichotomy is not entirely unproblematic, and has been criticised by scholars for making an artificial and normative distinction between different types of narrative accounts of reality ('etic' accounts supposedly being more 'objective' and, hence, superior to 'emic' ones), and falsely suggesting that there can be such a thing as non-situated knowledge (e.g., Ingold 2000, 14, 41). While I agree with this critique, I have nevertheless chosen to adopt the terms, but I will use them somewhat differently: rather than referring to different types of narrative accounts of reality, I use them to refer to different types of epistemological attitudes. 'Emic' narratives, in my use of the term, are narratives that seek to confirm and legitimise preconceived myths and truth claims (not necessarily religious) and operate within the context of a particular discourse; 'etic' narratives, on the other hand, seek to question, contextualise and reflect upon established texts and practices, crossing boundaries between different discursive fields. Needless to say, this distinction is ideal-typical, and the reality is more complicated as ultimately all narratives are ideologically situated; nevertheless, in discussing approaches to texts and practices, I do believe the distinction continues to be useful, if only to formulate scholarly ideals.[3]

Although I will not address the question as to whether they have any independent, pre-discursive existence, there is no denying the fact that the central point of reference of this story is 'gods dwelling in forests' – in particular, the different ways in which they have been (re)imagined and (re)conceptualised in recent Japanese academic, religious and popular narratives. Central to this is the concept of *chinju no mori*, the genealogy and meanings of which I will discuss in more detail later. The main difference between my narrative and the narratives I discuss is that I will not make any ontological statements regarding the presumed divine character of these forests. Instead, my story addresses some of the things other people have said about the gods and their forests, and the various ways in which they relate to them.

In this study, I use the words 'gods' and 'deities' interchangeably, as generic terms referring to a variety of supernatural agents believed to have the power to influence aspects of nature and human life. In Japan, the deities associated with Shinto are commonly referred to as '*kami*'. In works on Shinto written in English (or other European languages), one regularly comes across the statement that

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[3] On ways in which 'emic' notions can take on 'etic' significance (and vice versa), see Von Stuckrad 2010, 164; for an overview of the debate, including a number of classical texts, see McCutcheon 1999.

the term *kami* should remain untranslated, as it supposedly refers to something unique that may not be equated with 'gods'. For instance, Jinja Honchō states on its website that '[i]n order to comprehend the concept of kami, it is important to erase the preconception caused by the word god, an English translation that is often used for the word kami' (Jinja Honchō not dated c). Likewise, in many popular works, the term '*kami*' remains untranslated, by which the uniqueness of the concept (and, by extension, the tradition to which it belongs) is asserted, either implicitly or explicitly (e.g., Kasulis 2004; Ono 1962; Picken 2002; Yamakage 2006). However, the argument is not only expressed in 'emic' works claiming there is a fundamental difference between Shinto and other religious worldviews; it can also be found in works of a more scholarly nature. For instance, in his otherwise excellent overview of the Yasukuni Shrine issue, John Breen states that '*kami* (…) is often inadequately translated as "gods"' (2007, xv). Many other authors simply use the word *kami* without elaborating upon their choice not to translate the term.[4]

While it is undeniably true that the term *kami* signifies something notably different from the omnipotent creator 'God' of Christianity, Judaism or Islam, the generic term 'gods' cannot *a priori* be discarded as inapplicable. That is, whereas 'God' is, by definition, singular and absolute, 'gods' are countable, diverse, culture-specific and not necessarily omnipotent. The term 'deities', moreover, is even more generic, as it does not carry the confusing connotation of the absolute singular. Accordingly, in my opinion, there is no compelling reason not to use the generic terms 'gods' or 'deities' to refer to Japanese *kami*; a category which, it should be noted, is diffuse and generic itself, and has been subject to significant historical change. *Kami* can refer to a singular, omnipresent force, as well as multiple spiritual beings; it can refer to anthropomorphic or zoomorphic creatures, natural phenomena, abstract powers or deified ancestors.

Moreover, historically speaking, on the islands now known as Japan a variety of spiritual creatures have been worshipped that were not traditionally referred to as *kami*, yet may be classified as 'gods' or 'deities'.[5] Sarah Thal notes four difficulties in dealing with the concept of *kami*: first, they are particular and site-specific (i.e., diffuse and diverse) rather than all-encompassing; second, they change 'with startling frequency', depending on political and economical developments; third, they 'exist in close association with countless other types of powerful beings' that sometimes overlap –

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[4] Jonathan Z. Smith made an interesting (if somewhat provocative) remark about the tendency of many scholars to leave key terms untranslated, arguing that the assertion of uniqueness is not necessarily always justified: '[m]any students of religion, with their exaggerated ethos of localism and suspicion of generalization, (…) [often insist] on employing native terminology which emphasizes the *absolute particularity* of the data in question rather than deploying a translation language' (2000, 36; emphasis in original). A similar argument is made by Gavin Flood in his discussion of the possibility of intercultural intelligibility: he states that 'the ability to translate others' concepts into one's own language entails that we live in the same world' (Flood 2012, 138).

[5] An example of these are *gongen*, incarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas that were 'shintoised' and *became kami* after the forced 'separation' of Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri*) in 1868 (see Bocking 1995, 36, 164-166). Cf. Thal's comment (made with regard to the pilgrimage site Konpira, but equally applicable to many other places of worship in Japan) that 'any one spirit of the site (referred to here as "god") might be envisioned simultaneously as a kami, a buddha, a long-nosed goblin (*tengu*), a dragon, or any of countless other forms' (2005, 5).

associations that suddenly became politicised and forcefully reshaped in the Meiji period; and fourth, Christian notions of 'God' and 'religion' have complicated and transformed understandings of Japanese deities in modern times (2005, 2-7). Thus, she concludes, while *kami* are '[c]learly not "Gods", their role as objects of worship, more powerful than but responsive to humans, nevertheless qualifies them as "gods" (with a lowercase *g*) according to the more inclusive usage now prevalent among anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion' (ibid., 7-8). In sum, using the generic terms 'gods' and 'deities' – not in any ethnocentric or essentialist way, but as a comparative category denoting supernatural agents that are believed to possess the power to influence human life and are subject to worship – may actually be preferable to using *kami*, a term that is used differently by different authors and does not necessarily include all deities historically associated with shrine worship.

Finally, a short note on my use of the term 'forests'. I deliberately use this term in a generic way, as a translation of the Japanese '*mori*'. In fact, many of the 'shrine forests' and/or 'sacred forests' in which the gods are believed to dwell are very small, and do not fully correspond to common geographical, ecological or landscape-architectural definitions of 'forest'. As they constitute small areas of woodland, usually clearly demarcated from the surrounding urban or agricultural space, the term '(sacred) groves' is arguably more apt. Indeed, '*chinju no mori*' has been translated as 'sacred groves' (e.g., Sonoda 2006b). Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the word 'forests' as it is more generic, including not only shrine groves but also forested mountains, which likewise figure prominently in contemporary discourse on Shinto and nature. Moreover, the Japanese term *mori* not only refers to actual physical areas of woodland, but also carries a variety of symbolic and ideological connotations (see chapter eight) that I believe are more accurately reflected by the generic term 'forest' than by 'grove'. Thus, I will use 'forest' as an 'emic' rather than an 'etic' term. For instance, I will discuss 'shrine forests' that may not qualify as 'forest' according to common scientific definitions, but are conceptualised as *mori* nonetheless.

1.2.2   Shinto and 'Shinto'

Second, this is a story about Shinto, and 'Shinto', and some of the ways in which these categories operate in contemporary society and politics. When I refer to Shinto (without quotation marks), I am referring to a number of related institutions that have existed as a religion in Japan since 1945, and a variety of ritual, spatial and discursive practices that take place within this organisational framework. As with other religions, the definition and boundaries of Shinto are contested and subject to change; it includes the shrines affiliated with Jinja Honchō, the independent Fushimi Inari Jinja and its satellite shrines, as well as a number of organisationally independent shrines scattered around Japan (see Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 199-220). In addition, depending on one's definition, it may include several of the

so-called 'new religions'[6] historically categorised as 'Sect Shinto' (*shūha shintō* or *kyōha shintō*) and their split-offs, as well as a number of institutions outside Japan calling themselves Shinto. As I do not subscribe to any normative notion of what constitutes 'real' Shinto, the only criterion I can use is self-definition. That is, those movements, institutions and individuals that define themselves as belonging to the tradition Shinto are categorised as such; those that do not, are not.

The above approach to Shinto, one might argue, has too strong an institutional focus; moreover, its relevance for premodern (or even prewar) Shinto is questionable. If I were to apply the term more generically, however, and reimagine Shinto as a more or less homogeneous, indigenous tradition going back to medieval (or even ancient) times – one of the classical conceptualisations of Shinto – it would no longer merely refer to the socially and legally differentiated modern category Shinto, but would become a transhistorical, normative abstraction. Historically speaking, there is no clearly defined, unambiguous Shinto: throughout history, Shinto has been repeatedly reconceptualised and transformed, and any attempt to come up with a unitary definition inevitably overlooks the diversity of uses and interpretations of the term.

Hence my choice to juxtapose Shinto and 'Shinto'. The latter is written with quotation marks, in order to make clear that it concerns a *concept* – ideal-typical, imagined, prescriptive, ideologically imbedded, and contested – rather than a singular, unambiguous tradition. Thus, throughout this story, I distinguish between Shinto – the modern institutionalised religion (i.e., all institutions defining themselves as such) and its various practices – and 'Shinto' – abstract, normative conceptualisations of the tradition(s) supposedly underlying these practices. I will discuss the category 'Shinto', and its various conceptualisations, in more detail in chapter five.

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[6] Often described as a society with a large number of 'new religions', the religious landscape in Japan has received ample attention from scholars of religion (e.g., Hardacre 1986; Kisala 1999; MacFarland 1967; Shimazono 2004). In Japanese, these religions are usually referred to as *shinshūkyō* or, more derogatively, *shinkōshūkyō*. However, as an analytical category, the term 'new religions' – or its equivalent, 'new religious movements' ('NRMs') – is problematic. First, the adjective 'new' is ahistorical, as there is no consensus as to how young or old a movement should be in order to be classified as a 'new religion' (as illustrated by the somewhat absurd distinction in Japanese between 'new' and 'new-new' religions). Second, and more problematically, the categorisation of 'new religions' as something opposed to and different from 'established' or 'institutionalised' religions tends to conceal the similarities between them, as well as the fact that many of these so-called 'new religions' do *not* define themselves as such – but rather as 'Christian', 'Buddhist', 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and so on. Thus, it may be argued that the categorisation serves the agenda of powerful religious actors, who want to deny potentially subversive alternative movements the right to define themselves as belonging to the same tradition. This is perhaps not surprising, considering the fact that the category is a euphemism that has replaced the pejorative term 'cult' in academic discourse, but maintained the normative distinction underlying it (cf. Lewis 2003, 198-213). Nevertheless, as an emic category, the term 'new religions' cannot be discarded altogether; especially in Japan, the term features prominently in popular and academic discourse, referring to a large and disparate group of religious organisations that have been established from the early nineteenth century onwards. Hence, I will refer to the emic category when necessary, but I do not endorse the term as a valid interpretative category.

1.2.3 'Sacred space'

Third, this is a story about 'sacred space' – and, by extension, about particular places that are considered sacred. As such, it is informed by discourse produced in the academic field commonly referred to as 'religious studies' or 'study of religion(s)', of which the topic of 'sacred space' is one of the traditional concerns. However, in contrast to the traditional interpretations of sacred space advocated by Mircea Eliade and like-minded phenomenologists of religion, I do not endorse the notion of sacredness as a transhistorical, intrinsic quality of certain places. Rather, I consider it to be an external attribution, actively produced and reproduced through discursive, spatial and ritual/performative practices. Places and landscapes are subject to historical change, in terms of shape as well as meanings attributed to them; consequently, there is no such thing as permanent, unchanging 'sacred space'. On the contrary, it is contingent upon changing social, cultural, political and environmental circumstances. 'Sacredness' can disappear and reappear, and needs to be periodically reinterpreted and reinvented in order to survive. In other words, 'sacred places' do not simply 'exist'; they are produced both discursively and materially. Throughout this study, I will refer to this process – the discursive production of sacredness – as 'sacralisation' (cf. Anttonen 2000; Demerath 2007). This process cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration related processes of spatial and societal differentiation, as well as modernisation, secularisation and nation building, by which it is shaped and to which it reacts in a variety of ways.

Thus, I am arguing that, in contrast to phenomenological narratives of 'sacred space' stressing the supposedly transhistorical spiritual and symbolic significance of religious places, we should recognise their political, economical and ideological significance. Whether framed as 'sacred' or 'profane', 'religious' or 'secular' (related dichotomies, yet not entirely overlapping), any physical location is simultaneously part of a territory. Hence, it is owned by someone (an individual, group, company, religious organisation or state); it represents a particular economic value (which, naturally, is subject to change); and it may be contested, subject to competing claims regarding ownership, land use, history and meaning, and even to violent conflict.

The city of Jerusalem is a case in point. It is generally considered to be one of the most sacred places in the world, a status which is constantly cultivated and confirmed by means of a variety of discursive and performative practices. As such, it is subject to a number of claims – sometimes complementary, but more often irreconcilable – regarding its past, present and future use. These, in turn, are closely intertwined with power struggles, land control, and identity politics. An interpretation of the Haram Al-Sharif as an Eliadean *axis mundi* connecting world and cosmos, or a description of the religious symbolism of churches and chapels on the Via Dolorosa, may serve to conceal the violence, coercion and power struggles implicit in the construction, conservation and transformation of Jerusalem's 'sacred' cityscape. Accordingly, it may be argued, such narratives naturalise non-reflexive 'emic' explanations, thus depoliticising those sacred places.

By contrast, I am advocating an approach towards sacred places that takes into consideration the historical conditions of their construction and the ideological subtexts underlying their narrative representations. Hence, this is not only a study of 'Shinto', 'sacred forests' and environmental conservation in contemporary Japan; it is also an exploration of theoretical issues related to (sacred) space. As such, it constitutes an attempt to contribute to a reconceptualisation of the category 'sacred space' that leads to its repoliticisation, by deconstructing rather than reifying claims concerning sacred qualities, and by rehistoricising 'sacred' landscapes. I will further elaborate upon this topic in chapter three, in which I will discuss the theories of Henri Lefebvre and their possible relevance for a study of sacred space.

1.2.4   Nature' and 'the environment'

Fourth, this is a story about nature and the environment. More precisely, it is a story about ways of conceptualising nature and the environment, in relation to the three aforementioned topics – gods dwelling in forests (*chinju no mori*), Shinto and 'sacred space'. When I discuss 'nature', I do so in the light of recent developments in philosophy, science and anthropology that have led to the problematisation of one of modernity's foundational dichotomies: the existential distinction between 'nature' – a category encompassing most non-human animal species, plants and trees, as well as landscapes that do not show obvious signs of human involvement – and 'culture'. Generally speaking, the former is seen as the origin of life, not influenced by human action but preceding it, often conceptualised as 'pure' or 'wild'. The latter, by contrast, is seen as shaped by human action and antithetical to 'nature'; it encompasses the categories 'technology', 'society', 'politics', 'art' and so on. As the environmental anthropologist Tim Ingold has argued, the nature-culture dichotomy is the 'single, underlying fault upon which the entire edifice of Western thought and science has been built' (2000, 1), and it is reproduced in and reified by academic divisions of labour, spatial planning and policy-making, as well as common parlance.

However, this paradigmatic dichotomy has been challenged by a number of scholars, who have made attempts to transgress fixed disciplinary boundaries and reimagine ways in which human beings relate to and give meaning to their environments (including non-human animal species, physical landscapes and material objects). Influential thinkers contributing to this radical reinterpretation of 'nature' and 'culture' include Donna Haraway (1991; 2008), the aforementioned Tim Ingold (2000; 2011), Bruno Latour (1991; 2005), and Anna Tsing (2005). Following these scholars, I argue that, contrary to popular understanding, there is no *a priori* ontological distinction between nature and culture. That is, 'cultural' products are natural in the sense that they are physically embodied, and operate in relational networks that are not limited to, and cannot be fully controlled by, human actors (cf. Latour 2005). Meanwhile, it is questionable whether there is such a thing as 'pure'

nature that is not subject to historical change and human influence, for instance when it comes to landscape production.

The nature-culture dichotomy, it may be argued, is a discursive construction that has exercised profound ideological, spatial and ecological influence. That does not mean I agree with the social-constructivist argument that nature can be reduced to this discursive construction, i.e., that nature does not have any existence outside of discourse (e.g., Bird 1987; cf. Soulé & Lease 1995). Nor, for that matter, do I endorse the opposite materialistic argument that human beings can be reduced to their genetic material, and their experiences to neurological processes. I do, however, recognise the ideological potential of stories of 'nature' – a potential that rests on their ontological dissociation from the realm of politics. I will elaborate on this point, and illustrate it, in chapter four.

In addition to 'nature', I will also address 'the environment'. As a subcategory of 'nature', 'the environment' is usually conceptualised as something opposed to human culture and society. Likewise, as it constitutes knowledge of 'nature', environmental knowledge is generally perceived as universally valid, and fundamentally independent from temporal or spatial particularities. As any other knowledge, however, environmental knowledge is situated. Environmental models are attempts at interpreting changes that take place within physical landscapes (on local as well as global scales), which provide the basis for developing policies that may counterbalance or limit those changes deemed undesirable by certain powerful agents. That does not mean, however, that they are universally valid, even when framed as such (Tsing 2005, 88-90, 101-106). Conceptions of the environment are culturally specific and historically contingent, even though some of them are perceived as universal and operating on a transnational scale.

For clarity's sake: the fact that environmental issues are situational and locally embedded does *not* mean the problems addressed in environmentalist discourse are mere social constructions that have no reality of their own. On the contrary, I believe many of these problems represent a serious and imminent challenge to humankind, and I sympathise with most of the efforts made by activists and policy-makers who recognise this urgency and try to find solutions. It does mean, however, that the models and narratives provided by scientists and diplomats are not the only possible interpretations of the problems, and not necessarily always the most adequate and/or effective. While I am sceptical of romantic idealisations of 'indigenous knowledge' (a topic to which I will return later), it is nevertheless important to realise that there are alternative ways of conceptualising 'nature', 'the environment' and 'environmental problems' that do not always correspond to dominant scientific paradigms, yet can exercise profound significance on ways in which people co-exist with their surroundings – which, in turn, affect the ways in which they shape and negotiate their identities. In the end, formulations of 'nature' and 'the environment' are related to culturally defined ways of dwelling and moving in space; accordingly, they are often intertwined with, and sanction, understandings of selfhood and otherness. Hence, they are of profound ideological significance.

1.3 Research questions

As the above discussion makes clear, this story consists of four core topics – or rather, four layers, as they are not isolated entities confined to separate chapters, but overlapping themes that will keep on recurring throughout the study. The research is guided by four sets of questions, which correspond to the different layers. These questions are as follows:

1. How is the trope of 'sacred forests' (*chinju no mori*) employed in contemporary Japanese academic, religious and popular discourse? Through what discursive, spatial and institutional practices are *chinju no mori* defined, shaped and demarcated? What are the different meanings attributed to them? And how do these forests operate within the wider context of Shinto institutional and ideological developments, as well as environmentalist and conservationist practices?

2. What are the main paradigms by which 'Shinto' has been conceptualised in modern and contemporary Japan (by scholars as well as representatives of Shinto institutions), and what are the political subtexts underlying these competing paradigms? How do existing notions of 'nature', 'nation' and 'religion' resonate in contemporary discourse on 'Shinto'? And how are these abstract ideological narratives enacted and negotiated in local practices and institutional policies?

3. How has the notion of 'sacred space' been conceptualised in academic discourse, and how is it employed in contemporary theories? Can we conceive of 'sacredness' as a product of discursive and spatial practices, rather than as an intrinsic quality of certain places, objects and texts? How are notions of 'sacred space' appropriated for environmental, nationalist, commercial and other purposes, in Japan as well as on a transnational scale? How does sacralisation relate to other place-making processes?

4. To what extent are notions of 'nature' and 'the environment' culturally and historically specific, despite claims of universality? How are notions of 'uniquely Japanese' ways of relating to the natural environment employed in contemporary discursive and spatial practices? How do these notions relate to the discourse on 'sacred forests', and to reconceptualisations of 'Shinto'? To what extent do they shape institutional policies?

1.4   Methodological approaches

In many academic texts, especially in the humanities, the relationship between 'theory' and 'method(ology)' is unclear. The two categories are often taken for granted, and not usually clearly defined; consequently, the boundaries between them tend to be blurred. University courses and scholarly texts on 'theory and method' tend to privilege the former, at the expense of the latter. I have come across the statement 'my theory is my method' more than once. Thus, there seems to be considerable confusion as to how exactly the two relate.[7]

In order to avoid confusion, I would like to propose the following distinction. Theories are abstract, generalisable (as opposed to particular) statements of an ontological or epistemological nature, concerning the characteristics and operations of certain phenomena, and ways in which these can be known. Theories, therefore, give shape to interpretative frameworks and analytical narratives. Methodology, in my use of the term, refers to the academic *acts* or *practices* by which the object matter of the study (e.g., statistical data, literary texts, or ethnographic data) is selected, collected, produced, examined and/or tested. In the social sciences, there is a core distinction between so-called 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' methods, but the difference between 'theory' and 'method' is generally fairly straightforward. In the humanities, however, the terms 'method' and 'methodology' are less clearly defined, and are often confused with 'theory'. Inevitably, there is some overlap between the two – 'critical discourse analysis', for instance, may refer to a particular methodological approach (or, rather, various different approaches going by that name), but it also has theoretical ramifications. Nevertheless, I would still argue that 'method' should refer to the actual *practices* in which the researcher engages (for instance, text selection and ways of reading), whereas 'theory' refers to the abstract models and scholarly ideas (of a general nature) that guide her in her subsequent interpretation and analysis.

1.4.1   Historical discourse analysis

A significant proportion of this study consists of summaries and critical analyses of texts. These texts all address one or several of the core topics in which I am interested here: Shinto, nature, environmental issues, shrine forests and sacred space. Most of the primary sources on which my discussion is based are in Japanese, some in English. Several of these texts may be classified as 'academic' or 'scientific', others as 'popular' or 'religious'. But in Japan, there is considerable overlap

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[7] For instance, some of my colleagues who had read draft versions of the second and third chapter of this dissertation argued that these were methodological chapters, rather than theoretical, as I would describe them myself. They were right to point out that the sociological and spatial theories I explore in these chapters have methodological implications, as they have affected the selection of data (i.e., texts and practices) upon which this study is based. Nevertheless, I would argue that these chapters are primarily made up of theoretical discussions, shaping my interpretative framework and perspectives, rather than constituting my method *per se*.

between these different categories, and the distinctions between them are not always clear. For instance, religious institutions may organise 'academic' activities such as seminars or symposia, while scholars and scientists working at universities often produce 'popular-scientific' works and give interviews in mass media. Rather than on their presumed 'academic' or 'religious' character, therefore, I have selected texts primarily based on their subject matter.

Many of these texts are interrelated. In some cases, authors refer explicitly to the texts by which they are informed. More often, they employ similar arguments as others, without referring to them. Thus certain historical narratives, popular etymologies and ontological statements acquire the status of self-evident 'truths' (i.e., they become part of a particular religious-academic *doxa*, as Bourdieu has called it [Stordalen 2012]), and cease to be seen as theories or opinions. Together, these texts come to constitute a particular 'field' or 'network', and operate in a 'discourse': 'a group of statements which provide language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment' (Hall 2001, 72), or 'a relational totality of signifying sequences that together constitute a more or less coherent framework for what can be said and done' (Torfing 1999, 300). All meanings, it follows, are attributed discursively – 'nothing has any meaning outside of discourse', as Foucault famously stated (Hall 2001, 73) – but no discourse is ever definitive or all-encompassing.

As my study is concerned with a collection of interrelated texts and symbols operating within a discourse, which I intend to analyse, my method may be described as 'discourse analysis'. When using the term 'discourse', I am fully aware of the fact that, as Von Stuckrad has rightly pointed out, it 'is used in many, and often conflicting, ways' (2013, 7). But I am informed by his suggestions with regard to the 'discursive study of religion' (Von Stuckrad 2003; 2010; 2013), and follow his lead when he writes (based on his reading of Foucault) that

> Knowledge of the world is not an innate cognitive skill but the cultural response to symbolic systems that are provided by the social environment. These symbolic systems are typically produced, legitimized, communicated, and transformed as discourses. Discourse analysis, from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, aims at reconstructing the processes of social construction, objectification, communication, and legitimization of meaning structures. (…) [T]he notion of knowledge here does not refer to an objective truth of the world but to the social communication, attribution, and legitimization of what is accepted in a given society *as* knowledge. This knowledge can be explicit, but also implicit or tacit. (…) Implicit or tacit knowledge is not tested or challenged (or even understood) by agents in a given society; what is more, such knowledge can change significantly from one society to another and from one historical period to another. That is why historical analysis of discourse addresses not only the explicitly available forms of knowledge (…) but particularly the 'self-evident knowledge', the truth that is not formalized but generally accepted (2013, 8-10; emphasis in original).

Von Stuckrad then distinguishes between two types of discourse analysis. The first, 'textually oriented discourse analysis', is used in a philological and linguistic context, associated with speech-act

theory, and typically concerned with particular uses of language. The second, 'historical discourse analysis', focuses on context rather than text, on power relations, and on historicity. It is associated with scholars such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, and it 'explores the development of discourses in changing socio-political and historical settings, thus providing means to reconstruct [their] genealogy' (2013, 15; cf. 2003, 266). When I use the term 'discourse analysis', I do so in the latter meaning: the purpose of the analysis is to *contextualise*, *rehistoricise* and *repoliticise* narratives by looking at historical production processes and political subtexts. Central to this is the notion of *genealogy*, one of Foucault's core concepts, that refers to the examination of the historical processes whereby knowledge has come to be produced and seen as 'truth', yet is opposed to both historical idealism and the search for 'origins' (Foucault 2010a, 77).

Related to the genealogical approach is the method of 'conceptual history'. As they operate within a discursive context, concepts are 'socially, historically, and locally rooted, and must be explained in terms of these realities', as Eric Hobsbawm has written (1990, 9). Similarly, in the words of Reinhart Koselleck, 'our concepts are founded in socio-political systems that are far more complex than would be indicated by treating them simply as linguistic communities organized around specific key concepts' (2004, 76). He continues by arguing that any study of social and political historical realities needs to take into account the history of concepts and their meanings, for '[t]he persistence and validity of a social or political concept and its corresponding structure can only be appreciated diachronically. The fact that a word has remained in constant use is not in itself sufficient indication of stability in its substantial meaning' (ibid., 82). For instance, the concept 'religion' has been around since Roman times (Taylor 1998, 8), but it has been employed in a variety of ways and carried different meanings in different historical contexts (Smith 1998). Likewise, as I will discuss in chapter five, the fact that the term *shintō* – or, more accurately, the combination of Chinese characters that would later be pronounced as *shintō* (Teeuwen 2002) – can be found in ancient chronicles does not mean it carried the same meaning then as it does today.

Thus, while they may be perceived as natural and self-evident, concepts and categories are the outcome of a variety of historical, political and linguistic developments, and are constantly redefined and renegotiated. Accordingly, classification practices reflect dominant worldviews and power structures – even (or should I say: especially) when it comes to classifying supposedly non-political natural elements (Foucault 1973, 125-165). As Bruce Lincoln has pointed out, classification (or taxonomy, as he calls it) 'is not only an epistemological instrument (a means for organizing information), but it is also (…) an instrument for the construction of society' (1989, 7-8). Thus, classification and categorisation – no matter how abstract or 'scientific' they are – are inherently political activities, as they shape, sanction and/or challenge social structures, and as the power to classify is unevenly distributed among different members of society.

However, the production, reification and falsification of categories, and the classification and reclassification of empirical data into those categories, are core scientific practices. Accordingly, the

classification of cultures – and, by extension, of religions – into a set number of categories has long been a favourite pastime of (evolutionist) anthropologists and scholars of religion, and their studies reflect normative judgements regarding similarity and difference, if not superiority and inferiority (Smith 2000; cf. Pye 1989). Scholars do not own a monopoly on classification, however; religious institutions and officials themselves are continuously involved in processes of classification ('allowed'-'forbidden', 'good'-'evil', 'God'-'*jinn*'-'Prophet' and so on). Again, the power to do so is unevenly distributed, also within those institutions. To conclude, any academic study of 'religion' should take into account processes whereby categories are produced, negotiated, rejected and reproduced, in 'sacred texts' as well as exegetic literature and academic interpretations.

In sum, I would define the methodology I apply when reading texts for this study – i.e., my reading *practice* – as 'historical discourse analysis': although my study is not 'historical' as it is focused on contemporary developments, my approach is definitely 'historicist' in the sense that I try to interpret texts, concepts and categories in the context of their genealogy, socio-political and ideological significance, and historical construction process. Somewhat confusingly, Von Stuckrad asserts that discourse analysis 'is not itself a method' but a 'research perspective or research style' (2013, 14). But this statement, I would argue, only confirms what I have written previously: that there is considerable confusion in the humanities concerning the question as to what constitutes 'method' and 'methodology'. Historical discourse analysis constitutes my reading practice, i.e., my attitude to texts. Hence, it constitutes my method. By contrast, the subsequent *interpretation* of texts is influenced by my theory, which I will discuss in the following chapters.

1.4.2   *Ethnographic field research*

In addition to historical discourse analysis, this study is based on ethnographic data. Clearly, it is not an anthropological study in the classical sense of the word: i.e., an analysis of the cultural practices and social structures of a particular confined, 'non-Western' community, based on an extended period of ethnographic fieldwork (i.e., participant observation) within that community. That said, I am certainly informed by social/cultural-anthropological texts, both theoretically – in particular, when it comes to anthropological analyses of notions of 'identity', 'belonging' and 'otherness' – and methodologically. Moreover, one of the appealing aspects of anthropological discourse in recent decades, in my opinion, is the general focus on reflexivity and intersubjectivity, and a Foucauldian awareness of the political and ideological embeddedness of knowledge production – including, significantly, the researcher's own narrative. I will return to this topic shortly.

Cultural/social anthropology is generally associated with the research method 'ethnography'. According to a classical description, '[t]he ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or

she is concerned' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1989, 2). As a research method, however, ethnography is not only applied by anthropologists, but also (increasingly) by scholars of religion, area studies specialists, and scholars operating in new, transdisciplinary fields such as science studies and political ecology. For instance, Bestor, Steinhoff and Bestor have provided an interesting overview of the various 'fields' in Japan where ethnographic research has been conducted, ranging from bureaucratic institutions to non-profit organisations, and from karaoke clubs to 'new religions' (2003).

As Scott Schnell has emphasised, '[t]extual analysis is obviously a very important aspect of religious studies. Exclusive reliance on written documents, however, is insufficient for addressing certain problems involving the actual practice and experience of religion' (2006, 381). I fully agree. Hence, when studying contemporary understandings and reconceptualisations of Shinto and the environment, I did not want to rely on texts only, no matter how important. Fujimura Ken'ichi (2010) has rightly pointed out that most academic texts on 'religion' and 'the environment' are concerned with doctrines, ethics and abstract theory, rather than 'lived religion' (i.e., the practices carried out by 'religious' actors, and their opinions). But neither abstract academic discourse nor 'local' practices exist in a vacuum. *Chinju no mori* are discursively mediated, but that does not mean they merely exist in texts: they are physical realities, subject to a variety of spatial practices. Theories on Shinto and nature are enacted, materialised and negotiated by local actors; their practices, in turn, reshape theories. In some cases, the theorist and the local actor is one and the same person. Thus, in order to come to an adequate understanding of contemporary Shinto- and nature-related practices, text analysis must be combined with ethnographic data.

For several reasons, I have not been able to spend an extended period of time with one particular group of people. Instead, I have visited a number of different shrines, projects, and people somehow related to my main research topics. As a result, this dissertation is not based on a single case study. Instead, it constitutes an attempt at *mapping* a variety of contemporary practices. Of course, it is not *complete* – but then, arguably, no map can ever be – and the choice of shrines and projects is, to a certain extent, based on 'chance encounters and random occurrences' (Schnell 2006, 383). However, I do think that there are significant similarities between the different shrine projects I have studied, and that they share an interesting family resemblance. Most importantly, they all constitute attempts to give shape to the notion of *chinju no mori* as an invaluable resource (cultural, ecological and spiritual) for twenty-first century Japanese society.

In the course of my research project, I have spent approximately five months in Japan, divided into three periods: February-March 2011, September-December 2011, and May-June 2013. During these research periods, I have conducted a total of 31 semi-structured interviews with shrine priests, scholars and project organisers. In addition, I have talked informally to a number of people, including priests, volunteers, teachers, students, forest scientists and so on. I have participated in a number of shrine forest activities at Shimogamo Jinja, Kamigamo Jinja and Meiji Jingū; attended a number of academic meetings organised by Shasō Gakkai; participated in guided forest walks at Ise Jingū, Meiji

Jingū, Atsuta Jingū and Shiroyama Hachimangū; visited a number of shrines associated with the Shinto-environmentalist movement, including Chichibu Jinja, Gosho Komataki Jinja and Tsurugaoka Hachimangū; and I have been to the area of Tohoku hit by the 2011 tsunami, where I talked to shrine priests and volunteers. The results of these research visits and interviews will be discussed in detail in the last two chapters of this dissertation.

In addition to the above, I have also participated in landscape conservation activities; visited two so-called 'Shinto-derived new religions', and conducted interviews there; and joined members of cultural and environmental non-profit organisations on a 'business trip' to the shrines of Kumano. These last experiences have helped me learn more about contemporary issues in Japanese society and religion, as well as popular landscape construction practices. As I had to limit myself, however, I have chosen not to discuss these topics in detail in this dissertation. This study is concerned with notions of 'nature' and 'sacred space' pertaining to Shinto and *chinju no mori*. I will briefly touch upon the three topics of the conservation of 'traditional' agricultural landscapes, Shinto 'new religions', and contemporary Japanese civil society and non-profit organisations, but unfortunately I do not have the space to discuss them in detail.[8]

1.4.3   Notes on (inter/trans)disciplinarity

I have a background in two disciplines: Japanese studies and the study of religion (or 'religious studies'). Neither of the two are disciplines in the traditional sense of the word: they are not defined by a particular theoretical or methodological approach (or set of approaches), but by their subject matter, which is approached from a variety of perspectives. Arguably, this is both a strength and a weakness. As I will discuss in chapter two, both disciplines have been accused of constructing and reifying their subject matter, rather than merely 'describing' it. Dominated (until the 1990s, that is) by, respectively, the phenomenology of religion and philological-historical positivism, both disciplines have been criticised for their alleged lack of theoretical reflexion and apparent ignorance of the political embeddedness of knowledge production. On the other hand, it may be argued that, exactly *because* they are not confined to a single methodological or theoretical paradigm, scholars of religion and/or area studies are used to doing interdisciplinary research. Now that interdisciplinarity is often mentioned as a necessary strategy for overcoming disciplinary fragmentation and outdated academic classificatory structures, these two inherently 'interdisciplinary disciplines' may well serve as examples, in some ways at least.

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[8] Others have also written about these topics. On 'traditional' Japanese agricultural landscapes (called *satoyama*), see for instance Berglund 2008; Kyoto Journal 2010; Takeuchi et al. 2003. On 'Shinto new religions', see Hardacre 1986; Prohl 2006; Staemmler 2009; Staemmler & Dehn 2011; Stalker 2008. On 'civil society' and non-profit organisations, see Hardacre 2004; Marmignon 2012; Sorensen & Funck 2007.

Whether or not the present study counts as 'religious studies' and/or 'Japanese studies' in the traditional sense of the word is up to the reader to decide. In my approach, I am certainly informed by academic texts that are usually considered to be part of religious studies, as well as texts from area studies. In addition, however, I am informed by texts from cultural anthropology, philosophy, sociology, spatial studies, ecology and even forestry studies. As such, this study has a strong interdisciplinary orientation. Or perhaps I should use the word 'transdisciplinary' – for, arguably, 'interdisciplinarity' does not challenge disciplinary structures *per se*, just like the term 'international' usually refers to organisations and practices that reconfirm the privileged status of nations as today's world's primary political and cultural units. By contrast, the term 'transdisciplinarity' may be used to refer to attempts to transcend disciplinary boundaries rather than confirm and enforce them, and contribute to cross-disciplinary understanding rather than disciplinary fragmentation. That does not mean this study will be generic – on the contrary, if a transdisciplinary study wants to be relevant, it needs to have a clearly defined focus – but it does mean it will resist approaching the topic of inquiry from a single disciplinary perspective.

As outlined previously, the focus of this study are the discursive and spatial practices centred around 'sacred forests' in contemporary Japan, and the concurrent redefinition of Shinto, which will be analysed in its historical and ideological context. What makes this study transdisciplinary is not so much the subject matter itself – I have come across a number of monodisciplinary studies of shrine forests – but rather the ways in which I try to approach it. That is, I refuse to interpret these forests from a single perspective. Thus, I will not describe them solely as sacred places where rituals are performed and deities believed to dwell (which would constitute a traditional 'religious studies' perspective); as uniquely Japanese historical phenomena, where Japanese cultural elements have been preserved (which a 'Japanese studies' approach might come down to); or as local ecosystems composed of a variety of mutually dependent organisms (a possible ecological interpretation).

Instead, I see these forests as multi-layered places, subject to historical change, that have particular physical and environmental properties, and to which various discursively produced and negotiated meanings and values are attributed. No single disciplinary approach would do justice to this multi-layered nature, in my opinion. Hence my choice to adopt a transdisciplinary approach: that is, I will focus on one particular topic and set of questions, but I will approach these from a variety of angles so as not to limit myself to one particular set of disciplinary paradigms and corresponding methodology. In my opinion, in order to be relevant, transdisciplinary research should not be generic; on the contrary, it needs concrete foci. In other words, transdisciplinarity lies not in the choice of subject matter, but in the interpretation of that subject matter. Such an interpretation should take into account a variety of theoretical perspectives, based on multiple methodological approaches not limited to particular established paradigms and disciplinary boundaries.

1.5   My own journey: epistemology and reflexivity

In addition to being a scholarly discussion of Shinto, nature and sacred forests, this dissertation is also the account of a personal journey. The account follows academic conventions regarding genre, narrative structure, and references – scholarship is the field in which I operate, after all – but it is personal, as it is an account of the discoveries I have made in the course of the past couple of years, and my reflections on these discoveries. As such, the text is necessarily partial, perhaps even idiosyncratic, and the interpretations offered are situated and coloured by my personal questions and interests (see Haraway 1991, 183-202; Tweed 2006, 1-28). If another researcher had done this research, s/he would probably have selected some (although not all) of the same texts and places as I have, and have come up with some similar interpretations; nevertheless, the eventual story would have been different. I believe that the production of knowledge, and the narratives by which that knowledge is shared (either 'academic' or otherwise), are shaped by means of a variety of associative practices – ranging from database searches, to coincidental encounters and personal introductions, to networks of bibliographical references, and so on. In many ways, then, research can be conceived of as a journey (cf. Tweed 2006). The reflection upon this journey cannot be complete without acknowledgement of the fact that the data are collected and narrated by an individual, who has his or her own personal horizon (Gadamer 2004), preconceived notions of good and bad, and possible agendas.

Accordingly, I subscribe to the epistemological position that absolute objectivity (i.e., objectivity that transcends time and place) is an abstract ideal that cannot be achieved – not necessarily because absolute truth does not exist (which would be a far-reaching metaphysical statement), but because absolute truth is fundamentally unknowable, as all knowledge is culturally, historically and linguistically embedded and mediated. As social-anthropological theory has emphasised for several decades (e.g., Clifford & Marcus 1986; cf. Robertson 2002), a scholar can never be a neutral outside observer, but is always somehow personally involved in the interpretation and production of the data s/he works with. When studying human culture and society by interacting with other people, the researching subject is always also somebody else's object; thus, subject and object are situational rather than fixed categories, and academic knowledge is always produced through interaction between researcher and researched. As a result, no academic knowledge can be fully objective: there is always a certain degree of subjectivity involved, not only in the interpretation of research data but also in their 'collection' (i.e., production). Arguably, even scholars working with texts are involved in the production of their own data – if only through their practices of reading, selecting, and combining different texts.

However, whereas no knowledge can be fully objective, it is never a merely subjective construction, either. All narratives are produced in constant interaction with other narratives – texts, ideas, and assumptions – and, therefore, are *inter*subjective rather than subjective. Ideally, academic narratives can be distinguished from other, 'non-academic' narratives not because the former are more

'objective' than the latter, but rather because they display an *awareness* of their own intersubjectivity (often referred to by the term 'reflexivity'), and try to be transparent about the texts and ideas by which they are informed. To paraphrase Bruce Lincoln, if scholarship is mythmaking, at least it is mythmaking *with footnotes* (1999, 209). It is the footnotes that make the difference, as they represent the ideal of transparency with regard to intertextuality and intersubjectivity.[9]

Not only knowledge, but all social and cultural phenomena (texts, practices, beliefs, traditions, places and so on) are historically, politically, discursively and physically embedded. Everything is historically contingent: contrary to what is often asserted, I would argue that cultures, nations or religions do *not* possess an eternal essence that transcends history, as they are always the outcome of historical processes of production, transformation and continuous reinterpretation. Accordingly, all social and cultural phenomena should be studied as the outcome of such historical processes. Neither God(s) nor Nature are historical (f)actors that can be referred to in order to explain why things are the way they are, as these are abstract metaphysical entities arguably only known in their socially, culturally and linguistically mediated shapes: i.e., as concepts and ideals, which are themselves historically constructed and ideologically charged. Furthermore, nothing to which value is attributed can be politically neutral: collective identities, cultural traditions and historical narratives are constantly negotiated and contested, are subject to power relations, and can be employed for various strategic (or tactical) purposes. As such, they often have ideological significance, even if not implicit. The same is necessarily true for this dissertation: as any academic text, it is inevitably informed by, and reflects, the ideological perspectives and political interests of the author.

Finally, it is important to note that all phenomena are not only historical, political and discursive, but also physical: that is, they are embodied, and they are conditioned by the various geographical, biological and environmental factors involved in their historical production processes. Scholars discussing the 'social construction' of ideas and phenomena tend to overlook the non-human factors involved in their production processes. Japanese 'sacred forests', for instance, are shaped by *historical* processes not only of (re)plantation but also of sacralisation (i.e., the construction of 'sacredness'); they are of *political* and ideological significance, not only because they have a particular economical value but also because normative notions of national identity are projected upon them; they acquire these various meanings *discursively*, through language, in interaction with different narratives, myths and symbols; and they are conditioned by the *ecological and geographical* features of the landscapes of which they are a part, and shaped by various non-human actors such as trees, plants, animals and meteorological phenomena as much as by human actors.

As suggested above, while being committed to the scholarly ideals of transparency and intersubjectivity, this text is undoubtedly informed by, and reflects, my personal ideological and

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[9] Lincoln referred to 'footnotes', but of course the 'footnotes' in this expression can also refer to in-text references – his point is that in scholarship, arguments are well-documented, and make reference to the texts upon which they build.

political perspectives. I am personally committed to and concerned about environmental issues, and I believe the ongoing exploitation of the natural environment is intimately connected with the global spread of free-market capitalism, which is dependent on an incessant growth of both production and consumption – and, therefore, of exploitation, both of natural resources and human labour. I also believe that, in order to overcome today's challenges, a worldwide paradigm shift is needed, as well as radical changes in government policies. I sympathise with efforts to protect green space and biodiversity, reduce the amount of waste, restrict the emission of greenhouse gases, and counter ongoing deforestation.

That does not mean, however, that I uncritically embrace any environmentalist narrative. Nor, significantly, does it mean that this work is of an activist nature. In recent years, there have been some important anthropological works that have succeeded in combining scholarly analysis with environmental activism (e.g., Fortun 2001; Walley 2004). However, that is not the purpose of this study. Rather, I would like to show how environmental issues and symbolism have come to be understood, and appropriated, by contemporary Shinto actors (shrine priests, scholars, and volunteers). Hence, I approach 'nature and 'the environment' from a meta-perspective, similar to the way I approach 'G/god(s)'. That is, sociologists and anthropologists of religion do not usually speak about God. Instead, they speak about 'God', in quotation marks; i.e., as a historically and socially constructed concept to which a number of properties is attributed. Similarly, in this study I will not write about nature and the environment. Instead, I will write about 'nature' and 'the environment' as they have been conceptualised and employed in contemporary Japanese discourse and practices.

Thus, while the choice of topic is undoubtedly influenced by my personal interests, the purpose of this study is not to provide academic legitimation for contemporary environment-oriented Shinto practices. Nor, on the other hand, do I intend to judge them based on my personal environmentalist ideals and political opinions. Rather, I wish to summarise the existing discourse on Shinto and the environment, map contemporary shrine practices, and analyse the various motives and subtexts underlying these developments. As my main purpose is analytical rather than activist, my personal environmentalist ideals are not very relevant for the purpose of this study, so I will make an effort not to let them interfere with my interpretations. Inevitably, however, my interpretations will be somehow coloured by my own interests, opinions, and assumptions. I can only express my intention to be as intersubjective and transparent as possible.

1.6 Outline of the study

This dissertation consists of four parts. The first part, to which this introduction belongs, is entitled 'Theory, method, context'. The purpose of this part is twofold: first, exploring various theoretical issues related to my research topic; and second, discussing the social and ideological context in which contemporary ideas and practices take shape. In chapter two, I will begin by addressing questions

related to the position of the category 'religion' in modern and contemporary Japan – which are crucial for understanding the modern configuration of 'Shinto' – as well as recent debates concerning the use of this category in academic discourse. I will then move on to discuss the question as to how 'religion' in Japan relates to 'the secular', and explore recent articles concerned with Japan's apparent secularisation. By contrast, I will argue that, examples of institutional decline notwithstanding, there are various processes of sacralisation happening in Japan today.

In chapter three, perhaps the most theoretically oriented chapter of this dissertation, I will continue to explore the topic of sacralisation from the perspective of 'space'. I will start by discussing the theories of Henri Lefebvre, which will guide me in my interpretation of 'sacred-forest-making' practices in contemporary Japan, as well as some more recent, complementary theories. I will then move on to discuss the topic of 'sacred space' and examine existing theories on this topic. Based on this, I will make some tentative suggestions for approaching and interpreting 'sacred space' today. I will then move on to discuss notions of sacred space and processes of sacralisation in contemporary Japan.

In the second part of this study, entitled 'Shinto: a nature religion?', I will trace the development of something I refer to as the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm': the conceptualisation of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship, containing important ecological knowledge and solutions for overcoming contemporary environmental problems. First, in chapter four, I will address the topic of 'nature'. After a theoretical discussion of this concept, and ways in which it has functioned in Japanese modern discourse, I will examine the genealogy of the widely shared belief that 'the Japanese' have a unique way of relating to nature, supposedly characterised by harmony, interdependence, and even love. This includes a discussion of Watsuji Tetsurō's environmental determinism, as well as postwar environmentalist reappropriations and critique.

In chapter five, I will proceed to discuss various modern historical conceptualisations of Shinto. I will distinguish between 'historical-constructivist' and 'essentialist' approaches to Shinto, arguing that the difference is that the latter are based on the notion of a transhistorical core essence defining and unifying Shinto, which the former deny. I will then discuss the main 'essentialist' paradigms according to which Shinto has been defined and classified in modern times: the 'imperial paradigm', the 'ethnic paradigm', the 'local paradigm', the 'universal paradigm', and the 'spiritual paradigm'. I do not conceive of these different paradigms as mutually exclusive: while they may contradict each other in some respects, at times they can also complement each other.

Having discussed conceptualisations of both 'nature' and 'Shinto', in chapter six I will look at the development of the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm'. I will start by examining academic texts and practices, looking at Japanese responses to and appropriations of the foundational work of Lynn White and his followers, and discussing a number of Japanese academic events that have led to these notions gradually achieving paradigmatic status. I will also discuss some non-Japanese contributions to this trend, before moving on to look at other, 'non-academic' discursive fields. In particular, I will

focus on Miyazaki Hayao's popular films, which have arguably contributed a great deal to the dissemination of the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm'.

In chapter seven, then, I will discuss shrine-institutional contributions to the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, and instances of shrine-related environmental advocacy. The chapter is made up of three parts. First, I will make a brief historical excursion, raising the question whether it is possible to interpret premodern shrine practices as environmentally oriented, and looking at the pioneering work of the early-twentieth-century scientist and activist Minakata Kumagusu. Second, I will examine the somewhat ambivalent role the Shinto umbrella organisation Jinja Honchō has played in the postwar development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. And third, I will discuss some cases in which shrines have become sites of environmental advocacy (a topic to which I will return in chapters ten and eleven).

Part three, called 'Shinto's sacred forests', addresses the topic of sacred forests in more detail. It consists of two chapters. First, in chapter eight, I will discuss notions of Shinto as a 'forest religion', as well as related conceptualisations of Japan as a 'forest civilisation' characterised by 'animism' and diametrically opposed to 'Western monotheism'. In this context, I will discuss contemporary imaginations of the prehistoric Jōmon period as an ecological golden age, supposedly preserved in sacred mountains such as Mount Miwa in Nara prefecture. Moreover, I will discuss the theories of scholars such as Umehara Takeshi, Yasuda Yoshinori and Sonoda Minoru, who are some of the best-known representatives of this 'forest religion' discourse.

Subsequently, in chapter nine, I will discuss the genealogy of, and various meanings currently attributed to, the concept '*chinju no mori*'. I will start by distinguishing four different meanings, and giving some concrete examples of how they can be used. Next, I will explore recent theories concerning the etymology and social significance of *chinju no mori*. Following a recent popular definition of the term, I will then move on to discuss some of the core themes in contemporary discourse on *chinju no mori*.

Finally, in the last part of this study, I will discuss a number of concrete cases of shrine forest preservation and related practices. In chapter ten, I will discuss four cases where nature conservation is arguably the primary (although by no means the only) focus and concern. These are, respectively, the conservation project taking place at Tadasu no Mori, the forest of Shimogamo Jinja in Kyoto; the activities organised by Shasō Gakkai, an interdenominational non-profit organisation with a practical-scientific orientation that focuses on the conservation of sacred forests in Japan; the activities employed by shrine priest Sakurai Takashi at the forest (and rice paddy) of Gosho Komataki Jinja, a small but atmospheric shrine in Ibaraki prefecture; and the recently established Mori-zukuri Kaigi at Shiroyama Hachimangū in Nagoya, which unlike most other shrine forest organisations was not founded by shrine actors, but by environmental activists.

Next, in chapter eleven, I will discuss four cases that are all somehow related to the central topics of shrine forests and the reinvention of Shinto as a nature religion. Unlike the cases discussed in

chapter ten, however, they are not primarily concerned with nature conservation, but rather with the preservation and revitalisation of traditional culture, as well as of the nation as a whole. The first two are shrine projects that have several features in common with the projects discussed in chapter ten: the non-profit organisation Hibiki at Meiji Jingū in Tokyo, which organises a variety of activities in Meiji Jingū's large Taishō-period urban shrine forest; and the Afuhi Project at Kamigamo Jinja in Kyoto, which focuses on plant cultivation and educational activities. I will then explore a case that has acquired new significance in 2013 because of this year's *shikinen sengū* (ritual rebuilding): Ise Jingū, shrine-related forest cultivation, and newly emerging environment-related sacralisation practices.

Finally, I will address a topic that I did not intend to write about when I started my research project, but that emerged in the course of this research – unfortunately, I must say – as an important and socially relevant topic, which has some significant implications for the topic of Shinto, nature and shrine forests. I am referring to the topic of natural disasters, in particular (but not exclusively) the tsunami that caused widespread destruction and suffering in the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011. I will begin by examining various Shinto responses to the disaster, discussing the work of Shasō Gakkai, shrine-based reconstruction activities in Tohoku and elsewhere, and some of the ways in which the rhetoric of 'national resurrection' is employed by shrine actors in Kumano (another region hit by disaster in the same year). I will end the chapter by making a first attempt to address the question of theodicy, and examine some of the ways in which the experience of natural disaster has affected and has been reconciled with notions of nature as 'sacred', and Shinto as a 'nature religion'.

2. 'RELIGION' AND 'SECULARISATION' IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

2.1 'Religion' in Japan

2.1.1 On 'religion'

In recent years, the validity of the academic discipline usually referred to in English as 'religious studies' or 'study of religion(s)' has been the subject of heated scholarly debate. Paradoxically, now that secularisation theory has been declared dead by many – including some of its former advocates (Berger 1999; Cox 2000; cf. Stark 1999) – and religious ideologies have (re)claimed a prominent place in public spheres and (identity) politics around the globe (Casanova 1994; Demerath 2001; Roy 2010), the category of 'religion' itself has been subjected to much intellectual scrutiny. Several scholars have deconstructed the concept, questioned its supposed universal applicability, and challenged the assumptions underlying the discipline 'religious studies' – a discipline that, from its beginning, has been defined by its subject matter, rather than by any particular theoretical or methodological approach.

The notion of 'religion' as a second-order term rather than a natural category has been put forward by Jonathan Z. Smith, who famously stated that '[r]eligion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence outside of the academy' (1982, xi). This does not mean it is not valuable as an analytical concept (quite the contrary, according to Smith); it does mean, however, that scholars should be aware of the ways in which they use the concept, for '"[r]eligion" is not a native term. (…) It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics or "culture" plays in anthropology' (Smith 1998, 281-282). Thus, the phenomena described by scholars of religion are not inherently 'religious', for 'religion' is a scholarly abstraction projected onto a variety of texts, practices and institutions. A second-order term, that is.

The category 'religion' may be a scholarly abstraction, that does not mean it is politically neutral. Drawing on the work of Smith as well as other critical thinkers, several scholars have pointed out that both the establishment of the academic discipline 'religious studies' and the category that constitutes its *raison d'être* are the products of particular historical developments. Accordingly, it has been argued, they are imbedded within historically constructed power structures, and have significant ideological implications. However, these are not usually recognised as such, because religion has often been (and continues to be) considered as something essentially opposed to the realm of politics. As Talal Asad has written,

> the insistence that religion has an autonomous essence – not to be confused with the essence of science, or of politics, or of common sense – invites us to define religion (like any essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon. It may be a happy incident that this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our time that it be kept quite separate

from politics, law, and science – spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life. (…) Yet this separation of religion from power is a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history. (…) My argument is that there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes (1993, 28-29).

Thus, Asad criticised the reification of 'religion' as a universal category, suggesting that it is, in fact, a 'Western' ethnocentric construction that has taken shape within a particular historical setting, rather than an *a priori* fact of life. At the time of writing, these statements constituted a revolutionary critique of the taken-for-granted category 'religion', one of the foundational categories underlying modern society, political ideology and academic practices. Until then, the inherently tautological nature of the discipline religious studies – i.e., religious studies discursively constructs and naturalises its own object of inquiry, by which it then defines itself – had not been subjected to much critique. The underlying assumption that religion is a universally shared, transhistorical, even pre-cultural phenomenon was not usually questioned, and until recently statements such as the following were common: 'Few would deny that some form of religion is universal among mankind. We have yet to discover any society that does not articulate some notions about the sacred and about spiritual beings' (Morris 1987, 1).

This type of argument is referred to by Russell McCutcheon (1997) when he criticises 'religious studies' for constructing its own subject of study, and legitimising this by turning the construction into a '*sui generis* phenomenon' – that is, a natural, culturally dependent yet universally present response to the experience of presumed divine beings. This, he argues, has had profound economical and political implications – not only because it creates university departments and jobs, but also because the academic study of religion is imbedded within and has legitimised global (neo)imperialist structures (1997, 158-191; cf. Asad 1993).

It may be argued, then, that scholars such as Asad and McCutcheon have contributed to the repoliticisation and demystification of both the category 'religion' and the discipline that has long functioned as its intellectual 'caretaker' (McCutcheon 2001), by showing how these categories are produced by and imbedded in global power structures. A similar point is made by Timothy Fitzgerald (1997; 2000), who has likewise attacked the notion of 'religion' as a universal, cross-cultural category. According to Fitzgerald, the term 'religion' has never overcome its Christian ethnocentric connotations, and the discipline 'religious studies' suffers from a lack of theoretical reflection. Accordingly, he argues, scholars of religion do not usually acknowledge the ideology implicit in the concepts they use:

Even attempts by scholars with a non-theological agenda to refine the concept of religion and make it work as a non-theological analytical tool fail. Meanings are not merely a question of definition but also of power. I suggest that this category is now far too deeply embedded in a

legitimation process within western societies, in the dominant relation of those societies with non-western societies, or with ethnic minorities living within western societies, to be successfully liberated from the semantic hold of liberal ecumenical theology (2000, 19).

The term religion, he goes on, is a product of European modernity, 'a modern ideological construction', that (together with its inseparable other, the 'secular') was imposed upon 'non-Western' practices and beliefs as part of imperialist projects. These categories were employed to rearrange colonial societies according to European models, and were thus implicit in the legitimation of colonial exploitation. Before the introduction of the modern category, 'religions simply did not exist in this new sense but had to be imagined and invented, in a process that included legal definition, from existing traditional ritual elements' (2000, 30; cf. Fitzgerald 2007a, 6-7). Thus, the argument goes, 'Buddhism', 'Hinduism', 'Taoism' and so on are nineteenth-century inventions that were based upon existing heterogeneous discursive and ritual traditions, which were remodelled and reified as 'world religions' through the imaginative power of European academic Orientalists (Fitzgerald 2000, 121-155; Masuzawa 2005). Accordingly, the construction of the universal category '(world) religion', and the projection of that category onto a variety of non-Western others, was implicit in early-modern global power configurations (Fitzgerald 2007b). It must be emphasised, however, that 'religion' is not solely a category constructed and imposed by colonial oppressors: significantly, the category was also appropriated by certain 'indigenous' actors for purposes of identity politics.[10] Indeed, Japan constitutes a prominent example of a country that, albeit under pressure from European imperial powers in the nineteenth century, was never colonised; yet here, too, the modern category 'religion' was implemented, appropriated and employed for ideological and political purposes. The same, incidentally, applies to Thailand.

Asian traditions played a prominent part in the configuration of 'religion' as a universal category. As Kiri Paramore has argued, the distinction between 'religion' and 'politics' parallels other binary oppositions functioning in the production and legitimation of power structures, such as 'East'-'West':

> The emergence of 'religion' as an academic category and indeed 'religious studies' and 'religious history' as disciplines, occurred partly *through* the imagination of a concept of Asia in 18th and 19th century Europe. Asian religions themselves were used to construct the dichotomy of Asia as an oriental alterity, just as the academic concept of 'religion' was forming due to the impact of these same traditions in Europe. (…) It is important to note that this creation of a binary between an active West and passive East in the parameters of modern academic discourse was paralleled in the binary division between 'religion', as a discrete field of activity, and 'politics'. In the same way that cultures in regions other than Western Europe were rendered passive by being divorced from the agency associated with 'the West' as the

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[10] Cf. Van der Veer's discussion of ways in which notions of 'spirituality' and newly constructed 'isms' were appropriated and used by Indian nationalists to assert the superiority of their traditions vis-à-vis those of the colonial oppressor (2009, 1107-1118). There are some interesting similarities between India and Japan in this respect.

origin of universal categories, so too was religion allocated a certain political passivity by being defined apart from the political realm in a specialised sociological category (Paramore 2010, 18; cf. Masuzawa 2005).

Thus, as Paramore suggests, the religion-politics dichotomy was a product of the same power configurations as the equally essentialist East-West dichotomy, and followed a similar set of binary oppositions – irrational-rational, passive-active, primitive-modern and so on. Not only was the discursive construction of 'mystical Eastern religions' such as Hinduism and Buddhism central to the reification of 'religion' as a universal category, it was also implicit in legitimising Western hegemonic power and colonial exploitation (cf. King 1999; Said 1978).[11]

Arguably, the notion of 'religion' as a universal, *sui generis* category that cannot be reduced to any other realm of human civilisation (such as 'politics' or 'culture') has led scholars of religion and others to overlook the inherently political nature of the term. As Asad has pointed out in his critical reading of the work of Clifford Geertz (1973), religion is traditionally seen as 'a distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other. From this it seems to follow that the essence of religion is not to be confused with, say, the essence of politics, although in many societies the two may overlap and be intertwined' (Asad 1993, 27; cf. Fitzgerald 2007b). The large number of books, articles and university courses addressing the topic 'religion and politics (in X)' paradoxically confirms the assumption that the two categories may be interrelated, but are nevertheless opposing entities that cannot be reduced to each other.[12] Thus, the dichotomy is reproduced by scholars, who justify the assumption that the realm of 'religion' is essentially apolitical, by structurally distinguishing between 'politics' and 'religion' (Fitzgerald 2000, 112-113, 248). Religion, in their works, 'has become pluralized into generic things in the world, things that have some problematic relationship with a distinct and separate domain of power called "politics" ' (Fitzgerald 2007a, 2).

The above discussion raises an inevitable question: if the concept 'religion' is so irrevocably intertwined with power structures, should it be abandoned altogether as an analytical category? This seems to be the position of Timothy Fitzgerald (2000; 2007b) and Russell McCutcheon (1997; 2001), who argue that scholars of religion should limit themselves to the study of the historical formation of 'religion' as a second-order concept. While their critique of certain established academic practices and assumptions is convincing and relevant, the suggestion to close down 'religion' departments and only study ritual practices as a subcategory of 'culture' (Fitzgerald 2000, 221-234; cf. Tweed 2006, 36-42) does not do justice to the complexity of the contemporary category religion. That is, it is an undeniable fact that in the contemporary world the category 'religion' plays an important role – legally, politically

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[11] Incidentally, the ideological significance of the category 'religion' for the construction of otherness and the legitimation of colonial power was not limited to the 'East'. As David Chidester (1996) has shown, the category 'religion' also played a central role in the formation and justification of colonial rule (and, subsequently, apartheid) in southern Africa.

[12] On ways in which 'religion and …' courses have contributed to the reification of religion as a universal and transhistorical category, see McCutcheon 2001, 179-199.

and economically, as well as for the formation and formulation of collective identities, positive as well as negative. The fact that 'religion' is an ideologically charged, historically constructed category does not make it less 'real' as a semi-autonomous realm in contemporary society and politics. As Peter Beyer rightly observed, '[l]ike nations or cultures, religions represent powerful and socially consequential abstractions which manifest themselves in particular, identifiable forms such as religious organizations or religious movements' (2006, 15).

Thus, while its value as an analytical tool may be limited as it is fraught with conceptual difficulties, the concept 'religion' does serve a dual function as, first, a central category in contemporary society, politics and law (globally relevant, yet configured differently in different places), and, second, an 'emic' concept that is used by various actors for purposes of personal identity politics and differentiation. As such, it needs to be taken seriously – not by reasserting its transhistorical, universal nature, and reintroducing the existence of some sort of divine 'Real' as the ultimate explanation (e.g., Hick 2004; Flood 2012), but by approaching it historically and sociologically, as a category that has exercised profound influence on the shape of contemporary society and politics, and continues to be employed in a variety of ways. It does require scholars of religion to be clear about their use(s) of the term – the term continues to be used non-reflexively by too many scholars, who often end up re-essentialising it and contradicting themselves – but it does not mean the category can be overcome altogether, for it constitutes a social fact that cannot be ignored.

Accordingly, several scholars have criticised Fitzgerald for throwing out the baby with the bathwater; they have suggested new approaches to the study of religion that take into consideration conceptual difficulties and ideological debates, yet move beyond mere deconstruction and recognise the social and political significance 'religions' continue to play today (e.g., Beyer 2003; 2006; Von Stuckrad 2003; 2010; Tweed 2006). In other words, while arguably problematic as an analytical tool, 'religion' figures prominently in contemporary law, (identity) politics and mass media; as such, it undeniably constitutes a significant presence in today's world, if only as an 'emic' category employed by a variety of institutions and individuals for a variety of purposes. As Beyer convincingly argues,

> [T]he word and concept of religion in today's world are not just important among scholars of religion, theologians, and people who are both. Rather they are used and widely understood by a great many other people: not just western colonialists, but non-westerners and non-colonialists; not just in western languages but as corresponding words in virtually every other major language around the world. (…) [R]eligion in contemporary global society seems to be an ineluctable reality at least as important and real as a number of other abstractions like culture, race, nation and gender on the one hand, and sport, health, and art, on the other (2003, 150-151).

Following the previous discussion, in this study I will not use the concept 'religion' as a generic term referring to a wide variety of practices and beliefs, nor will I use the adjective 'religious' to refer to a particular kind of behaviour. However, as will become clear, the category does play a

significant part in modern Japanese politics and law, as well as institutional power struggles and self-definitions. Hence, I will not evade the term altogether; on the contrary, throughout this study, I will discuss different ways in which the concept has functioned in modern Japanese history. I will also use expressions such as 'religious organisations' and 'religious groups', since these are relevant categories in contemporary Japan. However, I will restrict my use of the terms to organisations that are *legally and/or societally* defined as religious organisations, as well as their properties. As the definition of practices and ideas as 'religious' in Japan is highly contested (as subsequent chapters will illustrate), I will use the term with caution.

2.1.2   On 'Japan'

If, as has been argued, 'religious studies' has constructed and reified its own object of study, the same can be said about Japanese studies – or, for that matter, about 'area studies' in general. Historically, area studies are rooted in the same academic tradition as religious studies: in nineteenth-century philology, which was characterised by a strong fascination with 'Oriental' languages and cultures. At the time, study of the East primarily meant study of its languages; scholars were looking for an idealised 'original Indo-European language' which they hoped to find in Asia (Dutton 2002; Masuzawa 2005, 147-178; cf. Said 1978). Accordingly, 'Oriental studies' (the study of Eastern cultures, which would later be extended to other 'areas'), philology and 'religious studies' were closely interwoven.

Arguably, this philological point of departure continues to define area studies today, as 'Western area studies knowledges are language-based and learning languages has come to operate as a "rite of passage" into Asian area studies for any scholar' (Dutton 2002, 504). That is, the preoccupation with language acquisition and with the practice of translation has long defined the main paradigm in area studies: that is, the lingering assumption that if one is able to correctly translate texts, one will be able to adequately translate the culture that has produced those texts. Not coincidentally, this paradigm parallels the traditional 'religious studies' assumption that the essence of a 'religion' can be found in its sacred scriptures, the translation of which will automatically lead to knowledge of that 'religion'.

As the area studies are only defined by their object of study and by nothing else, they are in a sense dependent on that object. Hence, they do not just passively study a pre-given and unique – *sui generis*, as McCutcheon (1997) would say – area, language and culture. Rather, by defining their own disciplinary boundaries, methods and 'objects' of scholarly inquiry, they have actively contributed to the construction and reification of that area, language and culture. Imagined as singular, homogeneous entities with their own distinctive features, identity and essence, the construction and essentialisation of these 'areas' not only parallels the construction of 'world religions' as singular entities (Masuzawa

2005), it also follows the normative primordialist assumption that every nation has its own unique, transhistorical language and culture, which sets it apart from other nations.

Thus, through academic practices, scholars of Japan can be said to have contributed to the essentialisation of 'Japanese culture' and the confirmation of notions of Japanese uniqueness and internal homogeneity. That is, until recently, few scholars of Japan had questioned their core category (i.e., 'Japan'), which was usually presented as transhistorical and self-evident in stead of as a historical construction.[13] As Harry Harootunian has argued, by the texts of scholars writing about Japan

> we were led to believe that Japanese culture can be grasped as a unity, a coherent unity, and that it can be described in detail if one possesses the right kind of knowledge (language). This conceit converges on and corresponds symmetrically to Japanese self-images steeped in the assumption of a whole and coherent culture. American social science, as it was applied to Japan, reinforced and was reinforced by *Nihonjin-ron* (Harootunian & Sakai 1999, 601).[14]

As Harootunian makes clear, the view of Japan as a unique entity is not limited to Japanese ideological discourse, but has been continuously enforced and legitimised by the essentialist tendency of 'Western' scholars of Japanese studies to perceive Japan as an eternal, distinctive entity. Hence the accusation, made by him as well as several others (Dutton 2002; Harootunian & Miyoshi 2002), that area studies suffer from a lack of analytical capacities and theoretical sophistication to the point of cultivating a 'hostility to theory' (Harootunian & Sakai 1999, 594).

Arguably, this latter formulation may be somewhat exaggerated, as there have been several attempts to interpret Japanese cases from various social scientific perspectives (e.g., Reader 1998). Nevertheless, until recently at least, the majority of 'Japanologists' had the tendency to approach their objects of study as isolated, 'Japanese' phenomena, and have been slow to integrate contemporary theories regarding globalisation, transnational communication, cultural hybridity and identity formation into their work. Fortunately, however, there are some notable recent examples of studies that do take into account transnational factors in their discussion of historical and cultural phenomena, possibly representing a movement towards the overcoming of cultural essentialism and isolationism (e.g., Iwabuchi 2002; Saaler & Szpilman 2011). It remains to be seen what the *raison d'être* of the academic discipline 'Japanese studies' will be if its foundational category has been deconstructed (the same, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to 'religious studies'), and its constitutive boundaries transgressed. For the time being, however, the 'area studies' paradigm continues to shape academic institutions such as departments, study programs and journals, and be implicit in the distribution of financial means (Harootunian & Miyoshi 2002; Zürcher 2007).

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13 Well-known examples of essentialist constructions of 'Japanese culture' include, but are not limited to, Benedict 2005; Nakane 1970; Reischauer & Jansen 1995. For a critical, genealogical approach to the historical construction of the Japanese nation and its corresponding 'culture', see Morris-Suzuki 1998.
14 On the topic of *Nihonjinron*, see Befu 2001; Yoshino 1992.

As I argued in the introduction, both Japanese studies and the study of religion can offer some valuable suggestions when it comes to the application of interdisciplinary research methods. However, both disciplines' foundational categories were not deconstructed and rehistoricised until recently. As long as 'Japan' continues to be of geopolitical significance and/or attract students interested in her (popular) culture, the discipline 'Japanese studies' is likely to have a place in academia. But perhaps scholars of Japan could learn from recent debates on 'religion', and conceive of Japan as a second-order, historically constructed category, rather than a natural given. 'Japan' is neither self-evident nor transhistorical (cf. Morris-Suzuki 1998); the meanings and properties attributed to the category are subject to continuous transformation and negotiation, and these are processes that take shape on a transnational scale as much as they relate to domestic notions of nationhood.

2.1.3   On 'religion in Japan'

At this point, I would like to extend the previous discussion, and focus on debates regarding the topic of 'religion' in modern and contemporary Japan – not only because these debates continue to resurface periodically and remain unresolved, but also because these concepts, whether endorsed or criticised, are relevant to any study of the (re)production of 'sacred space' in modernity. As Japan is often considered as a 'modern' (i.e., industrialised, urbanised, socially differentiated, liberal-capitalist and democratic)[15] nation-state, yet culturally deviant from the norm (i.e., 'non-Western'),[16] Japanese cases are often employed to either confirm or falsify claims regarding modernisation and historical necessity. For instance, in the 1970s, when the classical secularisation thesis (i.e., the teleological assumption that modernisation leads to differentiation, which leads to the privatisation and decline of religion) still enjoyed paradigmatic status, scholars of Japan were among the first to question the thesis (Swyngedouw 1976; Tamaru 1979). This is perhaps not surprising, as in postwar Japan modernisation and societal differentiation seemed to go hand in hand with an outburst of religious activity, rather

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[15] The issue of Japan's 'modernity' remains a contested one. The postwar critic Maruyama Masao, for instance, famously argued that Japan's modernisation process was incomplete, and that Japan should develop its own modernity (not to be confused with westernisation) in order to become truly democratic (Clammer 2001, 78-94; Kersten 1996, 109-136). Despite the critique, however, Japan is often portrayed as one of the very few 'non-Western' (see next footnote) countries that not only managed to catch up, but even to defeat European countries in their own terms (technologically, economically and even, for a while at least, militarily) – while maintaining (if not reinventing) its 'Asian' cultural heritage and social structures. For discussions of the 'modernity' debate in Japan, see Harootunian 2000; Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996; Thomas 2001.

[16] For clarity's sake: I do not endorse the term 'non-Western', as it is an empty category, employed for purposes of differentiation – i.e., between that mythical entity, 'the West', and its various Others – but I do use it (between quotation marks, that is) as an 'emic' category often employed non-reflexively in popular, political and scholarly discourse. In the formulation of Sakai Naoki, '[t]he West is a mythical construct (…) Until recently the indigenous or local characteristic of a social and cultural construct found in places in Asia, Africa, and sometimes Latin America has routinely been earmarked in contrast to some generalized and euphemistic quality specified as being "Western"' (Sakai 2006). If 'non-Western' is a mythical category, the same applies to the categories 'West', 'Western', 'East', 'Eastern', 'Occidental' and 'Oriental'. All of these are discursively produced and reproduced abstractions; myths (in the Barthesian sense of the word) that construct realities rather than reflect any pre-given essential differences, and naturalise historically produced binary oppositions.

than religious decline (MacFarland 1967). Accordingly, later critics of the thesis also referred to Japan when they argued that modernisation does not necessarily lead to secularisation (Casanova 1994, 27; Stark 1999, 268).

Likewise, some of those scrutinising the concept 'religion' as a universal, transhistorical category have used Japan as a case in point. As many scholars have pointed out, the Japanese term for religion, *shūkyō*, is a nineteenth-century neologism (based on an existing Chinese Buddhist term, but used differently) and translation of the European concept 'religion', drawing on notions of religion as primarily faith- and membership-based that did not fully correspond to existing Japanese practices.[17] 'Religion', it follows, did not exist as a category in Japanese society and politics until the establishment of the Meiji government in 1868. It did, however, come to play an important part in Meiji-period politics; devised as a category covering individual beliefs and ritual practices, the newly established state cult 'Shinto' – later referred to as 'State Shinto' (*kokka shintō*), by which it was distinguished from a depoliticised 'Shrine Shinto' (*jinja shintō*) – was configured as a public, 'non-religious' set of practices and beliefs to be followed by all members of the nation.

I will discuss the topic of the relationship between Shinto and *shūkyō* in more detail in chapter five. For now, I would like to point out three fundamental aspects of the category religion in post-1868 Japan: first, 'religion' as a concept and category was not introduced to Japan until the second half of the nineteenth century;[18] second, the category was based on normative Protestant understandings of religion as denominational affiliation based on personal belief, and did not include a range of popular practices that later scholars of religion would identify as core components of 'Japanese religion' (e.g., Earhart 1998; Reader 1991; Reader & Tanabe 1998); and third, the category came to exercise significant influence on Japanese politics and law.

Following the suggestions made by Peter Beyer (2003; 2006), we could argue that, albeit a second-order concept, 'religion' has come to be a relevant category in modern Japanese society, politics and law, and needs to be studied as such. However, the situation is more complex, as many scholars have used the term Japanese religion(s) as an interpretative (i.e., 'etic') category, projecting their own various understandings of the term 'religion' onto a variety of Japanese practices and texts, and employing the concept in ways that may overlap yet do not fully correspond to uses of the term *shūkyō* in Japan. Thus, they have contributed to a great deal of conceptual confusion; until recently, in most works on 'Japanese religion' the meaning of the concept 'religion' remained largely unexamined

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[17] Several scholars have discussed the genealogy of the concept '*shūkyō*', and the historical consequences of the establishment of religion as a differentiated category in the Meiji period. See for instance Godart 2008; Hardacre 1989, 63-65; Isomae 2003; 2005; 2007; Josephson 2011; 2012; Thal 2002a, 105-107.

[18] It should be pointed out that Japan was by no means unique in this respect. Prior to the introduction of European missionary activities and scholarship, few societies outside Europe had a differentiated 'religious' realm, or a concept similar to the generic 'religion' (Fitzgerald 2007b). Revealingly, the Japanese concept and corresponding socio-political category '*shūkyō*', composed of Chinese characters meaning school (or sect) 宗 and teaching 教 – which, incidentally, clearly points to the Protestant bias underlying the construction of the term – was later incorporated into Chinese (*zōngjiào*), Korean (*jonggyo*) and Vietnamese (*tôn giáo*).

and/or was used differently in different contexts, allowing the term to become a floating signifier that could take on a variety of meanings.

Michael Pye, for instance, a scholar who apparently subscribes to the notion of religion as a universal, *sui generis* phenomenon, has developed classification models for 'comparative religion' that include Asian traditions (1989). While it may be argued that such an approach constitutes a projection of 'foreign' scholarly categories that does not do justice to 'emic' categories and conceals ideological subtexts (cf. McCutcheon 1997; Fitzgerald 2000), Pye has argued (1994) that there were in fact indigenous Japanese notions of 'religion' prior to its implementation as a modern category in the Meiji period. Thus, he asserts, '[t]he term "religion" should by no means be written off as a misleading Western import' (2003, 3); according to him, Japan has had a long and unique tradition of religious studies, independent from 'Western' academic projects, going back to the eighteenth century.

However, while the agency of Japanese scholars and other players in constructing and reifying the category *shūkyō* should not be underestimated, Pye's claims that there was an understanding of 'religion' in Japan prior to the introduction of the modern category are arguably based on a questionable interpretation of the original concepts, as Jason Josephson has argued (2011, 591-592), and may be considered anachronistic. Besides, while it may be true that Japan has had a long academic tradition when it comes to the 'study of religions' (*shūkyōgaku*), as Pye argues, this tradition is firmly rooted in and informed by European notions of 'religion' and 'religions'. Hence, it is important to be aware of the fact that concepts and categories, while being diverse and contingent on place and time, acquire meanings in global, transnational contexts. The following statement by Mark Mullins sums up the discussion nicely:

> [A]n accurate understanding of the situation in Japan requires that we move beyond the framework of an isolated nation state and take into account the 'global interconnectedness' that has shaped both the Japanese understanding of religion and some of the responses to the process of secularization. One difficulty that must be recognized at the outset in approaching this topic is that there is no consensus in either scholarly or popular discourse on the meaning and use of the concept of 'religion' (*shūkyō*) in Japan. Even though the term was imported from the West in the late nineteenth century and has sometimes been viewed as an artificial construct that is inapplicable to the Japanese situation, it has been *adopted and adapted* by scholars and used widely over the past century – even by the government for official and legal purposes (2012, 62-63; my emphasis).

In this short paragraph, Mullins makes three important points, with which I wholeheartedly agree: first, the historical development of 'religion' in Japan cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration transnational influences; second, the term 'religion' is used differently by different actors, and has no fixed meaning; and third, the term cannot be discarded, for it has come to constitute a relevant category in contemporary Japanese society, scholarship and politics. Hence, when writing about 'religion in Japan' or 'Japanese religion(s)', it is important to make a distinction between, on the one hand, the legal, political and social category 'religion' as it is used in Japan; and on the other, the

generic concept 'religion' as a tool for scholarly analysis, used to group a variety of ritual practices, worldviews and institutions (i.e., between 'emic' and 'etic' uses of the term) (cf. Rots 2012d). In my opinion, one of the problems of much academic literature on the topic is that this distinction is not usually made explicit, if at all. That is, scholars writing about religion in Japan tend to confuse emic and etic meanings of the term, which leads to a lack of conceptual clarity and to projection. Yet, the suggestion made by some of their critics – eliminating the concept 'religion' from scholarly analysis altogether – does not do justice to the simple fact that it is a significant category in modern and contemporary Japan, which cannot be ignored.

2.1.4   'Religion' and its problems: Reader, Tanabe and Fitzgerald

The problems inherent in scholarly discussions of 'religion' in Japan can be further illustrated by looking at the work of three scholars, Ian Reader, George Tanabe and Timothy Fitzgerald. Reader and Fitzgerald represent opposite theoretical positions, and have engaged in a polemic discussion with each other concerning uses of the concept 'religion'. In a critical review article (2003), Fitzgerald has pointed out what he considered to be the problems inherent in Reader's (1991) and others' (Davis 1992; Earhart 1998; MacFarland 1967) non-reflexive uses of the term 'religion'. The article was vehemently attacked by Ian Reader himself (2004b), who claimed that it misrepresented some of his original arguments, while also suffering from questionable citation practices; this response, in turn, gave rise to three more articles (Fitzgerald 2004a; 2004b; Reader 2004a). Although perhaps too personal in its polemics, the debate is interesting, as both sides raise a number of important issues regarding the category 'religion' in Japan, introducing a variety of theoretical positions and discussing (and challenging) a number of relevant secondary sources. However, I will not reproduce the debate here. Instead, I will discuss some other works by these authors, in order to illustrate some of the difficulties pertaining to academic discussions of 'religion' in contemporary Japan.

Ian Reader is one of the leading scholars of contemporary Japanese religions, and has (co)written several influential books on contemporary ritual and institutional practices, pilgrimage, and new religions (1991; 2000; 2005; Reader & Tanabe 1998). He has been one of the first to acknowledge the problematic character of the category 'religion' in Japan, drawing attention to the negative connotations it has in Japanese society, as illustrated by the following citation: 'In *shūkyō* and hence in the idea of "religion" there is a hint of something committing, restrictive and even intrusive' (Reader 1991, 14). Reader has been right to point out that while many Japanese participate in ritual activities and regularly visit religious places, organised religion, as signified by the concept *shūkyō*, is generally distrusted (ibid.; cf. Nelson 2012, 48) – a trend that has been further aggravated by the violent attacks on the Tokyo subway by the religious movement Aum Shinrikyō in 1995 (Kisala 2001; Bafelli & Reader 2012).

Nevertheless, he does use the terms 'religion' and 'religious' to refer to those practices and beliefs corresponding to his understanding of the term – which obviously does not correspond to the average Japanese conceptual framework. For instance, in his study of the contemporary religious marketplace, *Practically Religious* (co-authored with George J. Tanabe), the term 'religion' is used

> as an inclusive term that has elastic frontiers readily intermingled with cultural and social themes in which belief and doctrine can play a part but are not essential. Under the rubric of 'religion' we include such things as visits to shrines and temples (locations that cannot be classified other than as religious institutions), participation in festivals that are focused on shrines, temples, and deities, the acquisition of amulets and talismans, and the seeking, through petitioning of deities, of worldly benefits. We treat religion as a matter not only of doctrine and belief but of participation, custom, ritual, action, practice, and belonging. (…) Rather than reject the term 'religion' defined in narrow theological terms, we employ the word with expansive meanings drawn from a broad spectrum ranging from theological abstractions to mundane practicalities (Reader & Tanabe 1998, 5-6).

This use of the term 'religion', the authors argue, follows the Japanese scholarly consensus; whereas the term has limited, negative connotations in general society, scholars there tend to use it as an all-inclusive container term (ibid., 5).[19] Having explained their use of the term 'religion', Reader and Tanabe then proceed to argue that 'the pursuit of this-worldly practical benefits' (so-called *genze riyaku*: good health, wealth, study or career achievements, a suitable partner and so on) constitutes 'the common religion of Japan' – a term they prefer to 'folk' or 'popular religion' (ibid., 23-32).

Reader and Tanabe's approach is appealing for two reasons: first, unlike many other authors, they explicitly state how they are using the term 'religion'; second, they rightly reject the normative classical dichotomy between 'true religion' and 'superstitious practice' (ibid., 6), arguing that official doctrine and idiosyncratic practices are part of one and the same religious framework. However, it also raises several questions. First, one may wonder whether the pursuit of this-worldly benefits is really the core feature of 'Japanese religion' – such a statement arguably leads to the essentialisation of a certain aspect of ritual and institutional practices. Moreover, the implicit suggestion seems to be that this is a typically Japanese phenomenon, whereas it may be argued that such concerns are central to many types of prayer and other ritual practices worldwide.[20] Second, it is of course possible to stretch the term religion so far that it covers any type of phenomenon, but this raises the obvious question what the remaining analytical value is of a concept that can be adapted and adopted to include any

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[19] Arguably, then, the works of these Japanese scholars reflect imported abstract notions of 'religion' as a transhistorical category, rather than common Japanese uses of the term.

[20] This becomes clear when we see the list of practical benefits, which covers any type of prosperity and protection (1998, 45-49). Even soteriologies promising salvation in the afterlife are considered this-worldly, as they 'grant [recipients of rituals] confidence and thus contribute to their happiness and sense of salvation in this world' (ibid., 48). But according to this logic, any type of other-world oriented behaviour can be considered ultimately this-worldly – which would imply that any religious behaviour anywhere in the world is this-worldly, as any promise of salvation, comfort, divine election and a happy afterlife influences here-and-now well-being. If a term becomes so generic, it loses its distinctive character.

type of social behaviour – such an approach only confirms the critique that the term 'religion' has come to be a floating signifier that can be employed to serve a variety of agendas, and, consequently, is becoming increasingly useless as a tool for scholarly analysis.

Third, by arguing that there is a common denominator defining any type of 'religious' practice in Japan, institutional and doctrinal as well as ritual and commercial, the authors are suggesting that there is a single *system* that may be called 'Japanese religion'. This is illustrated by their subtitle, which refers to '*the* common religion of Japan' (i.e., singular and definite; my emphasis), and the title of their first chapter, 'Benefits in the Religious System' (ibid., 37-70). This system may have various shapes, but it is unified by its commonly shared focus on this-worldly benefits. By doing so, Reader and Tanabe are following in the footsteps of previous scholars, who implicitly or explicitly argued that Japan has a single, unitary 'religious system' that transcends denominational distinctions and other historical particularities, and is characterised by harmony and complementarity (e.g., Earhart 1998; Kitagawa 1987) – an approach that is grounded in the once-paradigmatic Geertzian notion of religion as a 'cultural system' (Geertz 1973, 87-125).

Thus, Reader and Tanabe have highlighted one aspect of Japanese 'religious' (or is it?) behaviour, turned this into the central component of 'Japanese religion', and then reconstructed this 'Japanese religion' as a singular system with a common denominator – the only difference with previous works being the nature of the denominator. By thus essentialising their topic of inquiry, they have introduced an element that transcends historical and spatial particularity (the focus on 'worldly benefits'), and reified their own abstraction – 'the common religion of Japan'. They then projected this abstraction onto their (certainly rich!) ethnographic, sociological and historical data, all of which were analysed according to a single interpretative framework. The question, therefore, is not only whether the focus on 'worldly benefits' really is *the* common denominator that unites a variety of ritual and devotional practices – the answer to that question depends on one's interpretative and normative framework. More fundamentally, the question should be whether a singular-system approach does justice to internal diversity, conflict, idiosyncrasy and change. Not only is any 'system', by definition, an abstraction (more often than not produced by outsiders, such as scholars), it is also ahistorical, for fundamentally static.[21]

As discussed previously, Timothy Fitzgerald is one of the main proponents of an iconoclastic movement in religious studies, which sought to repoliticise the discipline and question the analytical validity of the generic term 'religion' (1997; 2000; 2007b). As noted before, Fitzgerald has been criticised for not acknowledging the fact that the category 'religion' has come to play a central part in

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[21] Because of these (and other) reasons, in recent years, there has been some critique on the use of systems theory in the study of human culture and society. The notion that societies and cultures (and, hence, religions) constitute self-sufficient and self-regulating systems goes back to the classical theories of functionalists and structural-functionalists such as Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, and was later adapted and developed by social scientists such as Gregory Bateson and Niklas Luhmann. The latter's 'social systems' theory has been appropriated by scholars of religion, among others (e.g., Beyer 2006, 18-116).

contemporary global society and politics, and define individual and group identities. Nevertheless, his critique of the conceptual and ideological problems inherent in the non-reflexive projection of scholarly abstractions onto a variety of 'non-Western Others' remains relevant, and deserves to be taken seriously. Significantly, in *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Fitzgerald devotes three chapters to a discussion of academic literature on the topic of 'religion' in Japan; his main point is that 'religion' is a 'Western' ethnocentric concept that does not accurately reflect Japanese society, as it artificially sets apart certain practices and institutions as 'religious', concealing larger ideological and cultural structures (2000, 159-218).

Fitzgerald has been criticised for not taking into account Japanese scholarship, thus paradoxically confirming Euro-American (or, rather, Anglo-Saxon) ethnocentrism (Shimada 2001; cf. Josephson 2011, 592). This critique, however, does not disqualify his claims *per se*, but only underlines the fairly obvious fact that Fitzgerald's research is limited to representations of 'Japanese religion' in English-language literature, and does not engage with Japanese scholarship. All-too-often, contributions from scholars who are not specialised in a particular language and culture are easily dismissed by those specialising in that 'area' based on the former's lack of knowledge of 'original sources'. However, as Fitzgerald's topic of inquiry and critique are the conceptual frameworks used in secondary academic discourse (in English), *not* the primary sources and other data on which those texts are based, this dismissal is not completely justified.

Whereas his polemic style may not be appreciated by many (and arguably distracts from the contents of his argument), Fitzgerald does make three valid points: first, until fairly recently, scholars writing about Japan tended to use the term 'religion' non-reflexively and all-inclusively, as if it were a self-evident natural category rather than a modern construction; second, conventional categorisation models artificially distinguish between so-called 'religious' practices and other socio-cultural practices, whereas many of these are structurally intertwined and part of the same networks of practices and worldviews; and third, like other discourses, scholarly (or scientific) discourse is not free from preconceptions, political subtexts, and exclusion mechanisms, thus constituting a legitimate object for critical research in itself.

Nevertheless, there are some serious problems with Fitzgerald's critique. First, as I suggested previously, the most important and obvious flaw in his work is his apparent refusal to accept the simple fact that 'religion' is a very real category in Japanese society – including law, mass media, and personal identity politics.[22] Second, more fundamentally, while he rejects the essentialisation of a particular set of practices under the problematic label 'religion', the alternative approach proposed by Fitzgerald is at least as problematic, as it essentialises 'Japanese society'. That is, while rejecting the concept 'religion', Fitzgerald subscribes to the idea 'that there is a system of dominant values

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[22] For a concrete example of uses of the category 'religion' for the construction of social identities, see my case study of a suburban Japanese Pentecostal community, and its members' strategies for accommodating and rejecting aspects of mainstream Japanese culture and ideology (Rots 2012a, 327-339).

operating in Japan, [which] are thought of as traditional by *the Japanese* themselves and as constituting a distinct Japanese identity' (2000, 181; my emphasis).

Note that 'the Japanese' are not defined (a natural category?); nor is the epistemological problem of knowing what 'they' think addressed. Fitzgerald continues by making the strikingly ahistorical statement that 'change in Japan is superficial and that ancient attitudes and values persist in barely disguised new forms' (ibid., 182), and endorses the culturalist theory of Nakane Chie (1970), which states that there are certain social structures characterising Japanese society throughout history, such as the family (*ie*) system. According to Fitzgerald, '[Nakane's] account of Japanese society is actually a very succinct account of the value system that the Japanese see as traditional and that defines their collective identity' (2000, 185). The problem is, however, that this supposedly transhistorical 'system' is largely an invented tradition; that is, it is the outcome of a myth produced in the context of Japan's modern nation-building project (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 114-119), reproduced in the post-war period as part of the pseudo-scientific nationalist *nihonjinron* discourse (Yoshino 1992, 64-68).

In his notion of a single 'system' that defines Japanese patterns of behaviour, Fitzgerald *de facto* follows the same symbolic-structuralist approach as Reader and Tanabe; while his choice of vocabulary is different, he likewise endorses the essentialist notion of a unitary system, by which he tries to explain 'Japanese' behaviour. In the process, he reifies 'the Japanese' as a single species behaving according to a particular set of rules and values, and implies that there are certain core structures in 'Japanese society' that transcend historical particularity. Thus, Fitzgerald's 'systems' approach does not allow for historical change, particularity, idiosyncrasy, conflict or diversity – at least not beyond the parameters set by the (discursively produced) structures supposedly constituting the essence of society. Despite all his awareness of the ideology implicit in the historical production of the category 'religion', then, Fitzgerald is strikingly unaware of the historical production of the categories 'Japan' and 'Japanese society' (see Morris-Suzuki 1998); accordingly, the uncritical use of *nihonjinron*-style theory to prove his argument – valid in principle – that so-called 'religious' practices in Japan are not essentially different from certain other ('non-religious' or 'secular') practices actually undermines his thesis.

In sum, Fitzgerald's work is controversial, and the alternative he suggests is ultimately disappointing; that does not mean, however, that his critique of uses of the term 'religion' should be dismissed altogether. I will now move on to discuss a central concern, addressed in his work as well as in recent articles by others: the question of secularisation in Japan.

2.2 'Secularisation' in Japan

2.2.1 The secularisation debate

Timothy Fitzgerald has not only problematised the non-reflexive, generic use of the category 'religion' by scholars. He has also questioned the applicability of the religious-secular dichotomy to Japan and other 'non-Western' societies, arguing that this dichotomy has been a vehicle of Western 'colonialism' and 'capitalism' (2003; 2007b). Although Fitzgerald does not extensively discuss the various ideological, semantic and sociological issues at stake in academic and political debates on 'the secular', secularism and secularisation,[23] he does raise an important question. If, as a result of the implementation of the differentiated category 'religion' in modern Japan, there is a newly constructed religious realm in society and politics, there should also be a differentiated non-religious realm. Should we call this 'the secular' (translated into Japanese as *sezoku*), or are there alternative categories? Can we automatically assume that *sezoku* is *shūkyō*'s Other, or do we have other candidates? And to what extent do European models for state-religion relationships apply to Japan? Constitutionally, few countries in the world have as strict a separation of religion and state as postwar Japan, but does the existence of such an apparently secularist state apparatus imply that Japan is 'secularised'? Fundamentally, how can 'secularisation' be measured in a country where the category 'religion' functions differently and carries different meanings from, say, Western Europe?

These are complicated questions, the answers to which are by no means clear-cut. I do not have the space to discuss them all at length, for that would require a book-length theoretical study. I do wish to raise them, however, for issues related to the legal rights and limitations of religious institutions, spatial divisions, nationalist ideologies and state-religion interactions – all somehow related to the religious-secular dichotomy, as well as to the parallel processes of secularisation and sacralisation – are central to any attempt to define and re-define Shinto in modern and contemporary Japan and therefore of great relevance to the core topics of this dissertation. If the (re)construction of sacred space (i.e., sacralisation) is one of the responses to processes of societal differentiation and secularisation, as Demerath has argued (2007), the same may apply to discursive and material productions of 'sacred nature' and 'sacred forests' as they take place in contemporary Shinto scholarship and institutional practices. Problematic and historically contingent though these categories may be, the possibility that Shinto 'environmentalism' and sacralisation are somehow rooted in and relate to processes of modernisation and secularisation should not be discarded *a priori*.

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[23] While obviously semantically related, these three concepts have different meanings, which I would describe as follows. 'The secular' refers to a particular societal realm that is defined by the absence of 'religion'; 'secularism' refers to political ideologies prescribing ways of separating state and religion, and limiting religions' influence in the public sphere; and 'secularisation' refers to the process of the privatisation and/or decline of religion. In Casanova's formulation, we need to 'keep in mind the basic analytical distinction between "the secular" as a central modern epistemic category, "secularization" as an analytical conceptualization of modern world-historical processes, and "secularism" as a worldview or ideology' (Casanova 2011, 54; cf. Asad 2003, 1-17).

While I do not have the space to discuss the entire multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary debate on the secular, secularism and secularisation that has developed in the past decades, I wish to point out four things. First, the classical secularisation thesis that enjoyed paradigmatic status in the social sciences until the 1980s, which stated teleologically that the decline of religion from public space (if not altogether) was an inevitable and irreversible result of modernisation and rationalisation (e.g., Berger 1967),[24] has been challenged and complicated by the global resurgence of religious politics and (re)politicised religion, as well as by religious institutions and ideologies reclaiming public space and challenging secularist models. Second, these developments gave way to a radical paradigm shift in scholarly discourse, with a number of scholars antithetically declaring secularisation a 'myth' and a 'failed theory' (Cox 2000; Stark 1999), or discussing transnational processes of 'desecularisation' (Berger 1999) – Northern and Western Europe being considered the exceptions to the global rule.

Third, in the past twenty years or so, a number of scholars have recognised the ambivalent and multi-interpretable nature of the terms 'secular' and 'secularisation', and argued that there are and have been multiple processes of secularisation worldwide. Secularisation, according to these authors, is neither singular, nor historically necessary, nor irreversible – however, that does not mean it does not exist. On the contrary, secularisation continues to be a factor of importance in many places. It is not dichotomously opposed to religion, either; indeed, secularisation may give rise to new processes of redefining and repositioning religion, sometimes labelled 'post-secular'. Scholars who have contributed to this rehabilitation of the term 'secularisation', and conducted historical and sociological research taking into account multiple ways of being and becoming 'secular' (and 'post-secular') as well as processes of religious revival and redefinition (including forms of secularism advocated by religious actors) include Talal Asad (2003), José Casanova (1994; 2006; 2011), N. J. Demerath (2001; 2007), Jürgen Habermas (2006; 2008) and Charles Taylor (2007).

Fourth, despite the fact that the secularisation debate has moved from unilinear historical models to more complex issues, and the 'heterogeneity of the secular' has come to be recognised, ethnocentrism and 'West-rest' binary thinking arguably remain lingering problems in some of the literature on secularism and secularisation. There are two important reasons for this. Firstly, some scholars, while criticising the classical secularisation theory, still seem to endorse Enlightenment notions of modernity, progress and Western exceptionalism, either implicitly or explicitly.[25] Second, until recently at least, few of the prominent participants in the debate were particularly knowledgeable about developments in the global South, East or Southwest. As José Casanova himself has

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[24] More precisely, as Casanova points out, the term refers to the three parallel processes of, first, 'the *decline of religious beliefs and practices* in modern societies'; second, '*the privatization of religion*'; and third, 'the *differentiation of the secular spheres* (state, economy, science) usually understood as "emancipation" from religious institutions and norms' (2006, 7; emphasis in original).

[25] See for instance the critique of Brown (2007) and Masuzawa (2008) on Taylor's modern classic (2007), which, despite its many qualities, is arguably grounded in the notion of an essential difference – a 'great divide', as Masuzawa calls it – between 'the West' and 'the rest'. The same applies to Talal Asad (2003), who has deconstructed 'Western' constructions of 'Others', yet has done so at the expense of reifying 'the West' as a singular hegemonic entity and maintaining a rigid West-rest binary opposition.

acknowledged, scholars working on the twin topics of secularism and secularisation should 'refocus the attention beyond Europe and North America, and adopt a more global perspective' (2006, 9). This should lead to 'a less Euro-centric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions' (ibid., 11).[26]

Considering these lingering ethnocentric assumptions, it is a positive development that in the past few years a number of books and journal articles devoted to the topic of secularism and secularisation in various 'non-Western' societies have been published. They have moved beyond the justified yet one-sided critique that these categories are merely vehicles of Western colonial exploitation (Fitzgerald 2007b), and applied them to more in-depth analyses of social and political developments elsewhere (e.g., Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008; Madsen 2011; Van der Veer 2011). One such example is the first issue of Brill's newly launched *Journal of Religion in Japan*, which is devoted to the topic of secularisation and secularities in Japan. Containing original articles by Mark Mullins (2012), John Nelson (2012), Elisabetta Porcu (2012) and Ian Reader (2012b), the journal reintroduces the topic of secularity to the study of religion in Japan.

This is not a new topic. In the 1970s, Reischauer and Jansen famously argued that Japan is a secular society in which religion only plays a peripheral role, and that 'the trend toward secularism that has only recently become marked in the West dates back at least three centuries in Japan' (1995, 203) – a problematic statement because it reflects outdated notions of religion as faith- and membership-based (cf. Reader & Tanabe 1998, 6-8), but nevertheless repeated in later editions of their book. Likewise, in the 1970s, several conferences and two special issues of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* were devoted to the topic (e.g., Swyngedouw 1976; Tamaru 1979). In addition, sociologist of religion Winston Davis examined the topic of the 'secularization of Japanese religion' in an interesting essay (1992, 229-251), in which he made the eminently sensible claim that

> while it is virtually meaningless to talk about the *general* secularization of religion in a society, and even more obscure to discuss the comparative levels of secularization in different societies, it may be possible to take the measure of the well-being and/or decline of the various *aspects* of religion in a specific society. (…) [C]oncern for the complexity of the problem should not cause one to deny the obvious fact that *in some crucial aspects* Japanese religion *has* 'declined' (ibid., 250; emphasis in original).

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[26] There are some exceptions to this rule. N. J. Demerath, for instance, has studied the resurgence of religion in politics all over the globe, taking into account processes of and responses to secularisation (2001). Casanova himself has included a discussion of Brazil (arguably a 'non-Western' society) in his classical analysis of secularisation processes (1994, 114-134). Nevertheless, most academic literature on the topic focuses on developments in so-called 'Western' societies. This is possibly related to the fact that most of the participants in debates on secularisation and secularism have backgrounds in sociology or political science, rather than social anthropology or area studies. As the classical academic division of labour prescribes, the former two disciplines deal with 'the West', 'our own' societies, while the latter two study 'the Other'. Clearly, this labour division and the corresponding disciplinary biases have been challenged and problematised in recent decades; however, they have not (yet) fully disappeared, as any comparison of the curricula of sociology and anthropology study programs will confirm.

However, in the past twenty years or so, as the secularisation thesis lost popularity, the topic of secularisation in Japan received little scholarly interest. This seems to be changing, as the topic of the decline of (rural) religious institutions has recently returned to the forefront of debates on Japanese religion (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 218-220; Fuyutsuki 2010; Yamamura 2009), a trend which is confirmed by the choice to devote the first issue of the *Journal of Religion in Japan* to the topic of secularisation. The journal constitutes an interesting contribution to the field, as its four articles all approach the topic from a different angle – thus confirming the impression that '[s]ecularization has taken on different meanings for different camps' (Demerath 2007, 57). Hence, they can be considered as complementary, even though they contradict each other at times. As they raise a number of important issues for the study of religious institutions and sacralisation processes in contemporary Japan, which are closely related to my research project, in the remainder of this section I will briefly discuss three of these articles.

2.2.2   Secularisation in Japan: Reader's new thesis

The first article is written by Ian Reader (2012b). Referring to the title of Rodney Stark's well-known article (1999), it is polemically entitled 'Secularisation, R.I.P.? Nonsense!', followed by a pun on the title of MacFarland's classic (1967), 'The Rush Hour *Away* from the Gods' (my emphasis). Employing the traditional notion of secularisation as a one-way process of 'religious decline', Reader provides his readers with an impressive amount of data (quantitative as well as qualitative) apparently pointing to such a decline, and concludes that '[r]eligion may not yet be dead in Japan but it is dying – and with it the claims of anti-secularisation theorists such as Stark' (2012b, 34). He points out some important contemporary developments: first, as statistical data suggest, the number of people stating they have some sort of 'religious belief' and/or identifying with religious organisations has decreased steadily in recent decades (ibid., 11-16); second, many small Buddhist temples face economical hardship as a result of rural depopulation and negative press (ibid., 16-19); third, the postwar period has seen a gradual decline in the number of *butsudan* (ancestral family altars, usually classified as 'Buddhist') and *kamidana* (small altars for the worship of deities, typically seen as 'Shinto') (ibid., 21-23); and fourth, pilgrimage practices have 'boomed' in some places (in particular Shikoku), but they have declined elsewhere, and the success of the pilgrimage in Shikoku has given rise to significant transformations (e.g., the pilgrimage has been reframed as 'cultural heritage' rather than 'religion', and certain devotional practices have apparently been discredited by temples themselves) (ibid., 23-29; cf. Reader 2012a).

However, there are some serious problems with Reader's interpretation; not only because some of the conclusions seem exaggerated (e.g., temple Buddhism may be facing serious problems, but that does not automatically imply that there is a 'prospect of collapse' [ibid., 16]), but also because there is significant conceptual confusion – again, related to the concept 'religion' and the way it relates

to 'secularisation'. First of all, for a scholar who insists on proper citation practices (Reader 2004b), Reader's misrepresentation of Casanova's argument raises questions.[27] More fundamentally, Reader does not clarify his use of the term 'secularisation' – as we have seen, the term carries a variety of meanings, and is employed differently by different actors – nor does he make explicit what he means by 'religious decline'.

As a matter of fact, any of the developments summarised above can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and neither of them are necessarily proof of 'secularisation'. First, the survey data clearly suggest that Japanese are increasingly less likely to identify with 'religious belief', and that the term 'religion' has come to carry widespread negative connotations. However, as discussed above, Japanese popular uses of the term 'religion' do not correspond to scholarly or legal meanings. More than anything else, therefore, these data suggest a semantic change – that is, the term 'religion' has become contaminated in public discourse, and the amount of people willing to identify with it has decreased – but that does not necessarily imply they are less inclined to participate in ritual and/or devotional activities, or visit temples or shrines. Clearly, it all depends on one's use of the term 'secularisation' – but the alienation of people from the *notion* of 'religion' does not make them more 'secular' *per se*.

Likewise, the economical problems of Buddhist institutions can be explained in numerous ways. Depopulation is an obvious factor, the gradual 'opening up' of the funeral market to non-Buddhist players is another one. Buddhist temples and rituals are losing their institutional monopoly on death-related rituals. However, this is not necessarily proof of 'religious decline'. The choice to have funeral ceremonies performed by non-Buddhist organisations, which tend to be significantly cheaper, may simply reflect Japanese economic developments more than anything else (note that even so-called 'secular' funerals contain ritual and devotional elements, in Japan as well as in Europe – whether we call them 'religion' or not in the end mainly depends on institutional and social conventions).[28] In fact, it is surprising that there is still such a high density of Buddhist temples in

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[27] Reader cites Casanova's question 'Who still believes in the *myth* of secularization?' (Casanova 1994, 11; quoted in Reader 2012b, 8-9; emphasis in original), and argues that Casanova is among those who refute the secularisation theory: together with Stark, he is portrayed as a representative of 'the anti-secularisation theory tendency' (ibid., 9). However, Reader ignores Casanova's next sentences: 'Who still believes in the *myth* of secularization? Recent debates within the sociology of religion would indicate this to be the appropriate question with which to start any current discussion of the theory of secularization. There are still a few "old believers" (…) who insist, *rightly*, that the theory of secularization still has much explanatory value in attempting to account for modern historical processes. But the majority of sociologists of religion will not listen, for they have abandoned the paradigm with the same uncritical haste with which they previously embraced it' (Casanova 1994, 11; second emphasis mine). In other words, Casanova did *not* join the ranks of those who had declared the secularisation theory false; on the contrary, he criticised those who did, and argued that the theory continues to have explanatory value. Reader's misrepresentation of Casanova's nuanced argument is puzzling. Furthermore, he criticises Casanova for claiming that religion continues to be an important factor in post-war Japanese society, despite Japan's secular political system; ironically, however, in the 1990s Ian Reader himself subscribed to the position that religion is a ubiquitous and dynamic phenomenon in Japan (Reader 1991), and (co-)criticised Reischauer and Jansen (1995) for suggesting otherwise (Reader & Tanabe 1998, 6-8). Apparently, he has recently changed his mind, which is of course perfectly legitimate – but it does disqualify his critique of Casanova's 1994 assessment of the Japanese situation, in my opinion.

[28] A Japanese friend recently told me that her mother, when she was old, converted to Catholicism, reportedly in order to save her children the significant financial burden of Buddhist funeral and memorial ceremonies. While

Japan – which dates back to the Edo period, during which they served an important political function in helping the military government control the population (the so-called *danka seido*, or *danka* system [see Hur 2007]) – and, as depopulation continues, it is only natural (i.e., an inevitable consequence of demographic as well as economic developments) that some of them disappear, or lose their traditional function.[29]

In addition, while the decline in number of *butsudan* or *kamidana* may point to a decline in concern for and awareness of non-human beings such as ancestral spirits and house deities (although there may be other variables involved, such as the cost of purchasing and maintaining altars), this in principle does not say anything about the position of religious institutions and their influence on the public sphere. Significantly, most classical theories of secularisation suggested that *privatisation* was one of the core aspects of secularisation. In Japan, however, the apparent decline in institutional affiliation, as well as certain practices and beliefs, seems to go hand in hand with the active return of certain religious institutions and symbols to the public sphere, which may be called *deprivatisation* (Mullins 2012; see below). Thus, it is questionable whether a gradual decline in the use of house altars can be seen as evidence for 'secularisation' – according to an approach that considers the privatisation of religion to be a core feature of secularisation, at least, it is not. Interpreting it as such would require a clear-cut definition of secularisation that includes the disappearance or transformation of certain rituals performed at home, and refutes the classical axiom that privatisation of religion is an essential element of secularisation.

Finally, the transformation of pilgrimage practices is not necessarily evidence of their secularisation; all it shows is that these practices can be adapted to changing circumstances.[30] Pilgrimage destinations may be rebranding themselves as 'cultural heritage' and concealing devotional aspects of the pilgrimage; however, unless one insists that a public recognition and discursive legitimation of pilgrimage *qua religion and/or belief* is necessary for it to be considered 'religious' (i.e., not secularised) – a circular argument, that inevitably gets caught up in 'religion' being defined by virtue of its being 'religious' – there is no reason to assume that the transformation and adaptation

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this illustrates quite well that established Buddhist death rituals are losing their self-evidence, at least for part of the Japanese population, it would be quite difficult to maintain that conversion to Christianity is evidence of secularisation! On contemporary funeral practices and other transformations in ways of dealing with death, see H. Suzuki 2013.

[29] Note that the critique of Buddhism (and, by extension, of 'religion') is by no means a recent development. The early Meiji period was characterised by anti-Buddhist sentiments (Ketelaar 1990), even though 'religions' were simultaneously revitalised and reemployed for political purposes. Mark Teeuwen has argued that many of these anti-Buddhist elements go back to the Edo period. And not only anti-Buddhist, for that matter: in Edo-period Japan, he argues, there was 'a broad and popular secularist discourse that was, at times, aggressively hostile to religion, while at other times defending its usefulness within a delineated private realm' (2013, 5). Classical unilinear notions of secularisation tend to romantically portray pre-modern societies as strongly 'religious' (which are then juxtaposed with the decline and privatisation of religion supposedly brought about by modernity), but this view is not always correct, for past generations were not necessarily as devotional as later historical narratives suggest. Rodney Stark has called this 'the myth of past piety' (1999, 255-260).

[30] This paragraph is based on earlier comments (Rots 2012d) on a blog post and lecture of Ian Reader (2012a), in which he made the same argument as in the journal article.

of pilgrimage practices implies their secularisation. On the contrary, it may lead to their sur- and revival. Moreover, the fact that Japanese pilgrimage organisations, local authorities and transport companies choose to describe their pilgrimage in explicitly non-religious vocabulary (i.e., redefining it as 'culture' and 'heritage') and advertise for pilgrimages in apparently secular places such as train stations does not really tell us anything about the practices in which pilgrims engage, let alone the meanings they contribute to these practices.

Reader should be well aware of these problems: in his excellent study of continuities and inventions in the Shikoku pilgrimage (2005), he convincingly argues against the artificial distinction between (religious) pilgrimage and (secular) tourism, showing that pilgrims have a variety of motives and objectives that cannot easily be divided into 'religious' and 'secular' ones. Moreover, as he has written in a later article, the fact that media tend to ignore the devotional aspects of pilgrimage does not necessarily mean that pilgrims do the same; nor can it be assumed that 'the commodification of pilgrimage via media representations necessarily turns pilgrimage participants into tourists. (…) [D]etailed contemporary studies of the pilgrimage (…) indicate that faith, spiritual quest, and devotion remain important criteria for many pilgrims' (Reader 2007, 26). It is puzzling, therefore, that Reader seems to have abandoned his earlier position[31] in favour of a one-sided narrative of the alleged loss of 'traditional' elements of belief and devotion, equating these with secularisation. By doing so, he not only causes conceptual confusion; he also seems to contrast the present situation with an idealised past, suggesting that pilgrimage practices used to be more 'religious' in the past than today. Significantly, however, several historians have shown that Edo-period pilgrimages were by no means characterised by devotion only (Davis 1992, 45-80; Thal 2005). 'Pray, pay, and play', as Sarah Thal euphemistically characterises the average pilgrim's concerns (ibid., 114): prostitution was as much part of pilgrimage as prayer.

In sum, the decline of religious institutions and vocabulary does not point to secularisation *per se*; it only shows that a particular tradition, for whatever reason, has not been able to adapt to changing circumstances. The decline of Mithraism, Champa Shaivism or Yoshida Shinto, to name but a few historical examples, had nothing to do with secularisation, but everything with changing political and socio-cultural circumstances. Likewise, the apparent decline of Japanese temple Buddhism may well point to significant changes in society – e.g., economical challenges cause people to look for alternative (i.e., cheaper) funeral practices, as a result of which Buddhist temples are losing their monopoly on performing these – but that in itself is not evidence of general, nation-wide secularisation. As societies and cultures change, transformation and (re)invention are necessary for traditions in order to survive (Thal 2002b, 2005); there is nothing particularly 'modern' about this, nor does it equal secularisation.

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[31] As illustrated by the *mea culpa* that he has also 'been guilty of' claims of a 'pilgrimage boom' (Reader 2012b, 24-25).

2.2.3 *From secularisation to sacralisation*

Thus, I am not denying the fact that a number of religious institutions in Japan are facing decline; that certain ritual practices are less commonly performed than, say, fifty or even twenty years ago; that fewer people are willing to identify with 'religion', due to semantic and social changes; and that pilgrimage and other practices are being transformed. However, in order to consider these as evidence of the general secularisation of Japanese religion (let alone of claims that there is a 'prospect of collapse' (Reader 2012b, 16) and that religion in Japan 'is dying' [ibid., 34]), one has to carefully instrumentalise one's conceptual framework – especially considering the contested and ambiguous nature of the concepts 'religion' and 'secularisation' – and examine possible external variables that may explain these developments. That does not mean the term 'secular' is not applicable to Japan – arguably, it is, at least when it comes to ideology and law – or that there is no such thing as secularisation in Japan. It does, however, require a more nuanced approach, including an examination of recent theoretical debates.

Such an approach has been adopted by John Nelson (2012) in his interesting and theoretically sophisticated discussion of aspects of secularisation in contemporary Japan. He rightly points out that 'there is considerable slippage when Eurocentric models of secularization are called upon in non-Western societies to assess the role of religion in the public sphere', and argues that 'conventional views of secularization and religiosity are only partially helpful in understanding the role of religion in contemporary Japanese society' (ibid., 38-39). He also correctly distinguishes between secularism as 'an ideological position (…) that there should be a negotiated separation of religion from the state' (ibid., 40), and secularisation as 'the functional differentiation and privatization of religion' (ibid., 41), and states:

> Any analysis of the relationship between the public role of religion and secular society should be sensitive to the following three features. First, secularity is culturally specific to the historical and political conditions of a particular society and is thus shaped decisively by locality and region. Second, thinking of secularity as locally determined (though certainly not isolated from larger networks of information and power) helps to accommodate wide variations in how religion is conceived in the first place, a particularly important issue for understanding the Japanese situation. Finally, secularities within a society respond to and are reconfigured by changing circumstances brought about through public controversies, debates in the media or in educational settings, and legal cases (ibid., 42-43).

Nelson makes several important points. First, secularity (and, hence, secularisation) is culturally specific; i.e., it is contingent upon time and place, not a universally applicable historical necessity. Second, rather than being a singular, large-scale and irreversible development, there are multiple secularisations, 'globally diffuse' (ibid., 37) and 'locally determined'. And third, by extension, secularities and processes of secularisation are historically configured, and influenced by global as well as national and local developments in law, mass media and popular discourse. Thus, in contrast to

Reader, who employs the term secularisation as a catch-all category referring to all sorts of supposedly 'religious' decline, Nelson recognises the existence of multiple secularities, and employs the term primarily to refer to institutional and legal developments, rather than 'individual attitudes about belief and religious practice' (ibid., 58). His approach makes clear that secular ideologies and multiple processes of secularisation (locally grounded, and not necessarily irreversible) are, indeed, influential aspects of contemporary Japanese society and politics. They are not, however, the full story.

As N. J. Demerath has pointed out, processes of secularisation often give way to processes of sacralisation. That is, 'modernization does often lead to forms of secularization, but these in turn often spark a sacralizing response – one that ironically uses the means of modernity to protest the ends of modernity' (Demerath 2007, 68). The term 'sacralisation', then, refers to 'the process by which the secular becomes sacred or other new forms of the sacred emerge, whether in matters of personal faith, institutional practice or political power' (ibid., 66). In other words, it refers to the production and reproduction of 'the sacred' in public. Note that this term does not equal the notion of 'desecularisation' as used by Peter Berger (1999), for *sacralisation does not negate secularisation*; rather, according to this argument, they are two sides of the same coin, sacralisation constituting a profoundly 'modern' response to secularisation. Indeed, secular elements can be 'sacralised' (e.g., national flags and civic commemoration ceremonies), just like 'religious' elements can be highly 'profane' (e.g., vending machines selling canned drinks in a Shinto shrine). As for the question what it is that constitutes 'sacredness', I will return to this topic in the second half of the next chapter.

Mark Mullins' article (2012) is in accordance with Demerath's theory, and complements it neatly. He points out that secularisation in Japan is by no means an unambiguous process; 'there are "multiple secularities" competing in Japan today' (Mullins 2012, 79). As his title suggests, they paradoxically coexist with processes of deprivatisation and 'the reappearance of "public religion" in Japanese society'. Unlike Reader, Mullins thinks that 'the sociologic regarding modernization and secularization developed on the basis of European history does not fit the case of Japan. (…) [A] unilinear conception of modernization and religious decline cannot adequately account for the situation in some non-Western regions of the world' (ibid., 63) (nor, I would add, in some so-called 'Western' regions). He also makes the important point that the privatisation and secularisation (i.e., institutional depoliticisation) of Shinto during the postwar occupation period was the result of 'imperialist secularisation' (cf. Demerath 2007, 75-76); that is, 'the coercive and top-down removal of religion from public institutions by a foreign power' (Mullins 2012, 67). This is significantly different from 'bottom-up' secularisation processes in, say, Germany or the United Kingdom.

Following Casanova (1994), Mullins then argues that recent decades have seen the gradual 'deprivatisation of religion' in Japan, in particular Shinto; several players have consistently lobbied for the revitalisation of Shinto as a national 'civil religion', to be reassigned important public ritual and ideological functions – 'not as a religious belief but as the fundamental expression of Japanese identity' (Thal 2002a, 12). Arguably, the notions of 'public religion' and 'civil religion' are confusing

in this respect, as they refer to practices and symbols that are not normally categorised as 'religion' in Japan. Rather, I would refer to these processes as a return of rituals and sacred symbols to the public sphere. These do not necessarily constitute a revival of religion, but they may certainly be conceived of as sacralisation. Instead of the 'deprivatisation of religion', we are perhaps witnessing the 'dereligionisation' of certain rituals and symbols, which are reconfigured as public and national rather than private and 'religious'.

Mark Teeuwen has made the interesting suggestion that, rather than a 'secular-religion' dichotomy, modern Shinto is characterised by a *'ritual-religion'* dichotomy (personal communication). In Shinto ideological and institutional discourse, the concept 'secular' is not used very often, but there is ample reference to both 'ritual' and 'religion'. 'Ritual' has been conceptualised as *public* (and, hence, as 'culture' and 'tradition'), whereas 'religion' is often described (and prescribed!) as something that belongs to the *private* realm (associated with personal belief, *shinkō*). This is an interesting hypothesis that is in accordance with some of my own observations, and it deserves further examination. That would require an in-depth study of different uses of both the categories 'ritual' (*gishiki, matsuri*) in modern discourse, as well as configurations of 'public' and 'private' space. I do not have the space to do so here, but it is important to point out that in Japan, a decline of *shūkyō* (both in terms of institutional affiliation and personal beliefs) does *not* necessarily imply a decline in public rituals, ceremonies and notions of 'sacredness'. Secularisation (in the sense of institutional decline) may well go hand in hand with sacralisation (the re-emergence of public rituals, and the reestablishment and popularisation of 'sacred places'). Indeed, this is what seems to be happening in Japan today.

In sum, 'secularisation' is a multi-layered concept, fraught not only with sociological but also with semantic difficulties, that is by no means unequivocal. Whereas the hypothesis that there are currently processes of secularisation taking place in Japan seems legitimate and needs to be subjected to further investigation, these processes are not likely to be unilinear, irreversible or all-encompassing; on the contrary, as I discussed before, they may coexist with, or even give rise to, processes of sacralisation and the reappearance of 'sacred' symbols in politics and public space. It is to these topics – sacralisation, place-making, and notions of 'sacred space' – that I will turn now.

3. SACRED SPACE AND SACRALISATION

3.1 The production of space

3.1.1 *Sacralisation and the 'spatial turn'*

As suggested in the previous chapter, secularisation processes can go hand in hand with, and provoke, processes of sacralisation (cf. Demerath 2007). I use the term 'sacralisation' to refer to processes by which 'sacredness' is constructed. As I do not subscribe to notions of 'sacredness' as a transcendental quality inherently present in certain objects, places and people, I consider it to be an attribute that is constructed and maintained discursively, through narratives as well as practices. However, whereas sacralisation is primarily a discursive process (i.e., 'sacredness' is evoked by means of discursive practices such as mythmaking, advertising and the narrative reconstruction of experiences), it does not only apply to texts. 'Sacredness' is a quality not only projected onto words and phrases, but also onto things and places; consequently, it becomes embodied by material objects, buildings, and physical landscapes.

As a result, sacralisation is closely intertwined with notions of space and spatial practices. Significantly, so-called 'sacred places' have traditionally constituted one of the core interests of scholars of religion, as has the corresponding umbrella category 'sacred space'. In recent years, however, these categories have been reinterpreted and reapplied in accordance with critical theories of space and place-making, including the works of scholars such as Michel de Certeau (1984), Michel Foucault (2010b), Henri Lefebvre (1991) and others. This is in accordance with a renewed interest in the topic of space in the humanities in general, referred to as 'the spatial turn' (Warf & Arias 2009b). Accordingly, in this chapter, I will examine the topics of 'sacred space' and 'sacralisation' from the perspective of this 'spatial turn'.

I will begin by examining some relevant theories of 'space', making theoretical propositions that may be helpful for the establishment of a non-essentialist understanding of 'sacred space'. This discussion is mainly based on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, but also links to some other recent theories of space. First, I will give a summary of Lefebvre's main argument and key concepts; I will discuss the different types and dimensions of space he distinguished, as well as his notion of space as *produced*. From this, I will draw four important conclusions, which will guide me in the course of this study. I will also point out two problems of Lefebvre's theory; in order to overcome these, I will try to complement his notion of 'the production of space' with some recent theoretical contributions, clarifying the relationship between 'space' and 'place'. Combining these different theoretical insights on ways in which places take shape and acquire meaning, I hope to develop a basic framework that will guide me in my interpretation of discursive and institutional practices pertaining to Shinto's 'sacred forests'.

I have already mentioned the recent development in the humanities referred to by the term 'spatial turn'. Having focused primarily focused on texts, symbols, and history for a long time, scholars of culture and religion are now rediscovering the Kantian core category 'space', paying attention to physical places as well as spatial imagination (Warf & Arias 2009b). As Edward Soja has written,

> In what I am convinced will eventually be considered one of the most important intellectual and political developments of the late 20th century, a growing community of scholars and citizens has, for perhaps the first time, begun to think about the *spatiality* of human life in much the same way that we have persistently approached life's intrinsic and richly revealing historical and social qualities: its *historicality* and *sociality* (1996, 2).

Thus, 'spatiality' has been added to 'historicality' and 'sociality' as the primary ontological and epistemological categories by which our experiences and interpretations of the world are shaped (ibid., 70-73). The term 'spatial turn' refers to this paradigm shift.

Of course, one may question the applicability of the term 'turn' – arguably, a bit too many different 'turns' have been pronounced in the social sciences and humanities in recent decades ('linguistic turn', 'cultural turn', 'cognitive turn' and so on) – but this new interest in spatiality constitutes a promising intellectual trend. Topics such as physical embodiment, spatial terminology and metaphors, globalisation and 'glocalisation', the natural environment, maps and other representations of space, landscape construction and so on are of great relevance for the study of culture, religion, ideology and art, far transcending the classical epistemologies and spatial methods associated with the discipline geography. As such, the spatial turn creates new opportunities for research that has the potential of overcoming disciplinary and other category boundaries. In a recent introduction to the topic, Barney Warf and Santa Arias write that

> as the spatial turn has unfolded across the social sciences and humanities, the term has come to embrace an ever-larger set of uses and implications. But, conversely, space can serve as a window into different disciplines, a means of shedding light on what separates and what unites them. Because so many lines of thought converge on the topic of spatiality, space is a vehicle for examining what it means to be interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, to cross the borders and divides that have organized the academic division of labor, to reveal the cultures that pervade different fields of knowledge, and to bring these contrasting lines of thought into a productive engagement with one another (2009a, 2).

If it wants to acquire theoretical significance, the spatial study of, first, ritual and devotional practices, and second, 'sacred' places and landscapes (including but not limited to various practices and places usually referred to by the fuzzy concept 'religion'), should not merely consist of the mapping of movements and locations. Nor, for that matter, should it lead to a reductionist focus on space that leads to a neglect of history, discourse, and action. On the contrary, such an approach should focus on ways in which history, discourse and action are imbedded in, shaped by, and

constitutive of space. In order to do so, however, we first need to examine the question what is meant by the abstract concept 'space', and how it relates to the notions of 'place' and 'landscape'. As space is constantly changing, and every single place can be seen as the outcome of various historical processes (whether human-made or not), we should perhaps reject classical notions of space as some sort of *a priori*, timeless and neutral container for events to take place in. Rather, we need a theoretical approach that takes into consideration the historical and political dimensions of space; i.e., the various ways in which spaces are constructed, organised, contested, changed, and (re)produced. For this, we may consult the work of the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1905-1991), whose well-known work *La production de l'espace* (*The Production of Space*) is arguably one of the most important theoretical reflections upon space in modernity.

3.1.2 *Introducing Lefebvre*

Warf and Arias' claim that spatial approaches in the study of culture and society may lead us to 'cross the borders and divides that have organized the academic division of labor' reflects Lefebvre's statement that a theory of space should be a 'unitary theory' (1991, 11), the purpose of which is 'to expose the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis together within a single theory' (ibid., 16). Thus, he is not only concerned with the question 'what *is* space', but also, more importantly, with the processes by which different kinds of space (have) come into being (i.e., the processes by which they are produced, and the conditions of their production). In Soja's summary, Lefebvre 'called his spatial perspective *transdisciplinary* as a strategy to prevent spatial knowledge and praxis from being fragmented and compartmentalized (again) as a disciplinary specialty' (Soja 1996, 47; emphasis in original).

While its main concern is space, Lefebvre's theory in fact has a strong historical focus; his descriptions are genealogical rather than phenomenological. 'Space', he argued, is a multi-layered concept, covering a number of fields. His purpose, then, was to develop a theory taking into account these different types of space. He wanted 'to discover or construct a theoretical unity between "fields" which are apprehended separately (…). The fields we are concerned with are, first, the *physical* – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the *social*' (1991, 11; italics in original). Thus, space is not merely a physical category; it is also mental (i.e., spaces are *imagined* and *conceived of*) and social (i.e., spaces are contingent upon, and shape, social relations; social relations, meanwhile, are spatially embedded). Thus, a Lefebvrean approach to space is inherently transdisciplinary, as it attempts to overcome the conventional categorisation between the natural, human and social sciences. Its argument is that, while space can be simultaneously physical, mental and social, these different fields are interdependent and mutually constitutive, and any study of space should take all of them into consideration.

The distinction between 'physical', 'mental' and 'social' space is one of Lefebvre's many triads. As Soja describes, Lefebvre consistently challenged any binary sets of two concepts or categories placed in 'a closed either/or opposition'; he always added a third option in order to challenge all types of 'totalizing closure' and 'permanent constructions', an approach which Soja refers to as 'trialectics' (1996, 60-61). In addition to the above triad, Lefebvre's theory is based on three other core concepts, referred to as 'aspects of space'. These are 'spatial practice', 'representations of space' and 'spaces of representation'. They correspond to, respectively, the notions of 'perceived space', 'conceived space' and 'lived space' (ibid., 65). I will introduce them briefly.

The first aspect of space is the notion of *spatial practice*; that is, a 'specific use of [a] space' (Lefebvre 1991, 16) that is socially embedded. It is 'the process of producing the material form of social spatiality, (…) presented as both medium and outcome of human activity, behavior, and experience' (Soja 1996, 66). The term 'embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion' (Lefebvre 1991, 33). Thus, through spatial practices, social relations are established and confirmed, labour is organised, and collective identities are constructed. As such, it is an inherent aspect of 'social space' – that is, the space of social relations (cf. Bourdieu 1989). Significantly, Lefebvre argues, social space is not something that simply exists, appearing *ex nihilo*; on the contrary, it is something that is *produced*. What is more, the processes by which and conditions under which it is produced cannot be seen apart from power configurations, for produced space 'serves as a tool of thought and of action' and 'a means of control, and hence of domination' (Lefebvre 1991, 26).

Yet, the processes by which spaces are produced (and, hence, their political aspects) are not usually recognised; according to Lefebvre, they are concealed by means of the 'illusion of transparency' (i.e., the notion that space is intelligible, innocent, and knowable) and the 'illusion of natural simplicity' (i.e., space is 'naturalised', and discursively dehistoricised) (ibid., 27-30). Every society, he argues, produces its own social space, which contains and assigns places to the 'social relations of reproduction' (i.e., family relations and gender patterns) and the 'relations of production' (i.e., divisions of labour and power) (ibid., 32). While the present study is not directly concerned with issues related to labour or industrial production, Lefebvre's notion of spatial practice is relevant as it shows that a) all spatial practices are also social practices, embedded in social space; b) any space, while it may be conceived of as 'natural', has its own (production) history; and c) spatial arrangements are implicit in, reflect, and may legitimise particular power configurations, including structures of domination and control. The meanings attributed to a certain place may be considered self-evident, or they may be contested and negotiated; in any case, they are not politically neutral.

The second core concept of Lefebvre's spatial triad is called *representations of space*, or 'conceptualised space'. This is 'the space of scientists', as well as urban planners, architects, and bureaucrats; it is 'the dominant space in any society', inherently ideological, that serves the interests of

the powerful and is imposed upon those they control (ibid., 38-39). By contrast, the term *representational spaces* (or, rather, *spaces of representation*)[32] refers to 'space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users" (…). This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate' (ibid., 39, italics in original). Thus, 'spaces of representation' can be seen as the mirror image of 'representations of space': the former are associated with the passive and powerless, the latter with the active and powerful; the former tend towards 'systems of non-verbal symbols and signs', the latter towards 'a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs' (ibid., 39); the former 'are subordinate to [the] logic' of 'social and political practice', whereas the latter 'need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness' (ibid., 41). In the formulation of Kim Knott, a space of representation 'is experienced by those (such as artists, writers, performers, and perhaps innovators of ritual and religious symbol) who make imaginative and symbolic use of physical space in order to realise the possibility of resisting the power of a dominant order, regime or discourse' (Knott 2005b, 165).

The distinction between 'representations of space' and 'spaces of representation' – or, alternatively, between 'conceived space' and 'lived space' – is significant. Adopting the vocabulary of Michel de Certeau, 'representations of space' can be conceived of as *strategies*, employed to control and suppress the 'marginal majority'; 'spaces of representation', on the other hand, open up for *tactics*, that may be employed by members of that marginal majority to subvert, pacify or reappropriate those strategies (1984, xv-xix). While in reality it is perhaps not always easy to distinguish between 'representations of space' on the one hand, and 'spaces of representation' on the other (just as it is not always easy to distinguish between strategies and tactics, as one person's liberating tactic may be another person's control strategy), it is nevertheless important to note that, in the conceptualisation, imagination and construction of space, fundamental power inequalities are played out. Yet even the 'passive' inhabitants of a place, who have spatial constructions imposed upon them, negotiate and reimagine imposed structures by means of their own 'spaces of representation'. In other words, space is not only subject to power, control and conflict, but also to creative reappropriation and transformation.[33]

But what does it mean to say that 'space is produced'? The terminology, first of all, is derived from the philosophies of Hegel and Marx:

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[32] 'Representational spaces' is the translation offered by Nicholson-Smith; others have argued for the term 'spaces of representation' (Knott 2005b, 163, footnote 17; cf. Soja 1996), which is arguably preferable as it is closer to the original '*espaces de la représentation*', and more clearly mirrors the second term, 'representations of space' (*représentations de l'espace*).

[33] It is on the latter – the creative reappropriation of space as something that is *lived*, the space of *tactics* – that the influential postmodern geographer Edward Soja has based his theory of 'thirdspace', a type of subversive spatial 'Othering' that leads to the deconstruction and reinterpretation of taken-for-granted categories (1996). I do not have the space to elaborate upon this theory here, but Soja's theories may well carry significant implications for the study of 'religion' and 'social space' – a topic which I hope to examine further in the future.

In Hegelianism, 'production' has a cardinal role: first, the (absolute) Idea produces the world; next, nature produces the human being; and the human being in turn, by dint of struggle and labour, produces at once history, knowledge and self-consciousness – and hence that Mind which reproduces the initial and ultimate Idea. For Marx and Engels, the concept of production (…) has two senses, one very broad, the other restrictive and precise. In its broad sense, humans as social beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world. There is nothing, in history and society, which does not have to be achieved and produced. (…) Thus production in the broad sense of the term embraces a multiplicity of works and a great diversity of forms (Lefebvre 1991, 68).

However, in the more restrictive use of the term,

what they have in mind is things only: *products*. This narrowing of the concept brings it closer to its everyday, and hence banal, sense – the sense it has for economists. As for the question of who does the producing, and how they do it, the more restricted the notion becomes the less it connotes creativity, inventiveness or imagination; rather, it tends to refer solely to labour. (…) What constitutes the forces of production, according to Marx and Engels? Nature, first of all, plays a part, then labour, hence the organization (or division) of labour, and hence also the instruments of labour, including technology and, ultimately, knowledge. [However,] since the time of Marx and Engels the concept of production has come to be used so very loosely that it has lost practically all definition (ibid., 69).

Lefebvre goes on to argue that the concept of production needs to be rethought and redefined, not limiting it to the narrow Marxist sense of the word (i.e., the fruits of labour), but not using it as a broad, generic term either. According to him, there is an important difference between a *work*, which has something 'irreplaceable and unique', and a *product*, which 'can be reproduced exactly' (ibid., 70). Significantly, he perceives a crucial difference between natural space and produced space: 'Nature creates and does not produce; (…) nature does not labour (…). A tree, a flower or a fruit is not a 'product' (…). Nature's space is not staged' (ibid., 70). As modernity progresses, however, produced (i.e., artificial) space is gradually taking over, while

natural space is disappearing. (…) It is still the background of the picture; as decor, and more than decor, it persists everywhere, and every natural detail, every natural object is valued even more as it takes on symbolic weight. As source and as resource, nature obsesses us, as do childhood and spontaneity, via the filter of memory. Everyone wants to protect and save nature (…). Yet at the same time everything conspires to harm it. The fact is that natural space will soon be lost to view. (…) Even the powerful myth of nature is being transformed into a mere fiction, a negative utopia: nature is now seen as merely the raw material out of which the productive forces of a variety of social systems have forged their particular spaces (ibid., 30-31).

Likewise, in a statement that echoes Nietzsche as well as environmentalist critiques of modernity, Lefebvre argues that 'it is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by "anti-nature" – by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse, as also by labour and its products.

Along with God, nature is dying. "Humanity" is killing both of them – and perhaps committing suicide into the bargain' (ibid., 71).

Thus, Lefebvre's analysis rests on a strict ontological dichotomy between what he calls 'natural space' and 'produced space'. 'Natural space' refers to 'primordial' space, so to speak, which was created by nature, pre-discursive, and made up of a great number of interconnected unique 'beings'. Produced space, on the other hand, is physical as much as it is mental and social; it is contingent upon, and legitimises, power configurations; it can be reproduced and repeated (thus, it is mechanical and designed rather than spontaneous and idiosyncratic); and, significantly, it acquires meaning discursively. This distinction between 'natural' and 'produced' space may be criticised on a number of grounds. We could question, for instance, the arguably romantic notion of nature as something essentially opposed to human society – a notion which, in recent years, has been criticised by a number of scholars, in particular those representing the newly established academic fields of science studies and environmental anthropology (e.g., Haraway 1991; Ingold 2000; Latour 1999). Nevertheless, Lefebvre's provocative critique of modernity's spatial aspects is significant, as it reveals how contemporary space is produced by and implicit in political and economical structures, and suggests that spaces not (co)produced by human actors are gradually disappearing – without us paying much attention.

3.1.3   Four implications

This theory has some important implications, four of which I would like to point out for the purpose of this study. First, there is a difference between nature and 'nature'. That is, constructions and reconstructions of 'nature' in today's world are not natural in the Lefebvrean sense: they are *products*, and therefore historically configured, ideologically charged and embedded in power structures. After all, now that we have entered the Anthropocene,[34] there are perhaps no places left in the world that are not directly or indirectly shaped by human behaviour. What is more, large parts of today's world were actively *designed*, including so-called 'natural parks'. These are the heritage of, first, American romantic conceptions of 'wilderness' as something opposed to, and untouched by, humanity (Buell 1995; Cronon 1996); and, second, spatial politics, such as colonial game reserves that led to the displacement of human populations and were later reconceived as 'wild nature' (Neumann 1998; cf. Lefebvre 1991, 83).

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[34] The term 'Anthropocene' was popularised by Paul J. Crutzen, winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry, and refers to the geological period following the Holocene, in which human beings are believed to exercise considerable influence on the Earth's climate, atmosphere, and ecosystems. This period is said to have begun at the end of the eighteenth century, when the steam engine was invented. For the time being, it remains somewhat controversial, and there is no scientific consensus yet as to whether the current age should be regarded as a new geological period. See Crutzen 2002.

In Lefebvre's terminology, while nature may still be present in the background as a remnant of the creative, life-giving force it once was (a 'trace', perhaps),[35] these 'national parks' have long ceased to be 'natural space', in stead becoming 'representations of space' that are a central part of postcolonial power configurations. Likewise, it may be argued, representations of nature in 'mental space' are by no means natural. That is, a variety of images, symbols and signs derived from nature have come to be appropriated and employed for political and commercial purposes. Examples of these include the construction of gardens that idealise nature, represent cosmological beliefs and, ultimately, naturalise historically constructed power relations (Gotō & Ching 1998; Hendry 1997; Stordalen 2011); supposedly 'natural' symbols, such as a snow-capped Mount Fuji with cherry blossoms or a wild fjord landscape, that come to signify (and, indeed, naturalise) nations as primordial entities, concealing the fact that they are modern constructions;[36] and the use of symbols representing 'nature' (and, by extension, purity) such as forests, flowers and animals to sell any kind of commodity, from cosmetics to entertainment. Thus, in today's world, 'nature' has indeed become a product; one that is reproduced in conservation practices, tourist destinations, advertisements and so on (Moeran & Skov 1995; Moon 1997). Arguably, then, it has ceased to be an independent agent, instead becoming dependent upon human production processes for its survival. Provided that it ever existed, original, pre-discursive nature is further away than ever; the only thing that remains, one might argue, are its traces.

Secondly, it is important to note that a Lefebvrean analysis of space is not opposed to discourse analysis. Whereas Lefebvre is critical of the tendency of poststructuralists to reduce everything to texts and signs, and overlook physicality as well as social practices – that is, in their work, 'the mental realm comes to envelop the social and physical ones' (1991, 5; cf. Olsen 2006) – he does not reject the notion of discourse *per se*. Nor, significantly, is his analysis incompatible with the Foucauldian premise that all meanings are established and negotiated discursively (a view which, as I have already noted, does not deny the existence of things outside of discourse, but merely addresses the processes by which things acquire meanings [see Hall 2001, 73]). Quite the contrary: discourse and spatial politics are mutually constitutive, and an analysis of formations of space should take into account the discursive processes by which spaces come to signify certain ideas.

On the other hand, discourses are physically embodied themselves, and thus have spatial attributes – e.g., books in a library, tourist brochures in a train station, and narratives posted and shared in 'cyberspace' – that influence the ways in which they are interpreted and appropriated. As Lefebvre

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[35] 'Trace' is one of the key terms used by the twentieth-century philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, as well as by a generation of philosophers of religion influenced by them. While not easily defined, in their use of the term, it has metaphysical connotations; it is used to refer to the absence of something, which can still be known and experienced, and is paradoxically present through its absence. Hence, one can speak of 'the trace of God' or 'the trace of infinity' – for instance, Nietzsche's statement that 'God is dead, and we have killed Him' implies that He has once been, and may have left a trace. Similarly, it may be argued that, in the Anthropocene, all we have left of nature is its trace. Cf. Bloechl 2000.

[36] See, for instance, Witoszek 1998 (on Norway) and Schwartz 2006 (on Lithuania). I will discuss the role of 'nature' in Japanese nation building in more detail in the next chapter.

writes, '[e]very language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from a space. Distinctions must be drawn between discourse *in* space, discourse *about* space and the discourse *of* space' (1991, 132, emphasis in original). Thus, as analytical concepts, 'space' and 'discourse' are complementary rather than contradictory, and mutually dependent. Furthermore, spatial practices may be discursive, and vice versa – as illustrated by De Certeau's compelling argument that spatial practices (e.g., walking in the city) have a narrative and, hence, signifying aspect, and may be conceived of as 'spatial stories' (1984, 91-130). In this study, I subscribe to the position that spatial practices acquire meaning discursively, through repetition, reinvention, cross-referencing and narrative reconstruction; simultaneously, however, I hold that texts and narratives are not disembodied entities, but stories that take on physical shapes and have spatial aspects.

From this, it follows that, thirdly, space is *not neutral*. As it is a product – whether physical, social or mental – it is contingent upon modes of production and, hence, power relations. Accordingly, ideology is embedded in space. Contemporary spaces are products that not only *embody* ideology, but are also 'part of the history of ideologies' (Lefebvre 1991, 116).[37] After all, they control and restrict us:

> That space signifies is incontestable. But what it signifies is dos and don'ts – and this brings us back to power. (…) Activity in space is restricted by that space; space 'decides' what activity may occur, but even this 'decision' has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order – an hence also a certain disorder (…). Interpretation comes later, almost as an afterthought. Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered (ibid., 142-143).

Modern cityscapes, for instance, limit city dwellers in a variety of ways; spatial planning and architecture are 'representations of space' that are employed by powerful institutional actors to structure and restrict spatial practices. In addition, cityscapes also convey ideological messages – the superiority, say, of a given dynasty (ranging from Napoleon III's demolition and subsequent rebuilding of Paris in the nineteenth century to the Dubai ruling dynasty's construction of artificial islands shaped as a world map), or the primacy and power of particular financial ideologies (e.g., the centrality and architectural grandeur of financial institutions on Wall Street or in the City of London).

But the ideological aspect of the production of space is perhaps nowhere as pronounced as in monuments. These are constructions that embody historical narratives, reify nation states, and take centre stage during public commemorative events. Their meanings, however, are not always made

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[37] Lefebvre uses the term 'ideology' in an inclusive sense. That is, it is 'not restricted (…) to the ideologies of the philosophers and of the ruling classes – or, in other words, to the "noble" ideas of philosophy, religion and ethics' (1991, 116). Here the term 'ideology' is not limited to explicitly political, normative narratives, but also includes a variety of implicit signs, symbols and subtexts that legitimise and naturalise (or, in some cases, challenge) particular power configurations. For a discussion of the term, and its relevance to 'religion', see Lease 2000.

explicit: 'Monumentality (…) always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wants to say – yet it hides a good deal more: being political, military, and ultimately fascist in character, monumental buildings mask the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought' (ibid., 143).

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, space *changes*. 'If space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history*' (ibid., 46). Thus, a spatial approach is by no means opposed to a historical one. On the contrary, a careful examination of a given space should not be limited to, say, a phenomenological description of its current features and functions; it should also take into account the historical processes (human and non-human) by which that space has acquired its shape, as well as the recognition that the current shape, too, is subject to change. Each space has a genealogy, and is made up of multiple historical layers; hence, the deconstruction (figuratively speaking) of the various meanings and functions of a given space should include a genealogical inquiry. Anticipating some of the theories on landscape produced by later anthropologists and geographers (e.g., Ingold 2000, 189-208), Lefebvre argues that

> every social space has a history (…). In the history of space as such, (…) the historical and diachronic realms and the generative past are forever leaving their inscriptions upon the writing-tablet, so to speak, of space. The uncertain traces left by events are not the only marks on (or in) space: society in its actuality also deposits its script, the result and product of social activities. Time has more than one writing-system. The space engendered by time is always actual and synchronic, and it always presents itself as of a piece; its component parts are bound together by internal links and connections themselves produced by time (ibid., 110; cf. 116).

Arguably, this is one of the strengths of Lefebvre's work: while taking space as its main focus, it does not overlook the importance of time, but takes into account diachronic processes and argues for an examination of ways in which spaces are constructed and transformed. While any given space is always 'a *present* space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality' (ibid., 37), it is also the outcome of historical production processes, and therefore fraught with traces from the past.

3.1.4 *Complementary considerations*

For all its significant theoretical contributions, there are some problems with Lefebvre's theory. First, like his Marxist predecessors as well as his (post)structuralist contemporaries, Lefebvre does not seriously address the question of agency. Granted, space is produced – but *by whom*? Who are the actors involved in the production of space? Lefebvre does mention planners, architects and scientists, as well as governments; however, he does not specify these terms, which thus remain abstract and undefined. One gets the impression of an all-encompassing state apparatus, operating as a single

organism, organising and producing space in such a way that it serves the interests of an undefined ruling class, the individual members of which remain anonymous.

However, not only are there various alternative ways of reappropriating and reimagining space, and, hence, subverting power (the 'spaces of representation' discussed previously); we should also allow for the existence of a much larger multiplicity of actors involved in spatial production processes than Lefebvre seems to acknowledge. After all, place-making is an activity by no means limited to the powerful; all people constantly shape and reshape the physical spaces in which they dwell and move (i.e., their environments), negotiate the social space they take part in, and readjust whatever mental representations of space they have learned and created (cf. Bourdieu 1990, 271-283; De Certeau 1984, xx-xxii).[38]

It is this 'lived space', the space of creative reappropriation, that Soja has focused on – calling it 'thirdspace' – in his reinterpretation of Lefebvre's theory (1996), and in developing this concept he has made some interesting associations with postcolonial and feminist theory. But his notion of 'thirdspace' is deliberately political, in that it seeks to subvert and challenge taken-for-granted power structures and corresponding epistemologies. I am also interested in spatial practices that are less explicitly subversive; i.e., the daily-life ways of dwelling in, walking in, using and adjusting space that De Certeau has described as the 'tactics of the ordinary [hu]man' (1984, 29-44, 91-110). In my opinion, the question of (individual) agency should be central to discussions of the relations between space and power: *whose space* are we talking about?

Second, one thing that remains unclear in Lefebvre's work is how exactly 'space' relates to 'place' – or, for that matter, 'spaces' to 'places'. Lefebvre does not subscribe to the traditional conceptualisation of space as some sort of geometrical 'frame' or empty 'container'; rather, he writes, '[s]pace is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism' (1991, 94). Throughout his work, however, he uses the term in a number of different, not always clearly defined ways. Generally, the term is abstract and uncountable (i.e., 'space'); at times, however, it suddenly becomes specific and countable (i.e., 'a space' or 'spaces'), causing confusion as to whether we are dealing with an abstract umbrella category, actual physical entities, or both. Likewise, the terms 'place' and 'landscape' are not much reflected upon. While the relation between 'space', 'place' and 'landscape' is a complicated issue that I will not be able to resolve in the limited space of this chapter (no pun intended), it may be worthwhile to have a brief look at the theories of two scholars who have elaborated upon this topic: Christopher Tilley and Tim Ingold.

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[38] In fact, it may even be argued that humans are not unique in this respect, as animals also have various ways of constructing, changing, structuring and, perhaps, imagining their direct environments. When studying spaces, it is important to recognise ways in which human actors have been involved in their production processes (including the production of spaces conceptualised as 'nature'); it is equally important, however, not to fully embrace an anthropocentric view that denies ways in which space – any space – is 'co-produced' by so-called non-human actors such as animals, plants, physical objects and climatological phenomena (cf. Latour 2005).

Tilley rejects the notion of space as an uncountable abstraction, arguing that '[t]here is no space, only spaces. These spaces, as social productions, are always centres in relation to human agency and are amenable to reproduction or change because their constitution takes place as part of the day-to-day *praxis* or practical activity of individuals and groups in the world' (1994, 10; italics in original). Hence, space 'can have no universal essence. What space is depends on who is experiencing it and how. Spatial experience is not innocent and neutral, but invested with power' (ibid., 11). Thus, Tilley argues against any overarching theory of Space, focusing instead on the various spaces of social practice, the meanings of which are intersubjective and contingent upon social relations.

As for the relationship between 'space' and 'place', Tilley suggests that '[w]ithout places there can be no spaces, and the former have primary ontological significance as centres of bodily activity, human significance and emotional attachment. (…) [P]laces are always far more than points or locations, because they have distinctive meanings and values for persons. Personal and cultural identity is bound up with place' (ibid., 15). Space, on the other hand, is conceptualised as 'a set of relations between things or places. (…) Space is created by social relations, natural and cultural objects. It is a *production*, an achievement, rather than an autonomous reality in which things or people are located or "found"' (ibid., 17, my emphasis). Thus, while his discussion of his core concepts is arguably more lucid, Tilley by and large agrees with Lefebvre's understanding of space as 'social', and as a 'product'. And while he does not subscribe to the notion of space as an abstract *a priori* category, stating that spaces are relative and contingent upon the people and places they connect, he does not reject the concept of 'space' altogether.

Tim Ingold, on the other hand, is more critical towards the notion of space as such, for '[o]f all the terms we use to describe the world we inhabit, it is the most abstract, the most empty, the most detached from the realities of life and experience' (2011, 145). By contrast, he is more interested in notions such as 'environment' and 'landscape', which are not abstractions from which the observer is artificially removed, as is 'space'. Landscape is 'qualitative and heterogeneous' (2000, 190); it 'is not a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind's eye; nor, however, is it an alien and formless substrate awaiting the imposition of human order' (ibid., 191). Thus, whereas the notion of landscape implies the situatedness and partial perspective of the observer/interpreter, the notion of space does not. Whereas space remains external, ontologically speaking, to those producing it, 'the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it' (ibid., 191).

To conclude: from the previous discussion, a new conceptual triad has emerged, consisting of the terms 'space', 'place', and 'landscape' (I will come back to the equally complicated concepts 'nature' and 'environment' later). While I appreciate Ingold's critical discussion of the term 'space', I do think the term continues to be relevant; not as an empty container category (a notion rejected by both Lefebvre and Tilley anyway), but, rather, as a term denoting a network, or 'set of relations', between places, people, and meanings. Hence, the terms of the triad are complementary. Whereas the notions of 'place' and 'landscape' refer to particular physical realities, the notion of 'space' is more

generic, encompassing the realm of social relations as well as mental representations. A 'place' can be seen as *a particular location*, more or less defined; 'space', on the other hand, refers to a network of physical places, the meanings attributed to them, and the social relations and power structures implied by those meanings.

Like 'space', a 'landscape' is made up of a set of places. But the term 'landscape' arguably has a narrower meaning than 'space'. The term 'space' encompasses not only any set of places, it also includes the social and discursive practices associated with those places. Moreover, space does not need to be physically embedded, whereas a landscape is. For instance, we can talk about maps as spatial models, or about cyberspace as a non-physical yet hyperreal social space. But neither maps nor cyberspace are landscapes. A landscape, as Ingold has argued, it is something that is *experienced* by those who dwell and move in it (and, accordingly, are part of it). A landscape is more than just a particular physical spatial configuration, he suggests: a landscape is 'a story', an account of 'the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it' (ibid., 189). Likewise, as Tilley has proposed, '[a] landscape is a series of named locales, a set of relational places linked by paths, movements and narratives' (1994, 34). Importantly, however, this story is always physically embedded. As such, I would argue that landscapes always constitute space, but space is not limited to landscapes.

3.2   Sacred space

3.2.1   *Notes on the category*

As said, 'the sacred' traditionally constitutes one of the core categories of the academic study of religion. The concept is central to most classical theories produced within the context of this discipline: well-known scholars such as William James, Rudolf Otto, Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade have devoted much of their work to discussions of 'sacredness'. These include the notion of 'sacred experience', the dichotomy between 'sacred' and 'profane', and the subcategories 'sacred space' and 'sacred time'. Influential though they have been, some of these theories have been criticised for being essentialist, ethnocentric and/or ahistorical (see Anttonen 2000, 272-273). Accordingly, the notion of 'the sacred' has a problematic status as an analytical category, as it is notoriously difficult (if not impossible) to conceptualise, quantify, or measure scientifically.

In recent years, however, the category has seen a revival. As both the concept 'religion' and the 'religion-secular' dichotomy are increasingly problematised (see chapter two), the notion of 'sacredness' – no longer conceptualised as an intrinsic quality of certain places, objects and persons, but rather as a cognitively or socially produced category – has been reintroduced as a viable conceptual alternative by some scholars (e.g., Anttonen 1996; 2000; Demerath 2000; 2001; Lynch 2012). In addition, in accordance with the 'spatial turn' discussed above, spatial approaches to religion are resurfacing, leading to a new interest in the concept of '(sacred) space' on the part of scholars as

well as religious actors (e.g., Bergmann et al. 2009; Chidester & Lidenthal 1995; Knott 2005a; 2005b; Tweed 2006).

Traditionally, most studies of 'sacred space' focus on the adjective rather than the noun: they take 'sacredness' as their point of departure, but do not usually question the category 'space'. However, if we accept the Lefebvrean premises that, first, spaces are the outcome of historical production processes, and second, these processes are inherently political, it follows that sacred space, too, is both produced and politically relevant. I shall refer to the process whereby 'sacred space' is produced – through landscape construction, architecture, ritual and discursive practices and so on – as 'sacralisation'. Sacredness, I hold, is not an intrinsic, transhistorical quality of a particular place or set of places; rather, it is something that is constructed, negotiated, transformed and, in some cases, forgotten and rediscovered. It is the result of human signifying processes, and as such, it is contingent upon historical change and socio-cultural contexts. In the words of Veikko Anttonen, 'the sacred does not have an autonomous ontological referent. It is always culturally produced within the culture-specific systems of categories, distinctions and arrangements of human behavior' (1996, 38).

Sacredness may be 'culturally produced', that does not mean it can be projected onto any given landscape, and that physical (and 'natural') features are completely irrelevant. Quite the contrary, I would suggest: it is no coincidence that impressive natural phenomena, such as mountains, giant trees or waterfalls, are often singled out as objects of worship. After all, they are *unusual*, and may evoke feelings of admiration. It does mean, however, that unlike the physical attributes of these sites (e.g., the size of a tree), sacredness itself is not a pre-given quality. Instead, sacredness is a *meaning* that is attributed discursively. Or, as Rappaport has stated, 'sanctity is ultimately a quality of discourse and not of the objects with which that discourse is concerned' (1979, 209).

The discursive construction of sacredness usually goes together with spatial practices, such as physical demarcation, ritualised movement (e.g., pilgrimage), and the construction of buildings designed for worship, thus producing and reproducing a particular place as a 'sacred place'. Whereas these places may have originally been chosen because of their unusual physical characteristics, they were transformed, and integrated into socio-political networks, by sacralisation processes. It may be argued that it is exactly *because* they were set apart as 'sacred' that these places are politically relevant. As Lefebvre has written,

> *Absolute space* [i.e., sacred space] was made up of fragments of nature located at sites which were chosen for their intrinsic qualities (cave, mountaintop, spring, river), but whose very consecration ended up by stripping them of their natural characteristics and uniqueness. Thus natural space was soon populated by political forces. Typically, architecture picked a site in nature and transferred it to the political realm by means of a symbolic mediation; one thinks, for example, of the statues of local gods and goddesses in Greek temples, or of the Shintoist's sanctuary, empty or else containing nothing but a mirror. (…) The absolute space where rites and ceremonies were performed retained a number of aspects of nature, albeit in a form modified by ceremonial requirements: age, sex, genitality (fertility) – all still had a part to play.

At once civil and religious, absolute space thus preserved and incorporated bloodlines, family, unmediated relationships – but it transformed them to the city, to the political state (Lefebvre 1991, 48).

Hence, the sacralisation of 'natural space' leads to its transformation, and its appropriation by politics. The sacred, then, is not opposed to politics; on the contrary, it is one of its foundational categories.[39]

3.2.2   Classical theories: Otto, Durkheim and Eliade

Even if we see 'the sacred' as a human construction rather than a fact of nature, we still need to address the question what it is that constitutes sacredness – or at least, how it is perceived and conceptualised. Hence, I will now move on to discuss some classical and contemporary theoretical approaches to the concept. Focusing on the paradigmatic views of Durkheim and Eliade, I will give a brief overview of the intellectual heritage by which contemporary discussions are informed, and introduce some of the main points of critique. Drawing on recent theoretical developments, I will then argue for a critical approach that takes into account the fact that places and landscapes are socially and historically constructed as well as environmentally conditioned. Accordingly, I will suggest that 'sacred places' are produced and reproduced by means of a variety of discursive and spatial practices, and, as such, are historically contingent and particular rather than transhistorical and intrinsic.

In a recent discussion of the role of 'the sacred' in the contemporary world, Gordon Lynch argues that the term 'is still widely used today without clear theoretical underpinnings. Indeed, in much academic and popular usage, the "sacred" is often treated as a simple synonym for religion' (2012, 9). However, as I suggested previously, it is important to note that not all aspects of religion are necessarily sacred (e.g., institutional politics and regulations), nor are all sacred symbols or places necessarily religious (e.g., national flags and monuments). Accordingly, even though the two are often confused, the concepts 'sacred' and 'religious' do not completely overlap, as several scholars have rightly pointed out (Anttonen 2000, 274; Demerath 2001, 6).

But what is it that constitutes sacredness, if not a 'religious' quality? According to Lynch, theories of the sacred can be divided into two types, which he calls 'ontological' and 'cultural sociological' (ibid., 10). This dichotomy corresponds to the distinction between 'substantial' and 'situational' notions of the sacred, as suggested by Chidester and Linenthal (1995, 6; cf. Knott 2005a, 98-99). A well-known example of an 'ontological' or 'substantial' theory of the sacred is the work of Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), in particular his well-known text *Das Heilige* (translated as *The Idea of the Holy*) from 1917, in which he argues that sacredness (or holiness) is 'an a priori category, (…) a feeling of awe and mystery, an experience of something "wholly other"' (Morris 1987, 142). This

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[39] The essentially political nature of so-called 'sacred sites' is well illustrated by a number of monographs on the history of particular temple-shrine complexes in Japan. See for instance Grapard 1992 (on Kasuga); Moerman 2005 (on Kumano); Thal 2005 (on Konpira).

feeling is fundamentally non-rational and pre-discursive, and can only be known experientially – and not by everybody, for that matter (Otto 1999, 78-79). According to Otto, it is brought about by an external object, the numinous or divine, to which the individual subject reacts.[40]

Otto's notion of the primacy of experience continues to be influential, and several scholars today follow him in defining 'the sacred' in terms of individual experience rather than, say, social construction (e.g., Appleby 2000, 28-30). 'Cultural sociological' or 'situational' theories of sacredness, on the other hand, do not presuppose the independent existence of 'the sacred'. In Lynch' formulation,

> What distinguishes this cultural sociology of the sacred from ontological theories is that the former does not identify the sacred as a universal ontological structure within the human person or the cosmos. Instead it attends primarily to the sacred in terms of identifiable processes and qualities of social life, understanding sacred forms as culturally constructed within historically contingent contexts. (…) The crucial distinction here is between the claim that there is an actual ontological referent for sacred forms, and the idea that sacred forms constitute *what people take to be* absolute realities that have claims over their lives (2012, 15, italics in original).

One of the most famous sociological interpretations of 'the sacred' is the classical theory of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), as outlined in his 1912 work *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (*The Elementary Forms of [the] Religious Life*) (2001). Like Otto, Durkheim considered 'the sacred' to be an essential aspect of religion, which he defined as 'a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite one single moral community' (Morris 1987, 115). Unlike Otto, however, he did not advocate the theological view that places or objects become sacred through some sort of intrinsic quality. Instead, sacredness is socially produced, and serves to symbolise and legitimise social structures. In principle, then, anything can come to be regarded as sacred, for sacredness is something that is attributed rather than intrinsically present (ibid., 117).

Durkheim developed the notions of 'sacred' and 'profane' as foundational, universally valid categories. Placed in binary opposition, 'sacred' and 'profane' are conceptualised as mutually exclusive, and their dichotomy constitutes one of the core themes in Durkheim's sociology. Sacredness, he stated, does not necessarily equal great power or moral perfection; rather, the sacred is constituted as such through its fundamental otherness vis-à-vis the profane (i.e., the ordinary) (Durkheim 2001, 37-41). The realisation that sacredness does not always correspond to the good and

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[40] In other words, according to this view, sacredness is an intrinsic, *sui generis* quality, exclusively accessible to those who are willing and capable to experience it. Thus Otto naturalised a concept that, arguably, is a normative theological construction; in addition, he introduced the rhetorical device that could (and would) be employed to discredit those criticising his views. In other words, sacredness is discursively placed outside the realm of reflexivity and critique, and into the realm of 'nature' (i.e., pre-given and transhistorical). For a critical discussion of the rhetoric of 'religious experience', see Sharf 1998.

powerful, but can also be morally ambivalent, forbidden or, indeed, violent, has been of great significance for later theoretical developments.[41]

Despite this significance, however, Durkheim's sacred-profane dichotomy has been subjected to critique: first, the definition he proposes is arguably tautological, for sacred and profane are not defined by anything substantial, but primarily by their mutual difference; second, empirical data suggest that while 'sacred' and 'profane' may be valid categories for interpreting symbolic and spatial practices, they are by no means always mutually exclusive or fixed, but subject to continuous negotiation and reinterpretation (see Morris 1987, 121). Nevertheless, Durkheim's understanding of the sacred-profane dichotomy as the foundational structure of religion (and, by extension, society), has exercised profound influence on later theories of religion. In particular, they were appropriated by Mircea Eliade, who combined Durkheimian dualism with Otto's notion of 'the sacred' as an intrinsic quality, to be experienced intuitively rather than analysed intellectually.

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) is one of the best-known authors in the history of the discipline 'religious studies', famous for his work on the phenomenology and comparison of religion (e.g., Eliade 1996), and his legacy lingers on. Eliade's theories have exercised profound influence on American academic interpretations of religion,[42] as well as on Japanese academic discourse, a topic to which I will return later. According to Eliade, the task of the scholar of religion was 'deciphering the deep meaning of religious phenomena' by discovering their alleged 'essence' (Morris 1987, 177). His theories are controversial, however, and much recent critical scholarship in the field has been concerned with overcoming his ideological and methodological heritage.[43] Perhaps most importantly, by saying that religion and the sacred can only be described and understood by using religions' own methods and vocabulary and not by means of analytical scrutiny, Eliade actively contributed to the discursive naturalisation (and, hence, depoliticisation) of religion – for '[t]o accept religion in its own terms is really to deny that it has any ideological function' (ibid., 177). Consequently, religion has long been perceived as something essentially (if ideally) opposed to the realm of politics. Accordingly, until recently, few discussions of so-called 'sacred places' took into consideration issues related to (competing) territorial claims, land value, property rights and so on – the realisation, in brief, that 'sacred space is contested space' (Knott 2005a, 99).

As said, Durkheim's sacred-profane dichotomy was adopted by Eliade, who introduced two subcategories of the sacred: 'sacred time' and 'sacred space'. 'Sacred time' refers to the mythical primordial age; i.e., the cosmic time of creation, for which human beings are said to long (see Ellwood

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[41] See, for instance, the classical work of Mary Douglas on the social function of notions of taboo (2002), and the theories of René Girard on the interconnectedness of physical violence and the worship of sacred objects (1990).

[42] It has been argued that one of the main reasons for their success in the United States was the legal prohibition on teaching explicitly religious doctrine in public universities; Eliade's universalistic, pseudo-scientific reification of divine existence was embraced as a viable alternative (Gill 1998, 304).

[43] Scholars have recently problematised Eliade's reification of the historically constructed category 'religion' as a universal, transhistorical category (McCutcheon 1997); and criticised him for the lack of sound empirical foundations and historical research supporting his theories, as well as the methodological vagueness and 'analytical naivete' of his 'mystical' approach (Chidester & Linenthal 1995, 17).

1999, 79-126). 'Sacred space' is the other core concept introduced by Eliade. According to him, sacred places can be experienced by human beings, but are never constructed by them: 'the place is never chosen by man; it is merely discovered by him; in other words, the sacred place in some way or another reveals itself to him' (Cave 2001, 237). Sacred places, in this model, have their own agency; human construction and signifying practices, on the other hand, are hardly acknowledged. Accordingly, Eliade's theory of sacred space is fundamentally ahistorical, as the following citation illustrates:

> In Eliade's conception, there are several components that make a place a 'sacred' place: 1) the place has a quality or experience felt and interpreted to be distinctive and irreducible; 2) the experience is inherent to the place; 3) the experience, therefore, is not subject to human choice; 4) the place and what is done there (the rituals, for instance), are modeled on mythic patterns (on what the gods or culture heroes did in the beginning); and 5) the place is capable of transforming one. [… In sum,] sacred space is that space (or place) that commands excessive, discriminating attention and that orients and transforms a person or group such that their life, or a component of it, is perceived to be meaningful (ibid., 238).

Thus, in Eliade's conceptualisation of sacred places, there is no place for historical contingencies or socio-political configurations. Nor, incidentally, is there much attention to the physical and environmental aspects of the location, as the place is reduced to the 'irreducible' spiritual experience it supposedly evokes. According to this model, it is the intrinsic sacred quality of a place that is capable of transforming human beings, instead of the contrary: human beings that are capable of transforming and sacralising places (and *de*-sacralising them [cf. ibid., 238, n. 10]).

Finally, if the sacred-profane dichotomy is central to Eliade's spatial theory, so is the centre-periphery dichotomy. As Sam Gill summarises:

> In Eliade's analysis, the strongest place, the place giving orientation to all space, is the center. Structurally the center can have no other valuation than sacredness since it is the locus of all creative and thereby religious activity, both divine and human. Thus 'sacred space' is focused upon and is oriented by 'the sacred center.' (…) By following the model of creation, human beings may replicate the sacred center in architectural forms such as dwellings and places of worship. (…) These places thus become openings to the transcendent (Gill 1998, 303).

The sacred centre is not necessarily a single location – different religions and different nations may have their own sacred centre – but the essence of the centre, and the transcendent, supernatural world with which it is connected, is singular. Eliade referred to this sacred centre as the *axis mundi*; a central, vertical pillar (or axis) connecting 'this world' with the divine 'other world'. This axis is supposedly reproduced in sacred buildings such as church towers, pagodas and minarets, providing human beings with opportunities to interact with the sacred – regardless of religious affiliation.

3.2.3   *Recent theoretical contributions*

Partly thanks to Eliade's work, the category of 'sacred space' and the derived notion of 'sacred places' continue to be employed widely in religious studies (e.g., Carmichael et al. 1994; Holm 1998). That does not mean there has been much scholarly reflection on the various social, historical, ideological and environmental factors implicit in the construction and deconstruction of 'sacred places' – the question, in brief, how 'sacredness' is constructed and negotiated. Quite the contrary, in fact. That is, the terms 'sacred space' and 'sacred places' have been used widely, but often non-reflexively. While it may be true that 'the investigation of spatiality and religion has a long history' (Corrigan 2009, 157), it is equally true that most studies of sacred space produced within the field of religious studies focus on the history and symbolic significance of particular 'religious sites', but do not take into consideration other aspects of spatiality such as landscape construction, spatial practices and politics, or social and mental spaces (see Knott 2005a, 2).

Likewise, despite the sizeable discourse on 'sacred places', until recently there has been little critical reflection on ways in which those places are constructed, contested and transformed, let alone on the territorial and identity politics implicit in sacralisation processes. A notable exception is the historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith, who has been critical of Eliadean essentialism for a long time, and addressed topics such as the relationship between physical space and its mental representations – between 'territory' and 'map', in his vocabulary (Smith 1978, 289-310; cf. Gill 1998, 304-310) – and the production of 'sacredness' by means of ritual practices (Smith 1987; cf. Knott 2005a, 101-102). Smith made the significant point that 'something or someone is made sacred by ritual' (1987, 105). As Knott summarises, '[r]itual then becomes a central creative process by which people make a meaningful world that they can inhabit. Following Durkheim, [Smith] states that things and people become "sacred" because they are identified with and used in the places where ritual is enacted' (2005a, 101).

As mentioned before, in recent years, the new interest in topics such as spatial practices, landscape construction, physical embodiment and territory has given rise to a number of studies tentatively exploring issues related to the complex relationships between sacralisation, religion, territorial claims, space and place. Two scholars who have made attempts to develop new theories of religion and space are Kim Knott (2005a; 2005b) and Thomas Tweed (2006). Their approaches are somewhat different. Tweed does not address the topic of 'sacred space' *per se*, but focuses on the practices of dwelling and crossing – in other words, homemaking and movement. He makes the important point that spatial configurations are always temporal, subject to change and negotiation. Instead of seeing places as static entities, he focuses on processes of place-making. Following Sam Gill's apt statement that scholars of religion should not conceive of territory 'as static [and] stable' but take into consideration 'movement and process' (1998, 310), Tweed looks at religious place-making

as a dynamic process, and is particularly interested in the notion of 'journeys', literal as well as metaphorical (2006, 10).

The consecration of religious sites, Tweed suggests, is a type of dwelling. As such, 'it is never permanent and complete', and it 'involves [the] three overlapping processes [of] mapping, building, and inhabiting' (ibid., 81-82). Tweed's theory of religion as a type of 'dwelling' focuses on four spatial categories: the 'body', which is the starting point of all spatial orientation (ibid., 98-103);[44] the 'home', where much 'religious' place-making takes place (in the shape of family altars, garden shrines, statues of deities, pilgrimage souvenirs and so on) (ibid., 103-109); the 'homeland' (i.e., the nation or place of origin), which plays an important part in the construction of collective identities as well as soteriologies (ibid., 109-113); and, finally, the 'cosmos' – i.e., spatial and visual representations of cosmology and cosmogony (ibid., 113-122). In addition, Tweed discusses the topic of 'crossing' – that is, of movements in space such as pilgrimage and migration, as well as crossings into other modes of being (both this- and other-worldly) by means of *rites de passage* and ascetic practices (ibid., 123-163).

The strength of Tweed's work lies in its focus on processes of place-making and movement – what we might call the dynamics of 'the production of religious space' – as well as his recognition of the situatedness and partiality of any scholarly interpretation (which I addressed in my introduction). As he argues convincingly, theorists themselves 'stand in a particular place' (ibid., 18), are involved in place-making activities, and constantly undertake journeys both in mental and in physical space. A problem of Tweed's approach is that, arguably, things become a bit *too* fluid: for all its focus on temporariness and movement, Tweed overlooks the importance of physical entities such as 'sacred' buildings and landscapes. If not actually static and unchanging, these places are nevertheless often *perceived* as such, and part of their appeal and attributed 'sacredness' may be due to the fact that they are associated with continuity and tradition. For all its focus on spatial practices and spatial imagination, then, Tweed's work does not sufficiently address the question as to how 'sacred space' is produced, let alone maintained over longer periods of time.

Kim Knott is another interesting contemporary theoretician of religion and space. In contrast to Tweed, in her work she does address topics such as the production of space, sacralisation, and spatial discourse. While her use of the concepts 'religion' and 'religious' is arguably too generic – she does not adequately define her use of these terms – her discussion of theories of 'space', and the application of these theories to 'sacred space' and 'religious' identities, offers some valuable new interdisciplinary perspectives. In fact, it was Knott who first applied Lefebvre's theory of space to the study of religion – and her interpretation of his theories which made me interested in, and led me to read and use the latter's work (see Knott 2005a, 35-58; 2005b, 157-166).

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[44] Tweed is not the only scholar of religion stressing the importance of the 'body'; following the recent academic trend (in a number of disciplines) to focus on the topic of embodiment, several authors have suggested that we should study religion from the perspective of the physical body – with mixed results, so far. See for instance Flood (2012) and LaFleur (1998).

Notwithstanding her relevant interpretation and analysis of Lefebvre's spatial triad, however, it may be argued that she overlooks one core aspect of his theory: his notion that space is *produced*, and that this production process is embedded in power structures. This may be due to the dissociation of Lefebvre's spatial triad from his Marxist notion of production. Knott states explicitly that she does not share Lefebvre's 'personal and intellectual engagement with Marxism' (2005a, 11). That may be understandable, but the problem is that Lefebvre's critical understanding of space cannot be seen apart from his notion of production – which, I have argued, is central to his theory because *it establishes the diachronic character of space*. This notion of production, it must be stressed, is not limited to discursive processes; it encompasses material, architectural and, indeed, capitalist production processes, all of which are of an inherently political nature, and lead to the transformation of physical land- and cityscapes.

That said, Knott's study is valuable for a number of reasons. One of these is her discussion of the topic of sacred space. Like several others, she underlines the important point that 'the sacred' and 'the religious' do not necessarily overlap. Following Anttonen (1996), she argues that 'the "sacred" is the boundary that is generated in situations of category transformation (such as between life and death, human and divine, pure and impure, animate and inanimate, male and female)' (2005a, 88). Sacredness, according to this view, is associated with liminality. This is an interesting suggestion that deserves to be subjected to further examination. After all, if we do not accept the ahistorical premise that sacredness is an intrinsic quality of certain places (and not of others), we are still confronted with the question what it is that makes a place sacred.

Of course, 'the sacred' is first of all a self-referential category, established discursively, as Rappaport suggested (1979, 209). That is, if enough people repeat the statement that a given place is sacred, it will eventually come to be categorised and regarded as such – regardless of its properties. However, sacralisation is not limited to the repetition of the speech act 'X is sacred', and to social consensus that this is indeed the case. If it were, it would merely be an 'emic' category. It may be argued, however, that sacralisation processes are also at work at places that are *not* generally conceptualised as sacred. If we wish to employ the categories 'sacred' and 'sacralisation' not only as 'emic' discursive constructions but also as analytical tools (see Anttonen 1996, 39-43), there must be a 'signified' to which the terms refer. That is, there must be some sort of substantiality to the terms; if they do not refer to some sort of divine absolute, they at least must refer to a particular reality that is socially and spatially configured.

In this respect, the notion of sacredness as a socially constituted category boundary may be helpful. After all, in the Durkheimian tradition, things are said to become sacred when they are *singled out* as special, unique, and out-of-bounds (in Durkheim's vocabulary, 'things set apart and forbidden'). This view is summarised by Knott when she writes that '[s]acred-making activity is that which sets things apart, which creates a place for those things of value, separating them out from profane or impure things that are negotiable or may contaminate' (2005a, 222). Sacred places and symbols, it

follows, are perceived as *non-negotiable* by the people to whom they matter: 'what is at stake in designating something as "sacred" is the identification and protection of "things with non-negotiable value" as distinct from "things whose value is his based on continuous transactions", things that are repeatedly negotiated' (ibid., 222). That does not mean 'sacred' places are not subject to negotiation – of course they are, for they are contested, and are subject to competing claims – but they are not generally perceived as such. That is, they are conceived as places standing outside the realm of daily life, characterised by 'anomaly and liminality' (Anttonen 1996, 55; cf. 2000, 281).

To conclude, I believe that the conception of the 'sacred' as things *set apart* (both spatially and discursively) and *perceived as non-negotiable* provides a fruitful basis for future inquiry. While pursuing this line of inquiry, it is important to bear in mind the following three things. First, 'sacredness' is never a fixed or static quality, but always the result of multiple production processes (i.e., sacralisation) – as such, sacredness is subject to historical change, and can disappear and reappear. Second, while meanings are established discursively, sacralisation is not merely a discursive process; it also involves physical aspects, such as landscape construction and architecture. Sacred places and objects are not only set apart in discourse, but also in physical space. And third, while sacred places are perceived as non-negotiable, they are in fact subject to continuous negotiation and renegotiation. After all, sacred space is often contested space, and spatial configurations embody power relations. Hence, sacralisation is an inherently political process, even though it may not be recognised as such.

3.3   Sacralisation in contemporary Japan

3.3.1   *Japanese theories of sacred space*

As mentioned, Eliade's theories have exercised significant influence on Japanese academic discourse. In particular, as Inken Prohl makes clear, his ideas gave extra legitimacy to the study of 'folk religion' and of 'shamanism' (2000, 50, 57). Many of his works have been translated into Japanese, and his conceptual and theoretical contributions continue to define much Japanese scholarly discourse on religion (ibid., 60-61). In particular, his ideas have been adopted enthusiastically by a somewhat loosely defined group of scholars and authors referred to as 'spiritual intellectuals' (*reiseiteki chishikijin*) by the prominent sociologist of religion Shimazono Susumu, a term later adopted by others (Shimazono 1996; cf. Prohl 2000). As the word makes clear, these authors – all of them men – share an interest in matters mystical and spiritual; in addition, all of them have written a great number of texts in which they discuss these matters in more or less scholarly fashion, using academic vocabulary (hence the term 'intellectual').

There are some problems with the categorisation, however. First, the vague term 'intellectual' arguably conceals the fact that most of these people are not merely well-educated, but prominent academics, who are (or were) affiliated with some of Japan's best-known universities and research

institutes. Thus, their writings are normally classified as 'scholarship' or 'science' – as well as 'philosophy', 'religious studies' and 'history' – which gives them an air of truth and academic legitimacy. Philosopher and cultural theorist Umehara Takeshi (born 1925), for instance, used to be the director of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken).[45] Second, the adjective 'spiritual' is even more diffuse, as it is a floating signifier that can carry a wide variety of meanings and is not usually well-defined. The term gives the suggestion of a 'soft', innocent topic – covering such things as experiences of the divine, communication with supernatural beings, meditation practices, esoteric ancestry theories and so on. In reality, though, most of the scholars euphemistically referred to as 'spiritual' have been actively engaged in academic identity politics. Much of their work is devoted to the discursive differentiation of 'the Japanese people' from 'the West', sometimes by means of classical pan-Asian rhetoric, sometimes in more narrowly nationalistic terms. Discursive constructions of 'spirituality', 'original' and 'essentially Japanese' (or 'Eastern') religious attitudes, a unique national heritage and utopian notions of a future world order (to be established by the Japanese) are all profoundly ideological, and reflect prewar narratives of Japan's divine election and a fundamental East-West dichotomy (e.g., Rots 2010). Thus, the term 'spiritual intellectuals' arguably conceals more than it reveals: while writing about so-called 'spiritual' topics, these scholars actively contributed to postwar ideological (re)constructions of Japanese national identity, and they did so (and, in some cases, continue to do so) within the context of Japanese academia.

The aforementioned Umehara Takeshi was probably the best-known and most influential scholar of this group. Although he did not define himself as a scholar of religion, he did write extensively about what he perceived as the essence of Japanese religion (or, rather, Japanese religiosity). I will discuss his ideas on Japanese religion – the essence of which he describes as 'animism' – in more detail in chapter eight. There are several similarities between Umehara and his contemporary, the scholar of religion Yamaori Tetsuo (born 1931). For instance, as Inken Prohl points out, there is an interesting paradox in the works of both: on the one hand, they assert the fundamental difference of 'Japanese' religiosity vis-à-vis 'the West'; on the other, their narratives are full of concepts (such as 'shamanism' [*shāmanizumu*] and 'animism' [*animizumu*]) and theories selectively taken from the European scholarly tradition (Prohl 2000, 60-61). In particular, Eliade's mystical-romantic reification of 'sacred places', and his theories of the possibility of interaction between this world and the other world through intuitive, pre-reflexive experience, have influenced ways in which 'Japanese religion' was (and is) conceptualised.

Much of Yamaori's work, for example, is devoted to a critical assessment of the category 'religion' as it developed in modern Japan. He argues that the Protestantism-derived notion of religion

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[45] His controversial, outspoken views on a number of topics (such as homosexuality and organ transplants) as well as his romantic, arguably nationalistic historical narratives led to some bad international press for Nichibunken in the 1980s and 90s. For an overview of the debate, see Prohl 2000, 98-104. In recent years, Nichibunken seems to have departed from these earlier ideological positions, and become more internationally oriented not only in name but also in practice.

as faith-based and exclusivist does not correspond to 'traditional' modes of religiosity in Japan, which were supposedly characterised by a more inclusive, combinatory approach, and an intuitive appreciation of sacred places. According to Yamaori, the negative image of religion in contemporary Japan (deteriorated by, but preceding, the Aum Shinrikyō subway attacks of 1995 [Okuyama 2000, 100; cf. Bafelli & Reader 2012]), and the commonly used self-definition *mushūkyō* ('non-religious'), do not mean Japanese people are actually secular or atheistic. Rather, it means they have forgotten 'traditional Japanese' practices and worldviews. These, he suggests, they need to rediscover (Yamaori 1996, 1-20; Okuyama 2000, 100-102).

In true Eliadean fashion, Yamaori argues that in Japanese sacred places (*seichi*) such as Ise, through the practice of the *shikinen sengū* – the ritualised rebuilding of the shrine buildings, every twenty years – a connection is maintained between the present and the mythical past (*shinwateki jikan*; the time of myths, i.e., Eliade's 'sacred time') (Yamaori 2001, 41). He also argues for the reestablishment of pre-Meiji *shinbutsu shūgō*,[46] and criticises scholars and politicians who seek to reconstruct post-Meiji imperial Shinto (or 'State Shinto') for frustrating the reestablishment of the 'original' Shinto supposedly found in traditional nature worship. The revitalisation of Japanese society, he suggests, cannot be found in explicitly political ideology and imperialist symbolism, but rather in re-establishing a bond between people and local sacred places.

Interestingly, in several of his works, Yamaori writes about personal spiritual experiences to illustrate his arguments (Prohl 2000, 27). The same applies to Kamata Tōji (born 1951), another prominent 'spiritual intellectual', who creatively (some might say: confusingly) combines scholarly theory, empirical data, mythmaking and personal accounts of spiritual experiences.[47] Kamata has written several books on the topic of sacred places (*seichi* or *seinaru basho*), combining ethnographic, psychological and theological approaches (e.g., Kamata 2008). He is particularly interested in traditions such as shamanism and *shugendō* (mountain asceticism), as well as local festivals and nature worship. Kamata defines sacred places as 'places where people can enter the world of the spirit, at the deepest level of their soul' (2008, 43). Like Eliade, these places are defined by their apparent capacity to evoke spiritual feelings, rather than by social or environmental factors. According to Kamata, 'sacred places' in Japan, where human beings can experience a connection with a transcendental other world, include so-called 'shaman mountains' such as those in Aomori Prefecture (ibid., 47-106); Mount Miwa (ibid., 108-139); and the shrines and pilgrimage trails of Kumano (ibid., 140-151).

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[46] The term *shinbutsu shūgō* refers to the combined worship of Buddhas (or bodhisattvas) and local deities, usually called *kami*. This was common practice in Japan until the forced separation of temples and shrines (the *shinbutsu bunri*) in 1868.

[47] Kamata is a prolific writer, who is not only known for his research but also for his performances as a 'Shinto songwriter' and rock singer. He is professor at the famous Kyoto University, where he has set up the *monogaku* research centre. This is an interdisciplinary research centre that combines anthropological, (art) historical, psychological and religious studies-based research on a variety of topics, such as 'traditional' material objects, spirit beliefs, and local spiritual and cultural traditions. *Monogaku* can only be translated as *mono* studies. The word *mono* is a homonym that can refer to things, people, or spirit; as it is written in katakana, the term maintains this semantic ambivalence.

Significantly, much of Kamata's narrative is devoted to a description of the atmosphere of these places, and an interpretation of their sacred qualities – using Otto's classical phrase to refer to the experience of 'the holy', '*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*' (ibid., 74) – but there is little attention to processes of historical change.

Like Yamaori, Kamata laments the 'erosion' of 'animism', 'shamanism' and other so-called 'folk' traditions, and the artificial separation of Shinto and Buddhism; likewise, he argues for a revitalisation of a 'spiritual' worldview, and the reconciliation of science and religion (Prohl 2000, 30-31). In addition, he is strongly interested in the work of the revolutionary nineteenth-century *kokugaku* scholar Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) – in particular in the latter's work on *tengu* and other supernatural beings, which Kamata has subjected to psychoanalytical reading (Kamata 2000a). Kamata's positive evaluation of Hirata's work is somewhat surprising, considering the fact that the latter is not only well-known for his notions of the superiority of the Japanese people, but also for his claims regarding the uniqueness of Shinto and his anti-Buddhist rhetoric. He exercised significant influence on Meiji-period ideology, including the 'separation' of Shinto and Buddhism that led to the decline of the very *shugendō* tradition Kamata is interested in. In fact, Kamata has been accused of depoliticising Hirata's work by downplaying its ideological aspects (Antoni 2001). Whatever the agendas underlying these texts, the example of Hirata neatly illustrates my point that writings about spiritual topics are by no means politically neutral, and often convey ideological subtexts. That is, because texts discussing these topics tend to be ahistorical - postulating the existence of spiritual beings and/or divine realities as a natural, *sui generis* given, rather than a human construction – they are easily employed for naturalising ideological constructions.

3.3.2   Sacralisation and heritage

As I argued in the previous chapter, there are several sacralisation processes going on in contemporary Japanese society. For clarity's sake: this sacralisation does *not* equal the return of 'religion' – for 'religion', as we have seen, is not very popular in Japan today. Instead, in recent decades, shrines, temples and ritual practices have been reframed on a large scale as '(traditional) culture' and '(cultural) heritage'. This is part of a larger process that has been going on since the 1970s, and that has been referred to as the 'culturalisation' (*bunkaka*) of Japanese society (Robertson 1991, 32-37; cf. Morris-Suzuki 1998, 60-78): the rebranding of Japan as a country with a rich cultural heritage and unique aesthetic traditions, intimately intertwined with the Japanese' intuitive appreciation of natural beauty and seasonal change, presented as essentially apolitical (see chapter four). This development had been going on for a while, but was probably accelerated after the Aum affair, when 'religion' came to be discredited and religious institutions sought to redefine themselves in alternative terms. It is related to a development I refer to as *the heritagisation of worship traditions*. That is, places of worship, ritual practices (e.g., pilgrimage) and 'sacred' buildings or objects are no longer primarily

defined in terms of faith, ritual efficacy or available 'religious merit'; nor are they necessarily framed as 'religious'. Instead, they are redefined – in tourist publications, media texts, policy documents and so on – as important remnants of 'traditional culture' and 'cultural heritage'. As such, they also figure prominently in the national memory, and contribute to contemporary notions of nationhood.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, there has been a concurrent development in Japan, which we may refer to as the (re)sacralisation of worship places: the discursive (re)construction (by mass media, institutional actors, popular-scientific authors and others) of certain places as 'sacred' (i.e., transcendent and non-negotiable) and, indeed, as 'divine' or 'spiritual' (i.e., pertaining to, and/or inhabited by, deities and spirits). These places are not referred to as 'religious', contaminated as the category has become, but as 'sacred' – or, alternatively, as 'spiritual'. While the development concerns so-called religious institutions such as shrines and temples, it also applies to places not associated with 'religion' in any way, but with popular culture: the term *seichi junrei* ('pilgrimage to sacred places'), for instance, has now come to be used for fans' visits to sites associated with TV dramas, *anime* films and so on (N. Suga 2010, 234). Contrary to what Reader has suggested (2012a; 2012b, 27-29), the reconfiguration of certain sites as 'cultural heritage' has not been incompatible with their status as sacred sites associated with deities that are worshipped by visitors (in whatever way).

The crux of the matter is that the abandonment of the category 'religion' can be an important strategy for adaptation, leading to the reinvention and revitalisation of institutions and practices previously classified as 'religious'. In the case of shrines, it is quite obvious that in recent decades many events, community activities and educational practices have been (re)framed as '(traditional) culture' – not merely discursively, but also institutionally and legally (i.e., by setting up separate non-profit organisations) – thus allowing shrines to engage in a variety of activities that 'religious' organisations would not be able to do because of constitutional restrictions. The same applies to the appropriation of the category 'heritage', which gives them a legitimacy that far transcends the particularity associated with 'religion': it suggests that they possess a collective, even universal value, regardless of individual beliefs or membership. Hence, heritagisation is not simply a strategy for survival necessarily leading to commodification and secularisation; the redefinition of places and practices as 'heritage' can also go together with new processes of sacralisation.

A clear example of this would be World Heritage Site Kumano Sanzan.[48] While Kumano may or may not be described as a 'religious' place, it is commonly referred to as a 'sacred' place (*seichi*), connected to valuable ancient traditions. For instance, while evading the term 'religion' in this context, on a conference on sacred forests organised on the occasion of the UN International Year of Forests

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[48] The official name of the World Heritage Site is 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range'. It was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004. In addition to the three shrines of Kumano (Kumano Hongū Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha and Kumano Hayatama Taisha), it includes several temples and shrines in Yoshino and on Mount Kōya (the centre of the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism), as well as the pilgrimage trails connecting these different places. See http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1142/ (last accessed: June 20, 2013).

(2011), Sonoda Minoru (born 1936) – one of the leading representatives of the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm, as we shall see later – defined Kumano as 'the native village of the deities found in Shinto-type faith' (*shintōteki na shinkō ni okeru kamigami no furusato*) (Sonoda 2012, 10). Yet, this definition was given at a symposium sponsored and attended by, among others, (representatives of) the UN and UNESCO – two organisations actively supporting the 'heritagisation' of places of worship.

Likewise, in tourist brochures describing the Kumano pilgrimage trails, the word *shūkyō* is not usually used, yet the potential value of 'powerspots' (*pawāsupotto*; a recently popularised term, denoting sacred places that are said to have a special spiritual power [see below]) along the way is asserted repeatedly, together with pictures of fashionably dressed young urban tourists/pilgrims praying at these sites. More ideologically significant, perhaps, is the sacralisation of Kumano as a site associated with the birth and success of the Japanese nation – not only because it plays an important part in ancient *Kojiki* mythology, but also because the shrines have come to symbolise the national football teams. Accordingly, as I will describe in the last chapter, Kumano has come to be associated with the nation as a whole, and its post-disaster reconstruction with the nation's collective rebirth. Whether categorised as 'religion' or as 'heritage', these developments indicate that shrines and their symbols continue to be perceived and constructed as places with great value and significance – indeed, as sacred. In sum, heritagisation and sacralisation are not necessarily opposed, but can mutually support and enforce each other.

3.3.3   *Resacralising public space*

Along with the discursive configuration of certain places as 'sacred' and/or 'spiritual', there has been a process going on in the past decades, which we may refer to as the resacralisation of public space (or the public sphere). As described by Mark Mullins (2012), certain 'sacred' symbols associated with Shinto, the nation and the imperial institution have regained new popularity, and the boundaries between 'the state' (public) and 'religion' (private) have been subject to continuous negotiation. Arguably, this development has been going on since the 1970s or 80s, when it was referred to by scholars as the re-emergence of 'civil religion' in Japanese society (e.g., Takayama 1993); thus, it is perhaps not as recent a development as sometimes suggested. In any case, attempts to challenge the constitutional separation of state and religion and to reassert the position of various Shinto-related symbols and practices in the public sphere continue to be made, and are often subject to heated debate. They typically concern issues related to the position of the emperor and war memory - but also, more in general, state patronage and sponsorship of shrines and other religious institutions (*shūkyō hōjin*) (Breen 2010a; cf. Tanaka 2011, 14-16).

In contemporary Shinto ideology, it is often argued that, in order for Japanese society to function well, shrines need to be reassigned their 'proper' place – not as private religious institutions,

but as a symbolic community centres; i.e., in the public sphere. Mullins' choice (2012) to refer to this development as 'deprivatisation' is apt, as the subject of these ongoing negotiations is precisely the extent to which Shinto and shrines are (legally) defined as either public or private. As Tanaka Tsunekiyo, the current president of Jinja Honchō, has argued:

> When seen from our perspective as shrine priests, shrine ritual worship and governance (*jinja no 'matsurigoto'*)[49] is always 'public' (*'ōyake'*). Private affairs do not take place at all. Put simply, all we do is pray for the peace and safety of the nation and the community (*kyōdōtai*) where we live. These are, so to speak, public prayers (*paburikku [public] na inori*) (2011, 7).

Thus, Japan's postwar secular polity continues to be challenged and contested by different actors – including organisations such as Jinja Honchō, but also (local) politicians and bureaucrats that are part of the state apparatus themselves. Meanwhile, however, they are rigorously defended by others (e.g., leftist politicians and Christians).

Undoubtedly the best-known such controversy considers the position of Yasukuni Jinja. Yasukuni Jinja is one of Japan's most internationally (in)famous shrines: built in 1869, it is here that modern Japan's war dead are enshrined. Among those enshrined are convicted Class A war criminals, which has contributed to the shrine becoming a highly contested nationalist symbol. Consequently, official shrine visits by (usually right-wing) politicians continue to frustrate relations between Japan and its East-Asian neighbour countries. Advocates of Yasukuni Jinja would like it to be nationalised and become the centre of public war commemoration; hence, despite their intimate mutual relationship, Yasukuni Jinja is *not* a member of Jinja Honchō, as its advocates do not want it to be categorised as just another ordinary Shinto shrine (i.e., a 'religious institution') (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 215).

Interestingly, however, some of those arguing apologetically in favour of collective participation in (or, at least, acceptance of) Yasukuni shrine rituals often do so by referring to 'traditional' Japanese beliefs – in particular those related to the dead. Japanese people, the argument goes, have always believed that the spirits of the deceased have to be pacified ritually, and that after a while they become *kami*. Worship of and gratitude for these spirits is not the same as endorsing their former opinions and actions, it is often argued; taking care of and pacifying the deceased by means of ritual offers has been an intrinsic part of 'Japanese religion' since ancient times. Hence, Japanese people who come to Yasukuni to pay their respects are acting in accordance with Japanese religious tradition, or so these authors have suggested (e.g., Antoni 1993; Jinja Honchō not dated a; Sonoda 1997, 79-96). Others have not referred specifically to beliefs related to spirits, but have nonetheless maintained that Yasukuni Jinja is a 'sacred' place, stating that the dead enshrined there 'sacrificed

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[49] The term *matsurigoto* goes back to the Ritsuryō system, the China-influenced system of state administration and ritual ceremonies implemented in the Nara period. Interestingly, it refers to both political administration and ritual ceremonies. The term was reapplied in the Meiji period, and used to refer to the role of the emperor (Bocking 1995, 118).

their lives for their country' and are worthy of reverence, as 'to die for the protection of one's family[,] friends or fellow countrymen is the most sacred of acts' (Doak 2007b, 53).

Thus, those who attempt to explain and/or advocate public worship at Yasukuni Jinja often do so by referring to its 'religious', 'sacred' and/or 'spiritual' aspects, while downplaying the various political and ideological choices made by shrine actors. By doing so, they overlook three crucial points. First, the collective enshrinement of thousands of ancestral spirits as a single *kami* that cannot be divided (hence the argument made by Yasukuni shrine priests that the Class A war criminals enshrined here cannot be removed) is a Meiji-period invention that has little or no precedent in Japanese history. Second, from the time of its establishment, Yasukuni has been a highly politicised institution, the meanings of which have been negotiated continuously throughout modern history, and which has been reappropriated several times by different actors for different ideological purposes (Nelson 2003; Breen 2007; 2011). Legitimating the current dominant narrative by calling it a logical consequence of 'traditional Japanese beliefs' (or even 'human instinct' [Doak 2007b, 53]) therefore comes down to both depoliticisation and dehistoricisation. Third, in the premodern and modern periods, ritual care of the deceased has usually been the task of Buddhist institutions; allocating this function to Shinto priests therefore represented a significant change and, indeed, an innovation.

In any case, what is significant about the argument that worship at Yasukuni is primarily about ritual care for deceased spirits (and, therefore, a 'natural' thing to do) is that it does not legitimise Yasukuni shrine worship in terms of culture, heritage, or tradition *per se*, as is the case at many other places; but, on the contrary, in terms of spirits, deities, rituals and beliefs, thus rendering it transcendent and non-negotiable. This, I believe, is an example of the sacralisation of Yasukuni Jinja – a process that takes place not only by means of ritual practice, but also by means of academic discourse. Other institutions have been subject to similar processes of sacralisation: the emperor, and various imperial symbols (including rice cultivation); Ise Jingū as the imperial ancestral shrine, and its ritual rebuilding as a major event of nationwide significance; and, last but not least, the nation as a whole, conceptualised as a unique divine unity called *shinkoku* (land of the *kami*) (cf. Breen 2010b; see chapter 9). Mythology, mystery and worship are very much part of the contemporary discourse surrounding these institutions.

3.3.4   The 'powerspot boom'

Politically and ideologically charged as they are, the Yasukuni debate and related issues have received ample scholarly attention. By and large, the (re)sacralisation of Yasukuni Jinja and related institutions is a top-down process, involving high-ranking shrine officials, scholars and politicians in powerful institutions such as the Jinja Honchō headquarters, Kokugakuin University and the Liberal Democratic Party. Meanwhile, however, there are other examples of sacralisation processes in Japan that are much

more bottom-up, involving a variety of actors ranging from local authorities and travel agencies to shrine priests and journalists. I will now examine one such development.

Paradoxically, while many small rural shrines suffer from depopulation, a lack of financial means and, in some cases at least, declining community participation (Fuyutsuki 2010; Yamamura 2009), several well-known shrines report ever-growing visitor numbers, and a renewed interest in shrine pilgrimage (some mass media have even referred to the apparent new popularity of shrines as a '*jinja* boom'). For instance, the shrines of Kumano have experienced a significant growth in popularity in recent years, which seems related to the spiritual power attributed to its sacred sites as much as to its long history or natural beauty (e.g., Chiba 2008; Kamata 2008, 140-151; 2009; *Okumano* 2011). Likewise, the ritual rebuilding of two of the most famous and historically important shrines in the country, Izumo Taisha and Ise Jingū, has generated a lot of attention and interest.[50]

This renewed popularity of shrines as places not only of cultural-historical significance but also of spiritual power is directly related to another trend, which has been going on for the last decade or so: the so-called 'powerspot boom'. Shrines, temples and other 'sacred places' have been reframed as places with significant 'spiritual power' called 'powerspots' (*pawāsupotto*, in Japanese transcription). The term 'powerspot' was reportedly already used by Japanese scholars of religion in the 1980s to refer to 'sacred places (*seichi*) where sacred energy (*seiki*) and spiritual power (*reiryoku*) from the cosmos (*uchū*) are clumped together' (N. Suga 2010, 243). However, it was not used commonly until the 2000s, when so-called 'women's magazines' (*joseishi*) started advertising them as places with special spiritual power, where one's energy or *qi* (J. *ki*) could be recharged. Using typical gendered discourse, they made the association between 'powerspots' and women that lingers on (ibid., 234-241). After *Asahi shinbun* (one of the country's leading newspapers) picked up on the topic and declared a 'powerspot boom' in 2005, the term spread more widely. Since then, it has been used by various popular guidebooks on 'spiritual travel' and 'pilgrimage to sacred places' (*seichi junrei*) – a term apparently extended to include places associated with films, TV dramas and *anime* (ibid., 234) – as well as by travel agencies and tourism PR organisations (ibid., 241).

There is probably a continuity between the pursuit of so-called 'this-worldly benefits' (*genze riyaku*) at certain designated shrines and temples (e.g., prayers for success in business at Inari shrines, or for success in entrance examinations at Tenjin shrines), well-documented by Reader and Tanabe (1998), and the contemporary popularity of 'powerspots'. That does not mean, however, that it is old wine in new bottles altogether, as Ian Reader has suggested (personal communication, February 2012).

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[50] In May 2013, Izumo Taisha celebrated the ritual rebuilding (*daisengū*) of its main hall, for the first time in sixty years. For this occasion, during several weeks, a large number of *matsuri*, *kagura* performances and other cultural events took place. In October 2013, Ise Jingū will celebrate its twenty-yearly *shikinen sengū*, which involves the rebuilding of the main shrine buildings of both Gekū and Naikū shrines; at the time of writing, the shrine is in the middle of the rebuilding process (some of the new buildings are already visible), and several preparatory ceremonies have been conducted. Both Izumo Taisha's *daisengū* and Ise Jingū's *shikinen sengū* have received ample media attention, attracting visitors from all over the country (as well as, to a lesser extent, from abroad).

At the very least, the 'powerspot boom' has led to an increase in media interest in shrines, as illustrated by the large numbers of popular books, magazines, guidebooks, websites and TV programs devoted to the topic.[51] It has also been advocated by local authorities and travel agencies for the purpose of attracting 'pilgrims' or 'spiritual tourists' – at various places (e.g., Izumo), they have set up 'powerspot tours', and made powerspot pamphlets and maps listing the sites in their locality considered to possess spiritual power. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these not only list the various sites and the particular qualities attributed to them, but also local culinary specialities (*meibutsu*) and other products available for purchase.

Interestingly, many 'powerspots' are associated with *en-musubi*, a concept that refers to the connection (*musubi*) of ties (*en*); i.e., to finding a suitable marriage partner (cf. Bocking 1995, 26; Reader 1991, 148). Places especially associated with *en-musubi* (and, accordingly, regularly referred to as 'powerspots') include Izumo Taisha and many of its nearby shrines, Tokyo Daijingū (a shrine in Tokyo devoted to Amaterasu), and the Meoto Iwa in Mie prefecture (two rocks in the sea, connected by a *shimenawa* rope). In all likelihood, there is a correlation between the recent popularity of these places among, especially, young women, and the ever-increasing number of young people who are single and unmarried.[52]

In any case, although not all powerspots are shrines, the association between powerspots, *en-musubi* and shrines is very common – as illustrated by the fact that many magazines and guidebooks explicitly refer to shrines as powerspots, calling them *pawāsupotto jinja* (e.g., Ichijō & Zō jimusho 2008). Although the term initially referred to particular selected and demarcated places considered to have a strong spiritual energy, constituting some sort of Eliadean bridge between this world and the cosmos, in recent years it has increasingly come to be equated with shrines as a whole, at least by mass media (N. Suga 2010, 233).[53] That does not mean, however, that all shrines define themselves as such. Some of the shrine priests I talked to expressed their annoyance with the 'powerspot boom', calling it superficial and saying it has little to do with 'real Shinto' (*'Hontō no shintō to chigaimasu'*). Others seemed more accommodating, suggesting that, while obviously not as important as *matsuri* and other shrine ceremonies, popular trends such as the 'powerspot boom' might bring more people to

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[51] For an example of a magazine devoted to the topic of 'powerspot' travel, see Pia 2010. For an example of a pocket guidebook to 'powerspots', see Ichijō & Zō jimusho 2008. Needless to say, there are dozens, if not hundreds of similar titles available.

[52] In recent years, the percentage of people getting married has declined steadily, while the average age of marriage has gone up. Accordingly, the birth rate has decreased significantly, making Japan one of the countries with the most rapidly ageing population in the world. For statistics on marriage, see the Portal Site of Official Statistics of Japan, http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/ListE.do?lid=000001101888 (last accessed: June 20, 2013).

[53] Well-known shrines that have come to be identified as 'powerspots' include Nikkō Tōshōgū, Meiji Jingū, Ise Jingū, Ōmiwa Jinja, Kumano Hongū Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha, Kibune Jinja, Shimogamo Jinja and Izumo Taisha (N. Suga 2010, 239). Although now more commonly associated with shrines than with temples, there are also temples that are framed as 'powerspots' and considered good places for *en-musubi*; Kiyomizu-dera in Kyoto is a prominent example.

shrines, and make them interested in learning more about Shinto.[54] Many other shrine priests whom I have talked to were not quite sure yet whether they should condemn or condone the trend, and seemed undecided on the topic.

In any case, exceptions notwithstanding,[55] shrines are generally promoted as 'powerspots' by non-clergy outsiders such as journalists, local authorities and popular authors, rather than defining themselves as such. For instance, one of the country's best-known powerspots, Kiyomasa's Well, is located in the garden of Meiji Jingū – but it gained popularity thanks to a TV program, and the priests at Meiji Jingū were reportedly flabbergasted by the numbers of visitors all of a sudden visiting their shrine garden.[56] Nevertheless, the 'powerspot boom' is transforming ways in which shrines – and, quite possibly, 'Shinto' in general – are perceived, if not by priests, at least by a significant number of visitors. 'Superficial' or 'commercial' though it may be, it does lead to a renewed interest in shrines as 'sacred places' (*seichi*) possessing 'spiritual power' that can directly influence the lives of those engaging in worship practices (prayers, *ema* writing, and the purchase of ritual objects such as *o-mamori*).

Thus, the reinvention of shrines as powerspots seems to constitute a process of sacralisation, not primarily driven by the religious institutions themselves but rather by outside actors, taking place in parallel and complementary to more top-down attempts to deprivatise Shinto and resacralise the nation. Clearly, this sacralisation process is not antithetical to the pursuit of 'this-worldly' interests and corresponding processes of commodification. But then, such things are not necessarily incompatible with devotional practices, faith, or 'spirituality' (however defined). On the contrary, they may actually serve to enforce them. If we do not adhere to a faith-centric, normative-puritan understanding of what 'sacredness' constitutes, there is no reason to assume that sacralisation is incompatible with commercialisation, popularisation, and various kinds of ideological appropriation.

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[54] This, for instance, is the opinion of the current president of Jinja Honchō, who appreciates the positive PR generated by this trend. He has even suggested that it may help people relearn the intuitive awareness of sacred places that Japanese people supposedly possessed in the past; and, hence, may help them refind the faith of their ancestors (Tanaka 2011, 6-10).

[55] There are also examples of shrine priests who have embraced the 'powerspot boom', and actively redefined their shrines as such – or even established new 'powerspots'. For instance, in the autumn of 2011 I visited a 'recently discovered' powerspot in the vicinity of Mount Fuji. I was told that the priest of a nearby shrine went for a walk, then 'discovered' two trees with unusual shapes on their bark. Upon closer inspection, they turned out to be shaped like a womb and ovaries. The place was established as a 'powerspot' with these trees as their main focus, received some media attention, and reportedly became popular among women trying to get pregnant (and their mothers). Two small shrine buildings were constructed, as well as a stand where *o-mamori* and various spiritual souvenirs can be purchased. In addition, a stone circle was created, which visitors circumvent three times in order to 'feel the spiritual energy' of the place (while holding their hands stretched out in front of them to feel the spiritual vibration).

[56] Kiyomasa's Well (*Kiyomasa no ido*) is a well in the middle of a small pond, in the garden of Meiji Jingū. It is said to have been dug by Katō Kiyomasa (1561-1611), a general in the army of Toyotomi Hideyoshi responsible for the conquest of parts of Korea. On December 24, 2009, Shimada Shūhei, a famous TV personality, visited the well and declared it a 'powerspot' with particular 'profit' (*go-riyaku*); i.e., wish-fulfilling capacity. Literally overnight, the well became hugely popular, attracting thousands of visitors lining for hours in order to be able to see the well – and have their picture taken in front of it.

PART II   SHINTO: A NATURE RELIGION?

4.   'NATURE' IN JAPANESE IDEOLOGY

4.1   The politics of 'nature'

4.1.1   The category 'nature'

As I suggested in the previous chapter, there is an important distinction between nature and 'nature'. Nature is a noumenon, which cannot be known or experienced directly. It is an abstract metaphysical entity, a God-word, the independent existence of which cannot be proved. As soon as it is conceptualised, one might argue, it seizes to be nature in the absolute sense: that is, as a concept, it becomes contingent upon discursive formations, historical change, and culturally established systems of meaning. The concept of 'nature', it follows, is by no means unambiguous or universal. On the contrary, it is a floating signifier that is employed widely in a great number of different contexts, carries a variety of possible meanings and, importantly, is not usually defined or reflected upon. Raymond Williams famously distinguished three uses of the term: '(i) the essential quality and character *of* something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings' (Williams 1983, 219; italics in original).

Whether encompassing human beings or not, in the history of European thought 'nature' has traditionally been conceived of and conceptualised as something diametrically opposed to the realms of 'culture' and 'society'. As Kate Soper summarised, the term historically refers to 'those material structures and processes that are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product), and whose forces and causal powers are the necessary condition of every human practice' (1995, 132-133). Thus, in conventional discourse, there is a binary opposition between the realm of phenomena that are created by humans and subject to historical change ('culture', 'society', 'politics', 'architecture' and so on); and the realm of the physical phenomena providing the conditions for those creations.

Nature, then, is seen as the material world 'out there', existing independently from, and preceding, human culture. It is considered simultaneously as a source of life, food, and inspiration, and as a potential danger to humankind's very existence – hence the desire to gain the power to control it. As Roderick Neumann wrote, '[t]he central problematic immediately faced by any investigation of society-nature relations is the fact that it has often been framed dualistically. That is, human society is seen to exist separate from an external nature that can be "dominated", "conquered", or "protected"' (1998, 25). One could argue that the nature-culture dichotomy is one of the most influential and

powerful myths of modernity, as it has exercised profound influence on contemporary understandings of the world, as well as social structures (cf. Ingold 2000, 1).[57]

One core characteristic of this conceptualisation of nature as a *sui generis* category, ontologically opposed to the realm of human history, culture and politics, is that it denies its own historicity. Nature is conceptualised not only as pre-discursive, but also as a *universal*; i.e., not contingent upon space or time. Paradoxically, this understanding of nature is itself a historical construction, established and reified in the course of the European history of thought; however, as the construction of 'nature' as a universal and non-discursive given was successful, this historicity has come to be concealed. Thus, Anna Tsing argues that 'nature' is one of the two 'most historically successful universal claims', along with 'God'. She writes that '[t]he universality of God and the universality of Nature are historically connected; in the European Renaissance, the stirrings of modern science conceived the latter on the model of the former' (2005, 88).

However, notions of universality and 'the global' are themselves the product of a particular imagination; as such, they are necessarily locally embedded and historically contingent. Tsing convincingly shows how notions of nature as universal go back to the project of developing a system for mapping all 'the world's' species (i.e., botany and Linnaean taxonomy). This project, she argues, was developed by means of the integration of non-European knowledge of plants and their properties, a process that was later concealed. 'Nature' became universalised, while knowledge of 'nature' was claimed by European 'scientists' who denied colonial contributors access to this knowledge, and removed any internal reference to the historical knowledge production process that had led to the system's establishment. In other words, 'nature' and 'science' were dehistoricised (ibid., 90-95). This understanding of nature as a universal, transhistorical entity, as human culture's Other, was appropriated by nineteenth- and twentieth-century environmentalists, and continues to influence contemporary practices (ibid., 95-112). Thus notions of nature are often implicit in the depoliticisation of historically developed ideas and practices, moving them to the apolitical realms of natural science and technology. I will elaborate upon this shortly.

As we have seen, although 'nature' is often conceptualised as universal, in reality conceptualisations of nature are culturally contingent, and subject to historical change. As Roy Ellen has written: 'How people conceptualise nature depends on how they use it, how they transform it, and how, in so doing, they invest knowledge in different parts of it. (…) [Nature] means different – often contradictory – things in different contexts. It is constantly reworked as people respond to new social and environmental situations' (2008, 326-327). Or, in the formulation of Macnaghten and Urry, 'there is no singular "nature" as such, only a diversity of contested natures; and (…) each such nature is constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes from which such natures cannot be plausibly

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[57] For instance, in universities (those social institutions that produce 'knowledge' and 'truth', and have the power to sanction certain narratives at the cost of others), the distinction between disciplines that study nature and those that study culture has long been clear-cut – not only in terms of methodology and interpretative frameworks, but also with regard to their organisational structures.

separated' (1998, 1). In recent decades, scholars have increasingly become aware of this historicity of 'nature', criticised the ethnocentrism and dualism underlying the universalist paradigm, and studied alternative ways of conceptualising nature (as well as the binary set 'nature-culture'). For instance, a number of scholars have studied the historical configuration of the category 'nature', and conceptualisations of nature and the environment, in Japan (Asquith & Kalland 1997; Berque 1997; Eisenstadt 1995; Kalland 1995; Kirby 2011, 69-84; Martinez 2005; Morris-Suzuki 1991; 1998, 35-59; Tellenbach & Kimura 1989; Thomas 2001).

Like any other concept, then, the term 'nature' is a historical construction, and the meanings attached to the term have changed over time. Notions of nature as diametrically and existentially opposed to society and culture, of nature as ideally 'pristine', 'wild' and 'untouched' – 'first nature', as it has been called (Hughes 2005, 157) – continue to influence popular understandings. However, as William Cronon has argued, even wilderness (both as physical and as mental space) is 'quite profoundly a human creation – indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history' (1996, 7). Universal though they may seem, notions of nature change over time, and are influenced by cultural and political particularities. Accordingly, practices of landscape construction, spatial planning, agriculture, 'nature conservation' and so on change from place to place and from period to period – as do the landscapes thus produced, 'second nature' (Hughes 2005, 157-158). Thus, the universalist claims of much environmentalist discourse seem at odds with the scholarly recognition of the cultural and historical specificity of 'nature', and with the realisation that so-called 'natural landscapes' and environments are, in fact, co-produced by human actors – and therefore 'cultural' as much as 'natural'. As I wrote in the previous chapter, now that we live in the Anthropocene, even places framed and constructed as 'natural' are the outcome of historical production processes.

The rehistoricisation of 'nature', and the corresponding recognition that conceptualisations of nature are culturally dependent, has led some scholars to see nature, as well as the sciences laying claim to knowledge of nature, as merely social constructions (Bird 1987; cf. Golinski 2005). Others have replied by accusing these scholars of relativism, reasserting the autonomous existence of natural environments, and arguing that natural actors do in fact co-shape human societies (e.g., Ingold 2000, 40-43). Quite aside from the complicated semantic and epistemological issues involved in the questions 'what is nature?' and '(how) can we gain objective knowledge about nature?', there are important political issues at stake: a critique of the ethnocentrism underlying particular conceptualisations of nature and the environment can be (and is) employed by some to discredit initiatives undertaken to counter problems such as environmental pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation *et cetera*. However, the fact that notions of nature and the environment are historical constructions that acquire meaning discursively and are socially and culturally dependent does not necessarily mean they are inaccurate; it simply means they are *mediated*. Thus, an awareness of different ways in which notions of nature are employed socially and politically does not render

natural sciences and ecological knowledge irrelevant, nor does it reduce environmental issues to mere social constructions; all it means is that the *interpretation* of those issues is discursively embedded and, hence, contingent upon culture and ideology.

4.1.2   'Nature' and depoliticisation

If the above discussion shows one thing, it is that 'nature' and 'the environment' are both politically significant. As such, they may be subject to contestation. In the terminology of Julia Thomas, 'nature necessarily functions as a powerful political and ideological concept. Whoever can define nature for a nation defines that nation's polity on a fundamental level' (2001, 2). Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that on some occasions, expressions of environmental advocacy are explicitly political. Discussions about climate change, landscape preservation and pollution are directly related to economic interests, and have become highly politicised – to the point that scientific evidence regarding human influences on climate change has come to be discredited and dismissed in public discourse as 'merely' a political opinion.

However, the opposite may also be the case: more often than not, discourse on 'nature' is remarkably apolitical. In fact, it may be argued that the ideological potential of the concept lies precisely in the fact that its political aspects are not usually recognised. When nature is seen as that realm of the world that exists independently of, and is not created by, humans, it follows that the social and political structures which constitute the realm of human culture do not apply to nature. Thus, as nature is seen as fundamentally apolitical, statements about nature are often considered apolitical as well. Despite the fact that, as we have seen, several scholars have questioned such universalist notions of nature, in popular discourse the dichotomy between culture/society/politics on the one hand, and nature on the other, is still very much alive. Hence, legitimising views by referring to nature can be an effective discursive strategy, as it is a way of concealing ideological motives and thus of depoliticising those views.[58] In contrast to culture, then, nature is seen as something that transcends historical particularity, and therefore relativity.

Consequently, nature-related and environmentalist practices are often depoliticised to a large extent, concealing politics behind a discursive construction of 'nature' as human society's Other that can only be accessed and altered by means of (politically neutral) scientific knowledge and technology. For instance, as Anna Tsing writes with regard to the International Tropical Timber Organisation (a global organisation set up for the dual purpose of facilitating international timber trade and promoting 'sustainable forest management'):

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[58] For instance, when evolutionary biologists make assertions about, say, 'human nature', those are considered scientific theories or facts (i.e., 'objective'), not political statements (i.e., 'subjective'). For a critical discussion of the ideological subtexts underlying biological notions of 'human nature', see Midgley 1994.

ITTO grants sponsor studies of illegal logging (…); however, little effort has gone into addressing the problems of *legal* logging, the loss of local livelihoods, and the opening of forests to destructive forms of settlement and mining. The technical solutions of ITTO programs do not address either ecological or social questions. Sustainable forestry management is self-contained – an 'anti-politics machine' – that converts social issues into technical ones (2005, 110; italics in original).[59]

Likewise, it may be argued that various environmental organisations today reduce environmental issues to 'technical problems', not taking into consideration the effects of competing land claims, displacement, political and economical deprivation and a lack of both education and participation – i.e., the political and social dimensions of the impact of environmental change. As such, arguably, they are among today's 'anti-politics machines'.

However, 'nature' and the 'environment' are not only employed as depoliticisation strategies by powerful institutions; they may also be appropriated by relatively powerless actors. In an interesting case study discussed in the same book, Tsing shows how practices related to nature and the environment may serve as tactics allowing people to become socially engaged without becoming explicitly political. She describes how Indonesian students in the 1960s and 70s joined 'nature lovers' clubs as a means to be socially active, yet in a 'decidedly non-political' way (2005, 122-154). As the late Sukarno and subsequent Suharto regimes were repressive and paranoid with regard to potentially subversive activities, students in the 1970s and 80s were careful not to organise in groups that might be considered political; instead, they engaged in deliberately 'apolitical' activities such as hiking and mountaineering. Paradoxically, however, as Tsing rightly points out, their organisations were rooted in youth nationalist movements, and their focus on 'natural harmony' was 'shaped by the heritage of "politics" even as they chose to avoid it' (ibid., 129).

Moreover, these students' 'ways of talking about and being in nature' were influenced by nationalist notions of 'Indonesian' natural space as much as they were influenced by supposedly 'international' notions of environmental protection and romantic appreciations of 'wilderness' (ibid., 124). As such, they were undeniably political, albeit not in an explicit way. Through their practices, these urban, middle- or upper-class Javanese students asserted their otherness vis-à-vis the 'local', rural communities they encountered, while symbolically claiming the places they travelled to as part of 'their' national nature. In an artificial state composed of a great variety of ethnic groups, where the lands of 'peripheral' communities are controlled and exploited by powerful Javanese elites, this can hardly be considered apolitical; yet these practices were never categorised as politics.

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[59] The concept 'anti-politics machine' – an institutional and ideological apparatus that conceals particular political configurations – was coined by James Ferguson, a social anthropologist who applied the theories of Foucault to an analysis of 'development' industries in southern Africa. He wrote that 'while we have seen that "development" projects in Lesotho may end up working to expand the power of the state, and while they claim to address the problems of poverty and deprivation, in neither guise does the "development" industry allow its role to be formulated as a political one. By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of "development" is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized today' (2002, 407).

Thus, in some situations, nature-related practices and 'environmentalist' narratives can serve as strategies or tactics for concealing the political; that is, for depoliticisation. Likewise, discourse on 'nature' may be employed to conceal political agendas and assumptions, by naturalising (i.e., reifying) what are in fact historical constructions. In this context, it may be useful to bring to mind Ronald Barthes' classic discussion of the myths of contemporary popular culture (sports, cars, haute cuisine, and tourism), and his rich theoretical essay, 'Le mythe, aujourd'hui' ('Myth today') (1957, 179-233). He defined 'myth' as a form of depoliticised speech, *une parole dépolitisée* (ibid., 217): that is, a rhetorical device employed to hide the fact that concepts and notions are historical and political constructs, by presenting them as 'natural' (and, hence, uncreated and permanent). As he wrote,

> What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality. (…) [M]*yth is depoliticized speech.* One must naturally understand *political* in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world; one must above all give an active value to the prefix *de-*: here it represents an operational movement, it permanently embodies a defaulting (2009, 169; italics in original).

The political significance of myth, then, lies in its capacity of presenting that what is historically constructed as both natural and eternal, and therefore as apolitical. The concept of 'nature', it follows, can be a highly political concept, powerful because it is not recognised as such by the majority of people. Accordingly, representations of nature might be considered types of myth in the Barthesian sense of the word.[60]

Significantly, Barthes conceived of myth as something which is actively constructed; that is, the outcome of a constant production process. Mythmaking is not a one-moment activity that produces static entities; any time the myth is retold, it is remade, reused, and depoliticised anew. Hence, '[m]yth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myths, there are no "substantial" ones' (2009, 131).[61] As discursive strategies, myths

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[60] For clarity's sake: I do not use the word myth in the meaning of 'fallacy', and do not make any statement about the 'truth' or 'falsity' of representations of nature. Rather, I am interested in the ways these representations have been developed, used, and changed historically. Nor do I use the word to refer to a particular genre of narrative (e.g., 'primitive' stories of deities, offering cosmogonic accounts of the creation of the world and explanations for natural phenomena), as this categorisation implies a normative distinction between different explanatory narratives. For critical overviews of understandings and uses of the category 'myth' in European history, see Lincoln 1999; McCutcheon 2000.

[61] Mythmaking, then, is a narrative strategy employed to conceal the political and historical context in which symbols have required their meaning. Meanings are socially and discursively constructed, but in myths, they become self-evident and transhistorical. This Barthesian understanding of myth as a type of speech in action, rather than as a genre defined by its subject matter, is reflected in the views of some contemporary scholars. Bruce Lincoln, for instance, defines myth as 'ideology in narrative form' (1999, xii), while Russell McCutcheon proposes thinking of myth 'not so much as a kind of narrative identifiable by its content (e.g., traditional tales of the gods or ancient heroes) as a technique or strategy. Let us suppose that myth is not so much a genre with relatively stable characteristics (…) as a class of social argumentation found in all human cultures' (2000, 199-200; italics in original).

are implicit in the construction of collective identities (including, in modern history, national identities). In many places, myths of nature have figured prominently in this construction process. That is, the stories we tell about nature often convey ideological messages, but most of the time they are not recognised as such, which is exactly the reason why they can be so effective and powerful. It is to this topic – the myth of nature in Japan – that I will turn now.

4.2   The Japanese 'love of nature'

4.2.1   'Nature' in Japan

As in other countries, 'nature' has featured prominently in the modern Japanese imagination. As Morris-Suzuki has written, '[i]n Japan, images of nature have played a particularly central role in molding the imagery of nationhood' (1998, 35). That is, 'different ways of understanding 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"' (ibid., 38). This point is also made by Julia Thomas in her fascinating study of different uses of the notion of 'nature' in pre-modern and modern Japanese political thought. According to her, from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century,

> the intellectual and political leadership of Japan repeatedly and consciously reconfigured the concept of nature. (…) [N]ature in political terms moved from being that which Japan must investigate in order to arrive at true political forms to that which Japan is, the truth of itself. (…) Nature was (…) the changing, contested matrix within which the political possibilities of modernity were explored (2001, 3).

Thus, conceptions and representations of nature were central to the construction and reification of the Japanese nation. As I suggested before, notions of nature carry great ideological significance exactly because they are not usually recognised as the historical and political constructions they are; they conceal their own historicity, and are employed as discursive tools for depoliticisation. As we have seen, universal though they may seem, notions of 'nature' are in fact culturally dependent and subject to historical change. The image of nature as the realm of physical things not made by humans, diametrically opposed to 'culture' and 'society', is not shared universally. Most cultures in the world have concepts denoting aspects of the physical environment, partially corresponding to the category 'nature' as it developed in the European (and, later, North American) history of thought. However, these concepts do not always cover the same meanings as 'nature', nor are they necessarily opposed to 'culture'.

In modern Japan, there are two words that may be translated as 'nature': *shizen* and *tennen*. These terms overlap, but they have slightly different nuances: *shizen* tends to be more abstract and

general than *tennen*, which has more concrete and material connotations (Kirby 2011, 72).[62] Although already used in classical Chinese sources, in their contemporary meaning these terms are the product of the Meiji period, when a great number of European scientific and political concepts were incorporated into the Japanese language and society. Initially, a variety of existing philosophical concepts (most of them Confucian) were used to translate 'nature', until *shizen* became the term of choice in the 1890s (Thomas 2001, 7, 32-34; cf. Yanabu 1977). As such, *shizen* is similar to *shūkyō*: an existing Chinese concept that was rediscovered and reemployed as a translation of a modern epistemic category in Meiji-period Japan.

In popular and scholarly discourse (primarily but not only in Japan), it has often been suggested that 'the' Japanese have a unique way of relating to nature, diametrically opposed to the 'Western' tendency to control and exploit nature. Japanese culture is supposedly characterised by a profound love of nature, an intuitive appreciation of nature's beauty, and a harmonious coexistence between humans and their natural surroundings. As several scholars have argued, this imagery is idealised, essentialist, and not necessarily in accordance with reality; notions of the Japanese love of nature were implicit in the Japanese nation-building project, and figure prominently in postwar *nihonjinron* discourse (Kalland 1995; Kalland & Asquith 1997; Martinez 2005; Morris-Suzuki 1998, 35-59; Thomas 2001, 8-10). However, as they continue to be reproduced in popular texts, mass media and advertisements, they have become naturalised to a large extent. Thus, the notion of the Japanese love of nature functions as a myth in the Barthesian sense. Kalland and Asquith summarise it as follows:

> The commonly held view that the Japanese have a 'love of nature' has been developed and repeated literally for centuries by both Japanese and observers of Japan. Closely related to this notion of love is the equally widely-held notion that the Japanese live in harmony with nature, which frequently is contrasted with the quest to 'conquer nature' allegedly found among Westerners. To whomever the essence of Japan is presented – tourists, artists, businessmen or students – in some form or other the packaging will more likely than not include an allusion to nature. This may be seasonal, such as a spray of plum blossoms, blue irises, red maple leaves, snow monkeys or a frosty landscape, or it may appear in the presentation of a garden, tiny but rich in symbolic expression, in a dwarfed tree (*bonsai*), or in a traditional house, with elegantly simple lines made entirely of natural products, which melds into the natural surroundings. Even images of high-tech products such as the *shinkansen* (bullet train), computers or musical toilet rolls are often embellished or softened somewhere with a spray of

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[62] For instance, *shizen kankyō* refers to the natural environment (in the modern, ecological sense of the word), whereas *tennen shigen* refers to natural resources – i.e., concrete, physical objects. *Shizen* is the more commonly used term of the two. This originally Chinese concept (already used by Lao Tse), alternatively pronounced as *jinen*, was introduced to Japan approximately 1500 years ago (Tellenbach & Kimura 1989, 153). Throughout history, the term has carried a variety of meanings. Composed of the characters *shi/ji* 自 ('self') and *zen/nen* 然 ('so', 'resembling'), it literally means 'in the way of itself', 'by itself' or 'like itself'. Accordingly, the adverb *shizen ni* does not only mean 'naturally', but also 'spontaneously'. In fact, in the *Man'yōshū*, the characters were pronounced as *onozukara* – a Japanese word referring to something happening spontaneously, 'of/from itself'. This term is conceptually related to the notion of *mizukara*, which also means 'self', or 'from the body' (ibid., 154-155).

seasonal foliage. This occupation with nature is seen as rooted in an innate aesthetic sense for the beautiful, existing since ancient times (1997, 1-2).

Thus, it is suggested, Japanese culture is not as alienated from nature as 'Western' culture; on the contrary, nature and Japanese culture are considered to be closely related. 'The Japanese' are characterised by their strong love of nature, as evidenced by such supposedly quintessentially Japanese art forms as *haiku* poetry, garden architecture, the tea ceremony and even martial arts, as well as by the simplicity of Zen religious practice and, as we shall see later, the 'animistic' orientation of Shinto. Japanese people are believed to live in harmony with nature and fully appreciate its beauty, especially when it comes to the specific characteristics of the four seasons – cherry blossoms in spring, chirping cicadas in summer, red maple leaves in autumn and snow-covered landscapes in winter. They also have a strong awareness of the passing of these seasons, and a high sensitivity towards the impermanence of natural beauty, or so the argument goes (cf. Shirane 2012).

According to this view, Japanese culture is formed by this awareness of the natural world; the experience of living in harmony with nature is reflected in the importance of harmony (*chōwa*) in Japanese society, and has given this society its unique character. As this experience is highly intuitive and emotional, 'Westerners', with their alleged rational and logical worldview and their desire to control nature rather than experience it, supposedly can never fully comprehend the unique Japanese worldview and society. Accordingly, the myth of the holistic love of nature and its beauty is one of the main markers of Japanese identity, and a central and recurring theme in many popular and scholarly texts that deal with Japan. Moreover, the love of nature is not seen as something that was created at some point in history, but as an essential feature of 'the Japanese people' going back to primordial times. Needless to say, in this type of discourse the concept 'Japan' is never problematised or historicised either (see Morris-Suzuki 1998). Thus, it can be argued, the story of the Japanese love of nature is naturalised; put simply, the love of nature is presented as the nature of the Japanese. As I argued before, such assertions can have profound political implications.

4.2.2   *Notions of nature in premodern thought*

As some scholars have argued, an examination of the different terms historically associated with *shizen* (*jinen*, *onozukara* and *mizukara*; see footnote 62) reveals something important about conceptualisations of 'self' and 'nature' in premodern Japan. According to them, nature was not conceptualised as something external to human beings. Rather, nature and human individuals ('selves') were seen as ontologically and conceptually intertwined and interdependent entities. Thus, they have suggested, there was no understanding of nature as something opposed to human society and culture (Eisenstadt 1995; Tellenbach & Kimura 1989).

It is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether this interpretation of notions of 'nature' and 'the self' in ancient and pre-modern Japan is correct or not. It is questionable, for instance, whether these notions represent 'indigenous' Japanese conceptualisations, or reflect continental (Confucian and Taoist) worldviews. Significantly, Fabio Rambelli has accused scholars such as Tellenbach and Kimura of anachronistically mixing up the ancient adverb *jinen* with the modern neologism *shizen*. This he, argues, is 'an example of the semiotics of reversed Orientalism, in which something the "Westerners" saw in the "Orient" is appropriated by the "Orientals" by creating a new concept through old words' (2001, 72-73).

Whether historically accurate or not, the interpretation of authors such as Eisenstadt, Tellenbach and Kimura is in accordance with popular representations of Japanese and Asian perceptions of nature. These are often said to be holistic and non-dualistic, grounded in 'religious' traditions supposedly maintaining that there is no ontological distinction between humans, non-human creatures, and the physical environment (Kalland 2008, 98-100). For instance, in the foreword to the series of books on 'religions of the world and ecology' (published by the Harvard University Press between 1997 and 2003),[63] Evelyn Tucker and John Grim write that in Confucianism and Taoism, there is a 'seamless interconnection between the divine, human, and natural worlds' and a 'cosmology of a continuity of creation stressing the dynamic movements of nature and the agricultural cycles. This organic cosmology is grounded in the philosophy of *ch'i* [J. *ki*]' (1997, xxvii). Likewise, it is often suggested that the Japanese Buddhist belief that all beings have Buddha-nature points to a holistic worldview (e.g., Parkes 1997).[64]

It has been suggested that the myth of the Japanese love of nature goes back to Orientalist constructions of Japanese culture as characterised by sensitivity and refinement, as illustrated by the writings of Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), and the imagination of Japanese aesthetics by European artists and authors taking part in the *Japonisme* movement (Kalland 2008, 96; cf. Cox 2003, 14-47; Littlewood 1996). While nineteenth-century Orientalist imagination undoubtedly contributed to the development of the myth, it is important to bear in mind that modern Japanese notions of nature and nation were also influenced by Edo-period ideology. In the premodern period, several Confucian and

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[63] This book series, and the conferences preceding it, represent a prominent example of the accommodation of the so-called 'religious environmentalist paradigm' by academic institutions. According to the website of the responsible research centre, '[t]he Religions of the World and Ecology series, published from 1997 to 2003, examines nine religious traditions and their ecological implications. These volumes result from a three-year research project conducted at the CSWR under the direction of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim; the project involved the direct participation and collaboration of some 600 scholars, religious leaders, and environmental specialists from around the world' (from http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/resources/print/catalog.html, last accessed: December 7, 2012). There are books about Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, 'indigenous traditions', Islam, Jainism and Judaism. Puzzlingly, the only conference that did not lead to the publication of an English-language book (despite the fact that several participants had submitted chapters) was the one on 'Shinto and ecology'. The conference proceedings were published in a Japanese report (Jinja Honchō 2000), but only a small number of copies exists.
[64] For a critique of this environmentalist interpretation of Buddhism, see Rambelli 2001; 2007.

kokugaku scholars reflected upon the topic of nature, using a variety of related concepts.[65] Of particular significance for the purpose of this study is the work of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), which was groundbreaking in many respects, and may be considered the first systematic indigenous attempt to conceptualise 'Japan' as a nation akin to its modern-day meaning: that is, a primordial entity, representing a unique culture, strictly demarcated and fundamentally different from other countries (Morris-Suzuki 1998; cf. Anderson 1991). That is, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the construction of a national identity and the increasing imagination of a Japanese nation or race (called *minzoku* or *kokumin* in post-Meiji Japanese; similar to the Herderian notion of *Volk*). Of central importance to this development were the works of a number of scholars who reacted against the predominance of 'foreign' (predominantly Chinese) intellectual and religious ideas in Japanese scholarship, and focused on the study of ancient Japanese chronicles and literary works instead. Their scholarship came to be called *kokugaku*, which is usually translated as 'nativism' or 'national learning'.[66]

Norinaga's work focuses on the study of ancient chronicles, in particular the *Kojiki* and its cosmogony, as well as literary classics such as the *Man'yōshū* and *Genji Monogatari*. He was highly critical of what he considered the poor state of Japanese culture, society and politics at the time, which he contributed to the corruptive influence of Chinese ideas, in particular Confucianism. The solution to this deterioration was, according to Motoori, a return to the ancient Way of Japan. As Japan was the place where the gods had created the world, the Japanese people were potentially superior to the other peoples of the world; they would not need any imposed morality if only they were to return to this ancient Way, as living according to the Way would automatically make them behave respectfully. This ancient Way was equalled by Norinaga to 'the natural Way of the Gods' (*shizen no shintō*) (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 48). Hence, his ideas were not only of political significance, but also exercised considerable influence on the discursive construction of 'Shinto' as a primordial, divinely ordained and uniquely Japanese tradition. I will return to this topic in the next chapter.

Paradoxically, Norinaga combined a universalist orientation (his view that the single correct Way is the same for all the people in the world) with a proto-nationalist assertion of Japanese superiority, evidenced by his belief that this Way was only transmitted correctly in Japan: 'Our Imperial Land … is superior to the rest of the world in its possession of the correct transmission of the

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[65] For instance, one of the most original thinkers of the eighteenth century, Andō Shōeki (1703-1762), devoted much of his work to a discussion of the concept *shizen*, which to him was 'a metaphysical concept implying the self-existent, the ground of all being' (Morris-Suzuki 1991, 83). In Daoist manner, he conceived of nature as 'the living truth', in which the life-giving force *ki* (*qi*) manifests itself (Andō 2011). Hence, later interpreters have referred to him as an 'ecological philosopher' (Yasunaga 1992). Most of all, however, his utopian call for a return to a society in which people live in accordance with the rules of 'nature' was grounded in a radical critique of the corruption and power abuse of the political and scholarly elites at the time (see Thomas 2001, 48-51). For in-depth discussions of the thought of Andō Shōeki, see Joly 1996; Yasunaga 1992. For overviews of theories of nature in the Edo period, including several other thinkers, see Morris-Suzuki 1991; Thomas 2001, 32-59.

[66] For a discussion of these terms, see Teeuwen 2006.

ancient Way, which is that of the great Goddess [Amaterasu] who casts her light all over the world' (Blocker & Starling 2001, 107). The argumentation of Norinaga follows the pattern of the 'triadic structure of nationalist rhetoric' typical for much nationalist mythmaking: the nation is considered to be in a state of decay, which is contrasted to a 'glorious past' characterised by purity and harmony, and a 'utopian future' modelled after this glorious past (Levinger & Lytle 2001).

As Julia Thomas has argued, notions of nature were central to Norinaga's ideology. She writes that

> [i]n melding nature with imperial Japanese culture, Norinaga advocates a thoroughly naturalized politics (…). Seemingly different forms of nature – nature as the divine spirit of *kami* both good and bad, nature as the human heart, and nature as the 'sacred land' of Japan – are united through these imperial practices *without need for mediation by words, rules, or doctrine*. Because it is the only place where the unification of these natures may be enacted, Japan is religiously, politically, and morally central, and the emperor 'rules all under Heaven through the Way' (2001, 45; my emphasis).

Thus, Norinaga naturalised (i.e., dehistoricised) his ideological innovations – the superiority of Japan vis-à-vis the rest of the world, the sacred characteristics of the ancient Japanese language, and the absolute power of the emperor – by arguing that these were self-evident, non-discursive, and divinely ordained. As we shall see, these ideas would exercise considerable influence on later ideological developments. Hence, his scholarship far exceeded the realms of poetry and ancient myths, and was of profound political significance.

Modern notions of the harmony between humans, nature and deity are often attributed to Norinaga. He did not use the category '*shizen*' in the modern sense, (i.e., as a particular ontological realm opposed to 'culture'), but rather used the term in the meaning of 'spontaneous', 'natural' or 'things as they are'. Thus, he argued, Japan's 'Way of the Gods' was more 'natural' than Chinese notions, as it was in accordance with the will of the gods (Thomas 2001, 44-45). But Norinaga also addressed ways in which people relate to the physical environment. In particular, phenomena we now refer to as natural elements were said to have the power to evoke feelings of beauty and melancholy, a sense of *mono no aware* ('the pathos of things') – most powerfully expressed in poetry – leading to 'an acute sensitivity of the affective and emotional qualities of life' (Nosco 1990, 178; Motoori 2011).[67]

Thus, in the work of Norinaga, we find for the first time the association of an appreciation of nature's beauty and harmony with nationalist assertions of Japanese divine superiority. As Morris-Suzuki summarises, his writings 'established a connection between Shinto mythology, Japanese nationalism, a belief in spontaneous human virtue, and a profound sense of the natural environment as

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[67] The concept of *mono no aware* refers to an intuitive awareness of the finitude and fragility of all beauty, leading to feelings of melancholy. It is often associated with *sakura*, cherry blossoms, whose beauty is short-lived. This is a powerful cultural trope, which was employed during the Pacific War to describe the fate of suicide pilots (see Ohnuki-Tierney 2002).

the chief stimulus to that virtue' (1998, 49). His myths were to be reemployed in the early twentieth century, when Japanese authors struggled to define their national identity vis-à-vis Western nations. The Japanese love of nature (as exemplified by the feeling of *mono no aware*) would become a central aspect of the discourse on the Japanese uniqueness, and Japan's alleged spiritual and aesthetic superiority to the West.

4.2.3   The 'love of nature' in modern nationalist discourse

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Japan went through a process of rapid industrialisation and modernisation. Among the many ideas that were adopted in Japan were modern conceptions of nationalism, which were embraced by leading Japanese intellectuals and the government in their project of defining the Japanese nation in an essentialist manner – thereby contrasting the Japanese nation to the 'Western' nations, which had replaced China as Japan's main Other due to their political and cultural significance. In the deliberate construction of a national Japanese identity in this period, Japanese intellectuals adopted European notions of nationhood and corresponding imperialist ideology, and combined these with *kokugaku*-derived 'indigenous' ideology (see Gluck 1985). As Japan's military and economic power grew, the thus developed nationalist discourse came to be employed to legitimise the imperialist behaviour of the Japanese state (that is, the annexation of other Asian countries) in the first half of the twentieth century.

Significantly, the Japanese elite did not only incorporate nationalist and imperialist ideology: they also adopted European Orientalist myths (see Cox 2003, 14-47; Littlewood 1996; cf. Said 1978), which were incorporated into Japanese ideological discourse influenced by *kokugaku* and Confucianism. Rather than being contested, Orientalist stereotypes were reemployed and used as ways to define Japanese identity. We may refer to this process as the *reappropriation of Orientalist imagery*; that is, some of the very attributes that Orientalists had used to suggest the weakness of 'Eastern' people were redefined as strengths. Ironically, then, myths that originally functioned in a discourse on Western superiority and Eastern powerlessness were creatively incorporated into a Japanese discourse of Eastern superiority, contributing to and empowering Japanese nationalist ideology. Notions of superiority and inferiority were thus reversed: whereas 'the West' was still considered technologically and militarily superior, Asian culture (allegedly most purely expressed in Japan) was considered superior spiritually, artistically and morally.

For instance, it was suggested that, whereas the rationalist Westerners had become alienated from nature, the Japanese had remained true to their close relationship with nature, as evidenced by their literary and artistic expressions. For instance, in 1907, the *kokugaku*-influenced scholar of Japanese literature and nationalist theoretician Haga Yaichi (1867-1927) wrote about the Japanese 'love for plants and trees'. In Rambelli's summary, he 'wrote that the Japanese are directly connected to nature and that this attitude comes directly from nature itself, which in Japan is particularly benign'

(2007, 139). Likewise, writings on Japanese art actively contributed to the imagining of the nation. Two examples of influential works on Japanese aesthetics in which the myth of the harmony of the Japanese people with nature was told are *The Book of Tea*, written by Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913) and first published in 1906, and *Art, Life, and Nature in Japan*, written by Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949) and published in 1932.

The Book of Tea is now considered a classic in world literature; it has been translated into a great number of languages and reprinted many times. In this work, Okakura tells a story about the history of the tea ceremony (or 'Teaism', as he calls it), which he considers one of the primary examples of the Eastern experience of nature. In his understanding, Teaism is

> a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It incalculates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. (…) The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about man and nature (1956, 3-4).

The art of tea is, according to Okakura, an important expression of the Japanese identity, as it encompasses art, worldview and spirituality. The experience of harmony or unity with nature, as well as the sense of *mono no aware*, is a central aspect of this identity, which is expressed in arts such as painting and flower arranging that are closely related to the practice of the tea ceremony (ibid., 75-107). The art of tea requires an intuitive, mystical awareness of the present, and is therefore fundamentally irrational and experience-oriented (ibid., 109-116); hence, 'Westerners' might not be able to fully grasp it, as '[u]nfortunately the Western attitude is unfavourable to the understanding of the East' (ibid., 9). Thus, Okakura explicitly contrasts East and West: his alterity claims are part of a deliberate attempt to empower the East and assert its artistic and spiritual superiority, as well as its unique character – allegedly better preserved in Japan than in any other Asian country.[68] Similar claims continue to be made in nationalist discourse, including contemporary treatises on Shinto's potential for teaching the world how to overcome the present environmental crisis.

Anesaki's *Art, Life, and Nature in Japan* is another cultural-essentialist celebration of Japanese aesthetics, and a famous retelling of the myth of the Japanese people's love of nature. In Anesaki's view, in contrast to other (that is, Western) nations, the Japanese do not live in fear of nature, or perceive it as something external to human culture. Like Okakura's, Anesaki's work is

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[68] Okakura's contribution to the discourse encouraged nationalist pride, and provided justification for claims that Japan represented 'Eastern' values and should protect its brother nations – sensitive and passive as they supposedly were – from Western imperial aggression. Significantly, Okakura was a strong supporter of pan-Asianism, the ideology that the nations of Asia should unite against the Western imperial powers (see Saaler & Szpilman 2011). This would later be employed by the Japanese government to legitimise the ideology of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' – that is, the ideological justification for the equally imperialist annexation of great parts of East and, subsequently, Southeast Asia by Japan, which would eventually culminate into the Pacific War. In sum, a story about something as innocent as a cup of tea can have a powerful political subtext.

simultaneously an attempt to formulate Japanese identity and a contribution to a discourse of differentiation:

> In many countries nature is thought of as necessarily wild and bold, in contrast to human refinement. According to that conception, life consists in the combat against nature, or in the conquest of it. But the Japanese lives too close to nature to antagonize her, the benignant mother of mankind. Just as art has permeated every corner of life in Japan, so Japanese art always derives its model and inspiration from nature.
>
> (…)
>
> Life varies according to the varying seasons, and the Japanese derives the artistic enjoyment which he finds an essential part of life from his ability to respond to nature's suggestions and inspirations. Benignant friendliness is the most striking feature of land and atmosphere in the Japanese archipelago.
>
> (…)
>
> Although the land is sometimes visited by earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions, the people have adapted themselves to such conditions, and live in amicable intimacy with nature. They enjoy the delights of the seasons (1973, 6-8).

Anesaki's idealised Japan looks like a true paradise. Human qualities are projected onto the natural landscape of the Japanese archipelago, and assertions about the character of the Japanese people are justified by referring to the allegedly mild climate and gentle geographical features. Implicitly, then, claims are made about the existential correlation, going back to primordial times, between the Japanese nation/race (*minzoku*) and the physical landscape of the Japanese territories. This, it must be noted, is a central aspect of much nationalist mythmaking.[69]

Apart from the question of the validity of his observations, what is relevant here is that Anesaki's work can be read as an attempt to completely depoliticise Japanese culture and society. He draws a reassuring picture of a gentle, artistic, peace-loving people, living in harmony with each other and their natural surroundings. One has to bear in mind, though, that this work was written in the early 1930s, when the Japanese army had just invaded Manchuria. Moreover, Meiji-period industrialisation had already caused large-scale environmental pollution (Murota 1985, 107), raising questions about the concrete application of the alleged 'love of nature'. Thus, the discrepancies between Anesaki's narrative and the historical reality are striking. Mythical images of the Japanese people and their love of nature not only contribute to a sense of national belonging and to notions of Otherness; they can also be read as attempts to conceal political and social realities that do not fit the ideal.

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[69] Anthony D. Smith used the term 'ethnoscape' to refer to this perceived correlation between nation and landscape, which he defines as 'the idea of an historic and poetic landscape, one imbued with the culture and history of a group, and vice versa, a group part of whose character is felt by themselves and outsiders to derive from the particular landscape they inhabit' (1999, 150).

4.2.4   *Watsuji Tetsurō:* fūdo *and environmental determinism*

Arguably one of the most influential Japanese intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century was the philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960), whose major work *Fūdo* (a concept often translated into English as 'climate'; see below) was first published in 1935 (Watsuji 1961; 1979). This work constitutes one of the main intellectual foundations for the postwar *nihonjinron* discourse (see Befu 2001). Whereas Okakura and Anesaki wrote in English in order to tell Western audiences the story of a peaceful and harmonious Japan, Watsuji (like Norinaga before him) wrote primarily for a Japanese audience. It may be argued that the argument of Watsuji has largely influenced Japanese self-understanding, as well as an awareness of a fundamental, ontological distinction between the Japanese people ('we') and its Western Others ('they') – not only because *Fūdo* has been widely read in intellectual circles, but also because its arguments have been repeated by many popular Japanese authors. As Befu points out, 'Watsuji's legacy has been carried on by a large number of scholars. Most of them uncritically and almost slavishly accept Watsuji's thesis *in toto'* (1997, 108).

    With Anesaki, Watsuji argued that there is a fundamental interrelatedness between natural landscape, including its geographical and climatological features, and the culture and society of the people who live there.[70] In contrast to the work of Anesaki, however, *Fūdo* is usually classified as 'philosophy' – for ironically, claims of Japanese uniqueness were often legitimised by presenting them as European-style rational philosophy. It is important to note that the classification of writings in particular genres can be a powerful ideological tool, and an effective means to legitimise the claims they make. For instance, we tend to treat and read 'philosophy' or 'science' differently from 'myths' or 'religious texts', which can influence the validity we contribute to them.[71] Berque's remark that 'Watsuji's *Fūdo* could be considered as just one treatise about Japanese uniqueness among well over a thousand ones published since Meiji, were it not for the philosophical premises which have made it a universal classic' (1992, 101) summarises this well. By appropriating the label 'philosophy', *Fūdo* has attracted an audience it might not have reached if it had been labelled as, say, 'cultural geography' – despite the fact that its main argument has little to do with philosophy proper.

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[70] There are close similarities between Watsuji's theory of *fūdo* and Johann Gottfried von Herder's idea that the distinctive character of a *Volk* is shaped by its climate and geographical location (see Hawthorne 2006, 81-91). This is probably no coincidence, as, like other Japanese philosophers at the time, Watsuji was well familiar with German philosophy. Indeed, at some point in *A Climate*, he mentions Herder, suggesting his influence; however, at the same time he claims to be more scholarly in his approach to the problem than his German predecessor (Watsuji 1961, 17). He also makes several references to Heidegger, suggesting that *Fūdo* is a means to fill a gap in *Sein und Zeit*: its supposed one-sided focus on the relationship between time and existence, and neglect of the way our existence is influenced by space (ibid., v-vi, 9; cf. Blocker & Starling 2001, 128-129). Contrary to what Watsuji suggests, however, one could argue that the Heideggerian notions of *Dasein* ('Being-there') and *In-der-Welt-sein* ('Being-in-the-world') do in fact point to an awareness of the spatial dimension; i.e., an awareness of the importance of 'place' for 'being'.

[71] For discussions of the problems that underlie the notion of 'Japanese philosophy', see Blocker and Starling 2001, 1-23; cf. Rots 2012b.

As said, *fūdo* is often translated as 'climate', but this translation is too narrow. Watsuji opens his work by explaining that 'I use our word Fu-Do [*sic*], which means literally, "Wind and Earth", as a general term for the natural environment of a given land, its climate, its weather, the geological and productive nature of the soil, its topographic and scenic features' (1961, 1). Berque's translation of the concept as 'milieu' (1992, 94), then, does more justice to the way Watsuji uses it than the original translation 'climate'. According to Watsuji, milieus are more than just physical phenomena; not only do they influence the ways in which individuals experience their existence (for instance, someone who lives in a tropical climate will experience life differently from someone who lives in an arctic climate), they also have profound implications on the development of human culture and society. Thus, people who live in tropical climates are said to have a different culture and worldview from those who live in arctic climates, which is supposedly caused by the differences in weather, landscape, vegetation and so on. There is certainly some validity to this assumption; however, in Watsuji's work it quickly turns into determinism and cultural essentialism. Historically constructed discourses of differentiation – that is, the imagined differences between 'us' and 'them' – are naturalised (i.e., presented as transhistorical essences) by referring to the fundamentally different milieus in which the nations of the world live (and have lived, since primordial times – migration is hardly taken into account). Thus, the link between a nation and the territories it claims is firmly established.

Watsuji divides the world into three different types of milieus: monsoon, desert, and meadow. Each of these milieus has its regional differences and subtypes – the monsoon climate in Japan is different from that in India, for example. Watsuji gives elaborate descriptions of the different milieus, the way the climate has shaped the landscape and the way the people experience the world, the corresponding features of agricultural systems and food culture, and, accordingly, people's mentality, material culture and social structures (1961, 18-118). What is problematic about his argument is not only his methodology (his knowledge of the 'desert' and 'meadow' milieus was based on nothing but the necessarily superficial impressions he got during his travels, and accordingly his representation of these is, to say the least, one-sided), but also the value judgements found throughout the work, with which he implicitly asserts Japanese cultural superiority.

Watsuji's narrative begins by asserting the inferiority of the other people of Asia vis-à-vis the Japanese, employing European stereotypes employed to justify colonial rule.[72] He then proceeds to

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[72] For instance, about Southeast Asia, Watsuji writes: 'The climate of the South Seas affords man a rich supply of food; hence his attitude is that all is well as long as he is blessed with nature's generosity. But, here, the relationship between man and nature contains no variety and, as a result, man is moulded to a passive and resignatory pattern. (…) There is no incentive to stimulate the development of productive capacity. (…) So they became easy prey for and ready lackeys of the Europeans after the Renaissance' (1961, 22-23). Significantly, at the time of writing Japan was preparing its own imperialist actions in the region, and one cannot help but think that accounts such as this were welcome ideological justifications for the 'liberation' of the 'passive' Southeast Asians from European powers. His description of people in the Middle East as naturally aggressive, however, is even more remarkable: 'the most striking example of desert's man struggle with the desert is his mode of production; in other words, desert nomadism. Man does not wait passively for nature's blessings; he makes active incursions into nature's domain and succeeds in snatching a meagre prey from her. This fight to nature

renarrate the familiar myth of the rational, scientific Westerner. As nature in Europe (in particular in Greece and Italy, where European culture is said to have originated) is 'docile, bright and rational' (ibid., 79), and as the meadows throughout the continent were easily cultivated, the rationality that supposedly characterises the European mentality is quickly explained:

> There is a link between the lenience and the rationality of nature, for where she is lenient man readily discovers order in nature. And if in his approaches to nature he takes due account of such order, nature herself becomes even more lenient, and man, in turn, is led further to search for the order in nature. Thus, Europe's natural science was clearly the true product of Europe's "meadow climate" (ibid., 74).

As may be expected, this European rationalism is contrasted with the Japanese emotional receptivity for nature, in particular the seasonal changes and dramatic contrasts, which are supposedly due to the typical type of monsoon milieu that is only found in Japan. In the summary of Morris-Suzuki,

> Japan, according to Watsuji, had a unique *fūdo* which combined the unpredictability of typhoons and monsoonal floods with the regularity of the seasons, and this, he believed, had created a distinctive and complex sensitivity to nature, vividly represented in Japanese art, architecture, and literature. Rather than expressing resignation to nature or imposing an artificial symmetry on nature, Watsuji argued, the Japanese arts involved an empathetic coming together of the human spirit and nature, which is very close to Motoori [Norinaga]'s emphasis on spontaneous human appreciation of the 'pathos of things' (1998, 57).

Apart from the aesthetic implications, according to Watsuji the Japanese *fūdo* has also had profound social implications. For instance, the heat and humidity of the Japanese monsoon summer caused the Japanese people to build open houses, which, together with the importance of cooperation in the cultivation of rice (also caused by the climate),[73] has contributed to the 'unique collectivism' of the Japanese people and the strength of their social ties. In fact, according to Watsuji, it is this notion of the 'house' or 'household' (*ie*) as central social unit that constitutes the main characteristic of Japanese society, going back to ancient times; and it is here that one finds such essentially Japanese features as filial piety and self-sacrificing love. Watsuji's naturalisation of the *ie* as an essential, primordial feature of the Japanese nation is a clear example of mythmaking in action; as several authors have pointed out, the *ie* system was in fact a Meiji invention, which became part of the state ideology and was actively promoted by the government (e.g., Morris-Suzuki 1998, 114-115). Not only did this ideology contribute to gender inequalities – women were encouraged to be 'good wives, wise

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leads directly to a fight with the other man' (ibid., 49). As the Jews always 'continued to retain their desert character' (ibid., 51), a justification for anti-Semitic persecutions is easily made: 'it was the Jews themselves, who invited such persecution' (ibid., 51). Thus Watsuji contributed to a sizeable anti-Semitic discourse in Japan, which continues to influence popular understandings of Judaism today (see Goodman & Miyazawa 2000).

[73] On the symbolic importance of rice and wet rice cultivation as markers of Japanese national identity, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1993.

mothers' (*ryōsai kenbo*) –[74] it also actively propagated uncritical love of the nation and its regime through the extrapolation of the notion of *ie* to the nation. That is, the nation was presented as one big family, of which the emperor was the head. Although Watsuji did not uncritically accept this aspect of Meiji ideology (1961, 148), his essentialism and natural determinism did provide an intellectual justification for this type of nationalist argumentation.

4.2.5   The 'love of nature' in postwar discourse

In postwar Japanese discourse, the ideas of Motoori Norinaga, Okakura Kakuzō, Anesaki Masaharu and Watsuji Tetsurō have been appropriated and renarrated by many authors, in Japan as well as abroad. D. T. Suzuki (1894-1966), the (in)famous populariser of 'Zen' in the United States, devoted a chapter of his classic work *Zen and Japanese Culture* to the topic of the Japanese love of nature (1959, 329-396).[75] Reproducing the essentialist East-West dichotomy of his predecessors, he wrote:

> In these prosaic days of ours, there is a craze among the young men of Japan for climbing high mountains just for the sake of climbing; and they call this 'conquering the mountains'. What a desecration! This is a fashion no doubt imported from the West along with many others not always worth wile [*sic*] learning. The idea of the so-called 'conquest of nature' comes from Hellenism, I imagine, in which the earth is made to be man's servant, and the winds and the sea are to obey him. Hebraism concurs with this view, too. In the East, however, this idea of subjecting Nature to the commands or service of man according to his selfish desires has never been cherished. For Nature to us has never been uncharitable, it is not a kind of enemy to be brought under man's power. We of the Orient have never conceived Nature in the form of an opposing power. On the contrary, Nature has been our constant friend and companion, who is to be absolutely trusted in spite of the frequent earthquakes assailing this land of ours (ibid., 334).

Thus, the Japanese 'love of nature' features prominently in Suzuki's identity politics, as it allows him to differentiate between the West and the East. 'Nature' here becomes a rhetoric device allowing the author to condemn 'Hellenistic' and 'Hebraic' worldviews (i.e., the two pillars of 'Western' civilisation) while romanticising the 'East', and lament the moral and cultural degradation of modern Japan supposedly caused by the 'import' of many Western ideas.

Suzuki was by no means the last to express this opinion. Anthropologist Ishida Eiichirō, for instance, 'defined the essence of Japanese culture in terms of a unique national feeling for nature', or

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[74] On the naturalisation of gender inequalities in Japan, see also Rosenberger 1997.

[75] An earlier version of this book was published in 1938, and the section on the 'love of nature' goes back to a series of lectures given in 1935. The 1959 edition was significantly revised and extended, however. Accordingly, it may be debated whether this work should be listed as 'prewar' or 'postwar'. In any case, Suzuki represents the cultural essentialism and East-West dualism typical of the *nihonjinron* discourse that became so prominent in the 1960s and 70s, not in the least in academic circles.

shizensei (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 35). A similar argument was made by the well-known Buddhist scholar Nakamura Hajime (1912-1999), who argued that

> This sentiment of nature, which contributed to the sympathetic heart of order in communal life, may be due partly to the influence of the land and climate and to early attainment of settled agricultural civilization (…). The mild climate, the variety of scenery, the rich flora and sea-products and the remarkable absence of beast of prey [?] – these combined contributed greatly to the development of a peace-loving and docile disposition and to an ability to establish order and attain solidarity (in Kalland & Asquith 1997, 5).

Thus, it is perhaps no exaggeration to state that by the early 1980s, the myth of a unique Japanese love of nature and corresponding social harmony – brought about by the physical conditions of the Japanese climate and physical landscape – had become a well-established 'truth', renarrated and legitimised by a large number of influential scholars and scientists. That is, it had become naturalised. In recent decades, these notions have often been reinterpreted in the context of environmental issues.

4.3   Nature, religion, and environmental issues

4.3.1   Lynn White and the 'religious environmentalist paradigm'

Thus far, I have mainly focused on Japanese discourse. It must be pointed out, however, that, notions of 'Western' civilisation as diametrically opposed to the 'East', and corresponding idealisations of 'Eastern' attitudes vis-à-vis nature, were (and are) by no means limited to Japanese academic mythmaking. On the contrary, the 'Western' control/conquest/exploitation of nature, and the 'Eastern' love of/harmony with/respect for nature, are recurring tropes in scholarly, environmentalist and religious discourse worldwide. Ever since the publication in *Science* of the famous article by Lynn White, Jr. (1907-1987), 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' (1967), notions of culturally defined attitudes to nature are intimately linked with environmental issues.[76] That does not mean, of course, that all these notions are directly influenced by this article. However, the article has long

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[76] 'Nature' is often treated as synonymous with 'the environment'; accordingly, perceptions of nature are expected to directly influence attitudes towards the environment. While this association may seem obvious, it is important to bear in mind that notions of 'the environment' as a single global ecological realm, currently in a state of crisis, are of a fairly recent date. And while they draw on existing notions of 'nature', they do not necessarily equal them. Contemporary conceptions of the environment are closely related to a perception of nature as a single, global realm, and to the understanding that this global nature is under threat (Macnaghten & Urry 1998, 19-21). Importantly, however, while the environment is often conceptualised as a global realm, '[a]round the world, environmental activism depends on distinctive cultural ways of recognizing the environment' (Tsing 2005, 153). These often draw upon culturally dependent discursive traditions concerning 'nature' (or related concepts), but they also transform them. The notion that conceptions of nature directly influence environmental attitudes and behaviour is therefore problematic. Nevertheless, it is often implicitly assumed that they do, not in the least in texts maintaining a binary opposition between 'Eastern' and 'Western' civilisation.

enjoyed paradigmatic status, and it is illustrative of a particular understanding of the relationship between religious doctrine and environmental issues. Hence, it is worth discussing in a bit more detail.

White's main argument is that the environmental crisis facing today's world is the consequence of a particular 'Western' way of relating to nature. As he writes,

> both modern technology and modern science are distinctively *Occidental*. Our technology has absorbed elements from all over the world, notably from China; yet everywhere today, whether in Japan or in Nigeria, successful technology is Western. (…) By the end of the fifteenth century the technological superiority of Europe was such that its small, mutually hostile nations could spill out over all the rest of the world, conquering, looting, and colonizing. (…) Since both our technological and our scientific movements got their start, acquired their character, and achieved world dominance in the Middle Ages, it would seem that we cannot understand their nature or their present impact upon ecology without examining fundamental medieval assumptions and developments (1967, 1204-1205; emphasis in original).

According to White, this medieval worldview was defined by the Judeo-Christian ideological legacy, which supposedly legitimised and stimulated the exploitation of nature:

> We continue today to live, as we have lived for about 1700 years, very largely in the context of Christian axioms. What did Christianity tell people about their relations with the environment? (…) Christianity inherited from Judaism (…) a striking story of creation. (…) Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this [i.e., the whole of Creation] explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. (…) Christianity, *in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions* (…) not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. (…) By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects (ibid., 1205; my emphasis).

Thus, Christianity is contrasted with 'paganism'/'animism' on the one hand, and Asian religions on the other. Zen Buddhism, for instance, is believed to conceive of 'the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view' (ibid., 1206). If the Christian view of nature as subordinate to (hu)man has caused environmental destruction, by implication Eastern views of nature and (hu)man as interdependent and mutually constitutive should have given way to some sort of ecological equilibrium, and prevented environmental destruction. As we shall see shortly, this is indeed the argument made by many scholars writing about Japan and/or 'the East'.

White's assumptions have not remained unchallenged. As David Hume famously showed, the *ought* cannot be deducted from the *is*; that is, normative ideas do not automatically follow from actual realities, nor do actions necessarily correspond to normative ideas (MacIntyre 2002, 166-168). Hence, even though the origin myth in Genesis may be seen as a justification for the exploitation of nature – a reading which is contested, not in the least by Christian theologians arguing that it should be read as an appeal for 'stewardship' (e.g., Russell 2008) – that does not mean there is a causal relationship

between the myth and actual practices. Yi-Fu Tuan was right to point out that there are significant discrepancies between attitudes towards nature, as formulated in famous texts and cultural products, and actual behaviour – not only in Europe, but also in China, where 'Taoist' and 'animistic' understandings of nature could not prevent massive deforestation long before the advent of 'Western' technology and science (Tuan 1968).

Nevertheless, White's article has exercised significant influence on subsequent discourse on culture, religion, and environmental issues. It is one of the foundational articles of what anthropologist Poul Pedersen has called 'the religious environmentalist paradigm': the 'appeal to traditional, religious ideas and values' (Pedersen 1995, 258) for tackling environmental problems, and the association of religion with environmental ethics.[77] As Pedersen writes, 'White's article (…) became a classic in the environmentalist literature with a global audience and was probably the most important single contribution to the religious environmentalist paradigm' (ibid., 260). Pedersen shows convincingly how White's arguments were appropriated in recent decades by a variety of non-Christian actors for purposes of identity politics: 'During the last twenty years Native Americans, Australian Aboriginals, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and many others have presented their religious traditions as authentically ecological and conservationist' (ibid., 260).

However, he proceeds to argue, such an understanding of religious traditions is historically problematic. As he summarises:

> The religious environmentalist paradigm is based on two claims. The first is that traditional religious ideas and values play a decisive – or even determining – role in human environmental behaviour. The second is that traditional religious ideas and values express an authentic ecological awareness and a strong conservationist commitment which are similar to those of modern environmentalist concerns. (…) However, there are two good reasons to reject the claims of the religious environmentalist paradigm. Firstly, they rest on a simplistic and untenable idea of how values and behaviour are related, and secondly, they are anachronistic projections of modern phenomena onto the screen of tradition (ibid., 264).

In addition, as I noted before, contemporary understandings of the environment rest on a particular imagination of nature on a 'global' (or transnational) scale, that is a by-product of modernisation processes. Accordingly, Pedersen writes, '[w]e should not reject the idea that traditional religious values may reflect conceptualizations of the environment, but these are not identical to our modern ecological and conservationist understanding of nature' (ibid., 267). Thus, environmentalist readings of ancient sacred texts are anachronistic projections. 'Ecological representations of nature belong to a conceptual framework of globality and are therefore fundamentally different from traditional representations of nature with their predominant localized focus' (ibid., 269; cf. Tsing 2005, 1-18). Arguably, then, what appears to be at stake in much religious environmentalist discourse is not so

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[77] The notion of the 'religious environmentalist paradigm' overlaps partially with Bron Taylor's concept of 'dark green religion': 'religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care', which 'is becoming increasingly important in global environmental politics' (2010, ix).

much concern for environmental problems – not primarily, at least – but, rather, identity politics. That is, by reinventing their own tradition as, say, ancient ecological wisdom, a variety of actors (religious, academic and/or political) dissociate themselves from the powerful but (allegedly) exploitative and morally corrupted 'West', as well as its dominant religious tradition, Christianity (Pedersen 1995, 272).

For clarity's sake: just because environmentalist re-readings of 'sacred' texts are anachronistic, that does not mean they are invalid. Any scripture considered to be of ongoing relevance for people's lives is constantly reinterpreted according to social and historical contexts, and interpretation is necessarily subject to historical change. Scriptures have always been interpreted anachronistically, as exegeses are always contingent upon historical change, so in that sense 'environmentalist' reinterpretations are perhaps not very special. Moreover, religious actors expressing a concern for environmental issues may have various reasons for doing so – including, indeed, the sincere belief that 'nature' (or 'Creation') is in urgent need of human protection, and that doing so constitutes a religious obligation. But one thing does not exclude the other: I do believe that Pedersen's thesis is relevant, as it rightly points out the identity politics involved in many environmentalist redefinitions of 'religious' (or cultural, for that matter) traditions.

Arne Kalland (2008) has elaborated further upon Pedersen's thesis. As he pointed out, in religious environmentalist discourse, two binary oppositions coexist. Both are based on an essentialist understanding of 'Western' culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition supposedly underlying it. In the first dichotomy, 'the West' is positioned vis-à-vis the 'ecological noble savage'; i.e., the 'primitive' cultures (or, in politically correct vocabulary, 'indigenous populations') supposedly living in harmony with nature and in possession of 'traditional ecological knowledge' (ibid., 95; cf. Lohmann 1993). In the second dichotomy, 'the West' (or its variant, the 'monotheistic' or 'Abrahamic' religious tradition) is placed in opposition to 'the East' and its 'religious' traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. The latter are conceptualised as holistic and non-dualistic, whereas the 'Abrahamic' religions are seen as fundamentally dualistic (Kalland 2008, 99). That is, they are supposedly based on a dualistic view of God versus (i.e., outside of) nature, as well as humans versus nature – despite the existence of pantheistic and panentheistic undercurrents in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Kalland's description is perhaps somewhat too generalising, as it does not take into consideration more nuanced expressions of 'religious environmentalism'. But the ideal-typical binary oppositions he distinguishes are certainly implicit in much religious-environmentalist discourse. As I will show in the following chapters, one of the defining characteristics of the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm' – i.e., the discursive reinvention of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship offering important wisdom for tackling contemporary global environmental problems – is that it combines these two different binary oppositions. That is, Shinto is reimagined as, essentially, *both*: a primitive indigenous tradition of ancient ecological knowledge, akin to Native American or Aboriginal

traditions, *and* a sophisticated holistic Asian wisdom tradition, diametrically opposed to 'Western' Christianity.

4.3.2 *Appropriation and critique*

Given the paradigmatic status of the Japanese 'love of nature' myth, and the international impact of the Lynn White thesis, it comes as no surprise that a large number of authors – both inside and outside Japan – have suggested that Japanese culture and religion can provide alternative models for approaching and coexisting with the environment. Most of these arguments are characterised by cultural essentialism – that is, 'the' Japanese are treated as a transhistorical, uniform entity, and the nation's historical construction process is not questioned. In addition, while making ample reference to artistic practices, poetry, and Japanese Buddhism, there is an overall lack of practical suggestions as to what such alternative models might actually look like, and how they can concretely contribute to overcoming environmental problems. A well-known example is the article by Watanabe Masao, also published in *Science*, in which he repeats the now-familiar myth that Japan has 'a love of nature which has existed from very early days. (…) For the Japanese and for other Oriental peoples, man was considered a part of nature, and the art of living in harmony with nature was their wisdom of life' (1974, 279). Following White, he suggests that, perhaps, Japanese cultural values may help to conceive of new ways to conceptualise our attitude towards the environment.

This point is made more explicitly by others. Murota Yasuhiro, for instance, argues that 'we need to return to the Japanese way of thought to find a direction for the future' (1985, 110). David Shaner states that 'much of the Japanese tradition is in concert with [an] ecocentric and communitarian perspective', so we should 'consider aspects of the Japanese experience of nature as a possible conceptual resource for environmental philosophy' (1989). The well-known geographer Yasuda Yoshinori (born 1946) described Europe as the 'civilization of deforestation', responsible for destroying 'the world of Animism', 'the peaceful relationship between man and nature in Asia, Africa and South America', and, hence, their nature (1990, 3). Japan, according to him, represents 'the forest civilization', escaped the 'invasion of the "civilization of deforestation"' (ibid., 4), and has preserved an ancient animistic worldview, which must be revitalised in order to counter environmental destruction.[78] And the argument continues to be repeated today. For instance, architect-designer Azby Brown recently published a book in which he argued that we could learn many practical lessons for living sustainably from Edo-period Japanese society (2009).[79] Midori Kagawa-Fox has published an

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[78] I will discuss the ideas of Yasuda Yoshinori in more detail in chapter eight, together with those of his intellectual predecessors and contemporaries writing about 'animism' and the 'forest civilisation'.

[79] This book is somewhat different in approach from other texts stating that traditional Japan should teach us how to live in harmony with nature. Arguably, it is also more interesting. First, in contrast to most other authors, Brown does not claim to have written an academic work. Instead, he self-consciously presents his work as a non-academic 'book of stories' (Brown 2009, 7, 11) – i.e., it is anecdotal and impressionistic rather than abstract and

article on Japanese 'environmental ethics' that claims to offer new ethical perspectives yet is grounded in a rigid East-West dichotomy, and reproduces familiar *nihonjinron*-type platitudes (2010). And Romano Vulpitta has argued that in this time of egotism, in which traditional social structures are disappearing, 'the West' would do well to learn from the Japanese people's sense of nature, their tolerance towards others, and their unselfish worship of the emperor (2011).[80] The list could go on and on.

These claims have not remained unchallenged. As mentioned, several scholars have scrutinised Japanese conceptions of nature, including the 'love of nature' myth (Asquith & Kalland 1997; Kalland 1995; 2002; Kirby 2011; Martinez 2005; Morris-Suzuki 1991; 1998; Thomas 2001). By showing how such notions have been developed historically, these works constitute an important counterbalance to the ever-expanding body of texts that uncritically assume that 'the Japanese love of nature' is a natural given; and, accordingly, also to texts suggesting that all it takes to overcome contemporary environmental problems is a return to 'traditional (Japanese) values'. Some scholars have also explicitly targeted those suggesting Japanese worldviews are superior to 'Western' ones, and may serve as environmental ethics. For instance, Ian Reader has responded to Yasuda Yoshinori's naive plea for an 'animism renaissance' (1990) by pointing out that every culture, including those in Africa and Asia, 'has devised its own ways of manipulating and exploiting its environment for its own benefit, generally with little regard for the overall and long term needs of future generations' (Reader 1990, 15). Moreover, he has rightly drawn attention to the fact that the alleged 'forest civilisation' Japan at the time 'consume[d] 40% of the world's trade in tropical timber each year, and it is logging for the Japanese trade that has denuded many of the forests of the Philippines and Thailand, and is about to do the same for Sarawak [Borneo]' (ibid., 15). Likewise, several popular authors have lamented the environmental destruction of Japan itself, criticising modern Japanese policymakers and politicians for not practising what they preach, and destroying traditional landscapes (McCormack 2001; Kerr 2001).

When confronted with this type of critique, proponents of the view that traditional Japanese values should be revitalised in order to deal with environmental problems do not usually disagree; on the contrary, they tend to concur. Their point is, however, that the environmental problems of modern Japan are the consequence of the Meiji-period modernisation project, and the incorporation of 'Western' technology and thought, as a result of which the Japanese people have lost their traditional values and ways of life (e.g., Yasuda 1990, 4). Or, as Watanabe wrote, '[s]till immersed in nature itself, the Japanese people do not quite realize what is happening to nature and to themselves, and are thus

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analytical. Second, he does not employ the classical tropes of the 'love of nature' myth – references to *haiku*, the four seasons, *mono no aware*, Mount Fuji and so on – but, rather, looks at actual practices: agriculture, forestry, city planning, dwelling practices and so on. As such, his approach is refreshing. In the end, however, he does end up idealising Edo-period Japan, overlooking tensions and problems at the time, and overestimating the possible applicability of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practices for twenty-first century society.

[80] This article was published in the journal of Meiji Jingū, a shrine historically associated with emperor worship; as it was written in Japanese, it was obviously not targeted at a non-Japanese audience.

exposed more directly to, and are more helpless in, the current environmental crisis' (Watanabe 1974, 282).

It is ironic, to put it mildly, that the country that has played a central part in the large-scale deforestation of great parts of Southeast Asia (Dauvergne 1997) – a development that had already started in the 1970s, when Watanabe wrote his article – is portrayed as a nation of victims, 'helpless in the current environmental crisis'. Nevertheless, the notion that Japanese environmental destruction is the result of 'modernisation' and 'Westernisation', sometimes seen as imposed by 'Western' imperial powers, is widespread – as is the related notion that prior to the Meiji period the Japanese lived in harmony with nature, and did not experience any environmental problems. This is not historically accurate, however. As environmental historian Conrad Totman has shown (1989; 2000), there have been different periods in pre-Meiji Japanese history when there was large-scale deforestation, as well as the depletion of other natural resources; none of these developments had anything to do with 'Western' technology or ideology. I will return to the topic of premodern de- and reforestation later. At this point, it is important to stress that the notion of perpetual ecological harmony may well reflect artistic celebrations and representations of nature, but does not correspond to actual reality. There is a significant discrepancy between ideal and reality, historically as well as in contemporary society.[81]

4.3.3   'Cooking nature': Kalland's critique

A similar point has been made by Arne Kalland. Drawing on the work of Totman, he has argued that '[t]here have been many serious cases of environmental destruction in premodern Japan. (…) We have overlooked the fact that for millennia the Japanese have tried to conquer nature as much as westerners have done' (1995, 245). 'Nature' as it is traditionally preferred in Japan is not at all similar to modern American notions of nature as 'wild' and 'untouched'. Using Lévi-Strauss' classical distinction between the raw and the cooked as an underlying structure of myths (1964), Kalland argues that

> The Japanese have, like most other people, an ambivalent attitude toward nature. (…) Many Japanese seem to feel an abhorrence toward 'nature in the raw' (*nama no shizen*; Buruma 1985, 65), and only by idealization or 'taming' (*narasu*) – e.g., 'cooking', through literature and fine arts, for example – does nature become palatable and even lovable. In other words, nature can be both raw and cooked, wild and tamed. Torn by destructive and creative forces, nature oscillates between its raw and cooked forms, and in its cooked form nature and culture merge. It is in this latter state, as idealized nature, that nature is loved by most Japanese (Kalland 1995, 246; cf. Kalland 2002, 147-150).

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[81] In a recent book, Karen Thornber compared idealisations of nature in literary texts with actual environmental practices and problems in Japan, China, Korea and Taiwan. She likewise suggests that, throughout East Asia, there is a significant discrepancy between ideals and reality, which she refers to as 'ecoambiguity' (2012).

Thus, 'nature' as it is appreciated in Japanese culture is highly cultivated indeed. According to Kalland, the significance of nature for Japanese culture lies in the fact that it functions as 'a repertoire for metaphors' (1995, 251). That is, natural elements do not acquire significance until they are culturally mediated. Accordingly, there is a striking difference between established Japanese conceptions of 'nature' and contemporary notions of the environment: the former are concerned with particular symbolic images and places, while the latter are based on an imagination of nature as a single, global realm, visible in yet transcending particular localities. Hence,

> [t]he quantity of nature, if I can put it that way, is of no great importance, and nature invisible to an actor – as one located in faraway places – is of little general interest. Many scholars have stressed the particularistic character of Japanese norms and this applies equally well to the environment. (…) Only when nature is brought into the real of the known, e.g. tamed, and there are some immediate personal gains, do most Japanese become interested in protecting nature (ibid., 255).

In other words, environmental advocacy in Japan is often concerned with particular locales, and immediate threats to public health (cf. Kirby 2011) or nearby landscapes of interest, rather than more abstract issues. As I will show in this study, the same applies to shrine-related environmental advocacy: while priests and parishioners may be mobilised to protest against the demolition of shrine forests, that does not mean they will protest against the overseas logging activities of companies purchasing shrine rituals. Of course, Japan is by no means unique in this respect – anywhere in the world, it is easier to mobilise people over local concerns than abstract issues. It does mean, however, that there is little or no empirical evidence supporting the claim that Japanese worldviews and values lead to more general concern for the environment than 'Western' ones. Thus, it may be argued that actual practices vis-à-vis nature and/or environmental issues in Japan are more particularistic than most literature may lead one to believe.

In fact, as Kalland has argued, the existence of abstract holistic ideas does not automatically lead to environmentally friendly behaviour (2002, 150-154; 2008, 100-102). On the contrary, he suggested, holistic views of nature may actually contribute to, or at least justify, environmentally *un*friendly behaviour. For instance, when there is no longer an ontological distinction between those things that are human-made and those things that are not, 'natural' landscapes cease to be seen as inherently different from human constructions. In Lefebvrean terms, the destruction of natural space is legitimised and concealed by the production of new spaces that are configured as 'natural'. Furthermore, Kalland points out, notions of nature as a cyclical process, of which death and decay are integral parts (as illustrated by the notion of *mono no aware*, as well as the Hindu-Buddhist concept of karma), are easily employed to downplay the importance of conservation practices: if all things are finite, there is no point in trying to preserve them. Likewise, a strong focus on *ideals* of nature (as in Japanese artistic traditions) can lead people to overlook actual physical realities. The same applies to

the Buddhist other-worldly emphasis on the illusory character of all being, which is perhaps not the best incentive for environmental conservation.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly,

> it has been argued that when nature is seen as immanently divine, as it allegedly is in Japan, this leads to a 'love of nature' relationship (…). But the close relationship between people and spirit also enable people to entice spirits to move from their abodes in order to utilize the locations in question for other purposes. (…) Spirits can also be persuaded to move into shrines so that their old abodes, in nature, can be appropriated. (…) Human beings are considered to become indebted to nature when exploiting it, but can 'repay' harm that has been inflicted upon nature, animate or inanimate, through, for instance, memorial rites (Kalland & Asquith 1997, 20), leaving the rest to nature itself to mend. A divine nature is, therefore, by no means a guarantee against environmental degradation, as has often been claimed (Kalland 2002, 153).

To conclude this chapter, I would like to emphasise five points. First, the notion that there is a particular, uniquely Japanese way of coexisting with nature, determined by the particular geographical and climatological features of the Japanese isles, was and is central to discursive constructions of Japanese national identity. Second, in recent decades, a large number of scholars has argued that Japanese cultural and religious traditions characterised by this 'love of nature' provide valuable ideological resources for overcoming today's environmental problems. Third, while drawing on the ideas of foreign scholars such as Lynn White, these arguments are grounded in essentialist notions of 'East' and 'West', placed in binary opposition; as such, like other expressions of the 'religious environmentalist paradigm' (Pedersen 1995), they figure prominently in contemporary identity politics. Fourth, as illustrated by various cases of environmental destruction caused by Japanese actors, idealised notions of nature by no means automatically lead to environmentally friendly behaviour; on the contrary, as Arne Kalland has argued (2002; 2008), they may even have an opposite effect. And fifth, as the following chapters will show, the myths and tropes discussed in this chapter are all appropriated and reformulated by proponents of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm.

5. DEFINING SHINTO: COMPETING PARADIGMS

5.1 Conceptualisations of Shinto

5.1.1 A contested category

As outlined in the previous chapter, in the past forty years or so a variety of religious and cultural traditions worldwide have been redefined as ancient, ecologically beneficial traditions supposedly containing valuable ethical, ideological and practical resources for overcoming contemporary environmental problems. Following Pedersen (1995) and Kalland (2008), I have referred to this development as 'the religious environmentalist paradigm'. I agree with their basic argument that, generally speaking, the redefinition of religions as ancient ecological traditions has anachronistic elements, and is embedded within wider identity politics. It includes the reappropriation of established tropes and stereotypes regarding 'Eastern' and/or 'primitive' cultures,[82] and is often employed to distinguish between 'the West' and its Others. Thus, it often serves as a strategy to criticise modern 'Western' exploitative practices, or to assert the superiority of any given tradition vis-à-vis the immoral 'West' (as well as, correspondingly, Christianity and Judaism). Given the dominant influence of this paradigm on scholarly discourse, as well as international politics and conservation practices, the appropriation of these ideas by Shinto actors is perhaps no surprise. In the previous chapters, I have already hinted at this development, which I refer to as the establishment of a 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm'.

I will present an overview of this development in the next chapter, followed by discussions of various recurring themes and practices in subsequent chapters. First, however, I will try to answer the question as to how 'Shinto' has been conceptualised in modern academic and political discourse, as this is important for understanding recent trends. I have already discussed two pillars underlying contemporary discourse on Shinto and nature: notions of 'the Japanese love of nature' developed in the (early) modern period, and the global development of the 'religious environmentalist paradigm' from the 1970s onwards. A third pillar underlying Shinto environmentalist notions is constituted by existing conceptualisations and idealisations of Shinto, an overview of which I will present in this chapter.

As I will illustrate, the category 'Shinto' is by no means unambiguous. On the contrary, it is a contested concept, which has been employed in a number of different ways, at times contradictory. In

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[82] The term 'primitive' is now considered derogative, and no longer in vogue. Communities that used to be called 'primitive' are now usually referred to as 'indigenous peoples', a category widely used in (international) politics. However, the underlying category distinction remains the same, as does the discursive differentiation between 'mainstream' and 'indigenous' populations – as if majorities and/or powerful groups are not indigenous. As the classificatory structure has not changed significantly, it comes as no surprise that classical stereotypes regarding the 'noble savage' are reproduced in contemporary discourse – not in the least by environmentalists, who often romanticise these groups, attributing to them a great intuitive (i.e., non-rational) ecological wisdom. The portrayal of Native Americans in popular media texts (e.g., *Dances with Wolves* and *Pocahontas*) is a case in point. Cf. Kalland 2008; Lohmann 1993.

academic debates on Shinto, various historical narratives coexist, reflecting a number of ideological and normative positions regarding the essence of the Japanese nation, the position of the emperor, and the role of 'religion' and ritual ceremonies in the public sphere. The category 'Shinto' is subject to ongoing negotiations, and conflicting definitions represent different political agendas. Accordingly, it is practically impossible to give a neutral, empirically adequate definition of Shinto, as the very term is ideologically charged. 'There is a political factor to be taken into account in any understanding of Shinto', as Michael Pye rightly observed (1981, 61). 'Shinto' is an ideal typical construction that may be based on actual ritual practices and shrine traditions, but does not equal them. In Mark Teeuwen's formulation, it 'is not something that has "existed" in Japanese society in some concrete and definable form during different historical periods; rather, it appears as a conceptualization, an abstraction that has had to be produced actively every time it has been used' (2002, 233).

Thus, Shinto is a historical construct, subject to continuous negotiation and redefinition, rather than a natural given (cf. Breen & Teeuwen 2010, ix). That does not mean, however, that the term is merely an empty signifier that can be projected onto any belief or practice. In discursive constructions and definitions of Shinto, there is a limited number of recurring themes, tropes and assumptions. More importantly, the term serves an important function as a generic category covering a variety of institutions usually called *jinja* (referred to as 'shrines' in English),[83] as well as associated ritual and discursive practices. Especially in the modern period (i.e., from 1868 onwards), 'Shinto' stands out as a very real presence in Japanese society, even though its category boundaries have never been clearly defined, and the societal and political position of institutions and practices referred to as 'Shinto' has gone through some significant transformations.[84]

When looking at the pre-modern and medieval periods, however, the picture gets much more complicated. Constructions of 'Shinto' as an independent, pre-Buddhist, indigenous Japanese tradition were developed by *kokugaku* scholars such as Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 60-65), drawing upon the inventions of Yoshida Kanetomo (1435-1511) and others (ibid., 47-52). However, before the Meiji period shrines were not usually independent from Buddhist temples, institutionally nor theologically. It may be argued, then, that modern Shinto is largely an

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[83] In addition to *jinja*, Shinto places of worship may be referred to as *gū*, *jingū*, *miya*, *taisha* or *yashiro*; Buddhist ones as *tera*, *ji* or *in*. In English, these are conventionally translated as, respectively, 'shrines' and 'temples'. There is a certain arbitrariness to this translation: in Vietnam, for instance, *non*-Buddhist (e.g., 'Confucian') worship places are usually referred to as 'temples', whereas Buddhist ones are called 'pagodas' – a term which, when used in the Japanese context, is only used for the multi-tiered towers functioning as stupas. Moreover, one may question whether 'shrine' is the most suitable term to refer to a particular place of worship, as the term historically referred to relic boxes, tombs of saints, and small chapels, rather than sizeable institutions. As a matter of fact, some Shinto organisations today use the Latin-derived term 'sanctuary' rather than 'shrine' in their English-language publications, or consider doing so in the near future (examples include the International Shinto Foundation and Ise Jingū). In this study, I have considered using 'sanctuary' in stead of 'shrine', but in the end I have decided not to in order to avoid confusion. That is, for the time being, the term 'shrine' continues to be used in virtually all English-language writings on Shinto and Japan, so I will follow the convention.

[84] On the establishment and subsequent transformations of 'Shinto' in the (early) modern period (i.e., the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth), see, among others, Breen 2000; Hardacre 1989; Murakami 1970.

invented tradition, which developed out of Buddhism and incorporated elements from a variety of sources – including existing shrine traditions, imperial rites, and Confucian ideology.[85] That is, while the term *shintō* (probably initially pronounced as *jindō*) – i.e., the combination of the character for 'deities' (*kami* 神) with the character meaning way, path, or road (*michi* 道) – was already used in the eighth-century chronicle *Nihon Shoki*, in all likelihood it did not yet refer to an independent tradition (Kuroda 1981; Teeuwen 2002). In any case, *kami* worship at the time differed significantly from Shinto as it developed in pre-modern times.[86]

Hence, imaginations of 'Shinto' as a tradition going back to primordial times often lead to the anachronistic projection of modern notions onto earlier shrine practices. While some shrines do indeed go back many centuries, in some cases predating the introduction of Buddhism to the Japanese isles, they have been subject to continuous processes of transformation and reinvention (e.g., Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 66-128; Grapard 1992; Thal 2005). By no means does the variety of practices concerned with the worship of local deities in ancient times equal the singular, 'indigenous' tradition 'Shinto' as it was imagined in the Edo and Meiji periods. Significantly, then, there 'have been historical processes of "Shintoization"' (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, ix) – that is, in the course of history, some places and practices were discursively reconceived as 'Shinto', while others were excluded.

Such a historical-constructivist approach to the study of Shinto, which takes into consideration historical processes whereby certain ideas and practices came to be categorised as 'Shinto', is by no means self-evident. Until the 1980s, the concept of 'Shinto' was generally considered to refer to 'the' indigenous religious/ritual tradition of 'the' Japanese people, which throughout history has existed alongside Buddhism, its essence more or less unchanged since 'prehistorical' times. The historicity of the concept itself was not usually studied, let alone processes of 'Shintoisation'. The historian Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) is usually credited for being the first to question this notion of Shinto as 'the indigenous religion of Japan, continuing in an unbroken line from prehistoric times down to the present', arguing that 'before modern times Shinto did not exist as an independent religion' (1981, 1-3). Kuroda's work has been groundbreaking for a number of reasons, and it has influenced a generation of historians. Although some of his claims have been rejected for being too radical (e.g., Breen & Teeuwen 2000a, 4-5), his basic argument, that 'Shinto' is the outcome of historical construction and negotiation processes, remains highly significant. As Teeuwen and Scheid write, '[b]y stripping away the myth of a single, independent Shinto tradition, [Kuroda's] work has led to an

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[85] In a thought-provoking article, in which he compares the historical development of Shinto with other non-Buddhist 'indigenous' traditions in Asia, Mark Teeuwen questions conventional interpretations of Shinto as a tradition based on the ancient imperial cult and local traditions of *kami* worship. Instead, he argues that 'Shinto arose from a Buddhist cult that incorporated the *kami* as *jindō*, rather than from the classical court cult that created a distance between Buddhism and the *kami*, and that defined the latter as *jingi*' (2007, 373). On the imperial state cult (650-800 CE), see Ooms 2009; on the intertwinement of Buddhas and *kami* in medieval Japan, see Grapard 1992; Teeuwen & Rambelli 2003.

[86] On ritual practices in ancient Japan, and the various continental influences they incorporated, see Como 2009; on Taoist influences, see also Barrett 2000.

emphasis on aspects of discontinuity in kami worship, both diachronically, between various periods of Japanese history, and synchronically, between center and periphery, between different locations and historical contexts' (2002, 197).

Kami worship, it follows, is not the same as Shinto. The former is a generic term denoting a wide variety of worship practices relating to local and national deities, whereas the latter is a normative ideological construction. Thus,

> it is vital to distinguish between shrine cults – the reality of those multifarious activities and beliefs that are manifest in shrines both local and central – and 'Shinto' – the ideological agenda of the establishment, rooted especially though certainly not uniquely, in reverence for, or at least identification with, the imperial institution. There is, of course, no denying the continuities across shrines, from the smallest rural shrine to that of the imperial ancestress in Ise, in terms of symbols, practices and, indeed, beliefs – at least at a basic level. And yet it remains that these continuities fail conspicuously to converge with the establishment's articulation of Shinto. (…) 'Shinto' is not, then, in any obvious sense, what contemporary Japanese 'do at shrines', nor what they think before the kami, since it is not what they themselves understand that they do and think; Shinto is, rather, what the contemporary establishment and its spokesmen would have them think and do (Breen & Teeuwen 2000a, 3).

Significantly, as the above quotation suggests, for the majority of the people participating in shrine rituals, 'Shinto' is an irrelevant category; that is, they do not generally conceive of their prayers or rituals as expressions of 'Shinto' (Teeuwen 2004, 10; cf. Nelson 1996). Breen and Teeuwen are right to point out that there is a gap between shrine practices on the one hand, and the normative abstraction 'Shinto', on the other.

That does not mean, however, that the term 'Shinto' is the sole property of the 'establishment and its spokesmen', as they seem to suggest here. Such an approach is arguably too much top-down, and does not take into consideration the various ways in which different actors not necessarily related to 'the establishment' have tried to appropriate and redefine the category. These include scholars, priests, as well as representatives of so-called new religions defining themselves as 'Shinto'. Indeed, in their later co-authored work, Breen and Teeuwen do take into consideration these alternative conceptualisations of Shinto (2010, 5-7, 208-212, 227-228). Thus, while 'Shinto' is an abstraction fraught with ideological connotations, it is not solely the construction of a powerful elite. Rather, in contemporary academic and popular discourse on Shinto, a number of ideological positions are represented, leading to some subtle and not-so-subtle differences in perspective. After all, '"Shinto" is sufficiently vague as a term and loosely organized as an institution to invite any number of interpretations and reinterpretations' (ibid., 223).

Thus, definitions and conceptualisations of Shinto are embedded within, and informed by, wider developments in Japanese society and politics; as such, they are inherently ideological. As Brian Bocking writes,

[H]ow we approach, understand and most importantly teach about Shintō is not an issue of merely 'academic' significance. The political aspect of Shintō has often been ignored by Western writers on Japanese religion. This was so even in the pre-1940s heyday of 'state Shintō' but there is a continuing debate inside and outside Japan about Shintō's relationship to Japanese nationalism and national identity (…). To ignore the current political dimension of Shintō by representing institutions such as the Yasukuni shrine as peripheral to 'Shintō' would itself be a political act, however well-intentioned (2004, 265-266).

In recent years, the political dimension of Shinto has been addressed by a number of scholars; particularly noteworthy in this respect is the work of John Breen (2007; 2010a; 2010b; 2011). Nevertheless, apolitical, essentialist accounts of Shinto continue to be prevalent, both inside and outside Japan. In a review article from 2006, Sarah Thal summarised the state of affairs as follows:

Dangerous traps threaten to ensnare any author writing about Shinto. The 'Way of the Kami' has for so long been touted as 'Japan's indigenous religion' or 'the essence of being Japanese' that essentialism, overgeneralization, and romanticism dominate many discussions of kami-related religious practices in Japan. While most scholars today successfully avoid these problems, others still expound some version of the aesthetic nationalism promoted by nativists and nationalists since the late eighteenth century. Thus, to read the recent work on Shinto is to be both inspired and dismayed – inspired, because a wealth of solid, innovative work has transformed our understanding of Shinto; dismayed, because old, debilitating ideas about Shinto as 'experientialism' or 'Japaneseness' remain alive (2006, 145).

Likewise, in a recent lecture, Mark Teeuwen stated that essentialism continues to be 'a major problem within the field of Shinto studies', and repeated his appeal for looking at ways in which shrines and shrine practices were 'Shintoised' – i.e., processes by which they came to be seen as 'Shinto', and the transformations these entailed (2012). The title of this lecture, 'Restoring historicity to Shinto', aptly summarises the project of critical historians of the post-Kuroda age. Indeed, in the past two decades, a number of serious historical studies and overviews has been published that move beyond essentialist idealisations. They focus on individual actors and processes of historical change, rather than assuming the existence of 'Shinto' as a transhistorical entity (Ambros 2008; Breen & Teeuwen 2000b;[87] 2010; Grapard 1992; Havens 2006; Inoue Hiroshi 2011; Inoue Nobutaka et al. 2003; Itō et al. 2002; Moerman 2005; Thal 2005; Teeuwen 1996b; 2004; Teeuwen & Rambelli 2003). However, as stated, the popular view of Shinto as an ancient, singular (religious) tradition, the essence of which has supposedly remained unchanged and is susceptible to neither change nor continuity, continues to be influential. This applies not only to widely-read online encyclopaedias,[88] anthologies

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[87] Breen and Teeuwen 2000b is a collection of articles. While the majority of articles in this volume is based on critical historical scholarship, there are some exceptions, written by authors who do adhere to essentialist notions of Shinto (in particular, Kamata 2000a and Sonoda 2000 – two influential contemporary Shinto writers).

[88] As of December 2012, the Wikipedia entry on Shinto started by defining it as 'the indigenous spirituality of Japan and the people of Japan. It is a set of practices, to be carried out diligently, to establish a connection between present day Japan and its ancient past.' There are some serious problems with this definition. First, it repeats the common claim that Shinto is 'indigenous', thus denying the various continental influences that were

of texts from the major 'world religions' (e.g., Markham & Lohr 2009, 131-152) and popular introductions to Shinto (e.g., Hamuro 1999; Kamata 2000b; Littleton 2002; Picken 2002; Rankin 2010; Sonoda 1997; Tanaka 2011; Yamakage 2006; Yamamura 2011), but also to works that appear to have been written for academic audiences (e.g., Kasulis 2004; Picken 2004; Sonoda 1998).

5.1.2 Six paradigms

As 'Shinto' is a normative abstraction, it is difficult, if not impossible, to give a neutral definition that does not reflect one or the other ideological position. Hence, the question 'what is Shinto' is not as simple as it may seem at first sight, for any attempt at definition is inevitably bound up with ideology (cf. Bocking 2004, 263-266; Havens 2006, 14-19). Therefore, in this study, I will not add another definition to the ones that already exist. Rather, adopting a metaperspective, I will compare and analyse different ways in which Shinto has been, and continues to be, defined. In contrast to what some critics have suggested, there is not one single essentialist conceptualisation, although there are certainly recurring tropes and themes.[89] After reading a variety of primary and secondary sources,[90]

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incorporated. Second, it asserts Shinto as *the* (i.e., singular) tradition, not only of the country Japan – as if a 'spirituality' can be intrinsic to a land – but also of 'the' people of Japan – as if they were a single, homogeneous community, all sharing in this particular tradition (cf. Thal 2006, 146). Third, it contradicts itself by defining Shinto as, both, a 'spirituality' – i.e., a particular worldview concerning matters spiritual, however conceptualised – and 'a set of practices' – i.e., a number of established, mutually related activities. This internal contradiction may be due to the fact that on Wikipedia anybody can contribute to any entry – as a result, a single definition may end up including competing claims. But what is particularly noteworthy here is the fact that Shinto is not defined as a 'religion', thus reflecting ongoing identity politics and attempts at legal reformulation that I will discuss shortly. Finally, the claim that the *purpose* of these practices ('in order to') is 'to establish a connection between present (…) and (…) past' is highly problematic: people have various reasons for participating in shrine rituals, but their underlying motivations do not necessarily have anything to do with the ancient past (cf. Nelson 1996; Smyers 1996). In sum, the Wikipedia definition is normative, one-sided, and historically inaccurate. Why care about such a 'non-academic' source? Because for millions of people, this website is the first source of information. Consequently, it influences popular understandings of numerous topics, including this one. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinto (last accessed: December 20, 2012).

[89] Brian Bocking has summarised the ideal-typical 'emic', essentialist description of Shinto fairly well. His summary goes as follows: 'Shintō is an ancient tradition indigenous to Japan based on shrine-worship and devotion to the ubiquitous *kami* (spirits, gods). Originally nameless, it adopted the name Shintō only to distinguish itself from the newly introduced Buddhism. The pre-eminent Shintō kami is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, ancestral deity of the Imperial house. Shintō was strong enough to survive the influx of Buddhism and Chinese culture around the 6th century AD. Indeed, it was the innate Shintō mentality of the Japanese which throughout history has helped decide which elements of foreign culture and religion were appropriate to Japan and which were to be rejected. (…) In the Meiji Restoration of 1868 Shintō too was "restored" to its ancient rightful position above Buddhism and other foreign religions. Although the true character of Shintō was temporarily eclipsed by politics and ultranationalism in the 1930s and 1940s – an aberrant period about which the less said the better – Shintō remains fundamental to Japanese culture and is expressed through local and national shrine festivals, rites of purification and a love of nature and harmony (and so on…)' (2004, 266).

[90] I do not assume a rigid distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' sources; academic texts reflecting upon earlier texts can become 'primary' in the sense that they take on paradigmatic status, and influence later discourse. The article by Lynn White (1967) which I discussed in the previous chapter is a good example of such a transformation. The boundaries between 'primary' and 'secondary' sources are as fluid and subjective as those between 'emic' and 'etic' – whether a text is defined as 'primary' or 'secondary' (or as 'emic' or 'etic') influences the way it is read, and the authority attributed to it. For instance, whether Sonoda's well-known article on 'Shinto and the natural environment' (2000) is read as 'secondary' and 'etic' – i.e., scholarly, analytical and

both academic and 'popular', I have reached the conclusion that in the modern and contemporary periods a number of different essentialist paradigms has emerged for defining, conceptualising and interpreting 'Shinto'. These paradigms came up in different periods, responding to political and academic developments at the time, and continue to coexist. They are not necessarily incompatible with each other: while some are clearly contradictory, others overlap or can be seen as complementary, and different combinations are possible. I distinguish between six paradigms, which I will discuss shortly.

Before moving on to discuss these 'paradigms' in more detail, however, let me briefly explain my use of that term in order to avoid confusion. In this study, I use the term 'paradigm' to refer to a particular set of correlated, historically established, taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the basic structure and attributes of a certain phenomenon, which shapes and strongly influences interpretations and representations of that phenomenon. In my use of the term, a 'paradigm' is not as fundamental and all-encompassing as the Foucauldian notion of *épistémè* – the underlying worldview upon which complete understandings of 'truth' and reality of a given generation are based (Mautner 2000, 174) – for different paradigms can coexist, clash, and influence each other. Nor do I limit it to 'scientific' worldviews, as in Thomas Kuhn's original use of the term (Leezenberg & De Vries 2001, 90-91). In my understanding, the term can be applied to any discursive or societal field. It must be pointed out, however, that a paradigm is more than merely a definition, a well-established opinion, or a single narrative, although these may serve an important part in its establishment and continuation. It is a foundational, authoritative set of assumptions regarding, first, the basic nature of something, and second, ways in which this basic nature can be known. As such, it is ontological as well as epistemological.

As mentioned, in modern (i.e., post-1868) constructions and conceptualisations of 'Shinto', several different paradigms have emerged, which continue to coexist today. In addition to the historical-critical, 'etic' approach to Shinto outlined above (which might be called 'the constructivist paradigm'), I distinguish between six essentialist paradigms. For clarity's sake: I do not use the term 'essentialist' as a value judgement. Instead, I use it to refer to the notion that a given phenomenon has a particular *core essence* that transcends historical change and contingency, is both foundational and primordial, and is, ultimately, *knowable*. I refer to the six paradigms according to which Shinto has been conceptualised as the *imperial* paradigm, the *ethnic* paradigm, the *universal* paradigm, the *local* paradigm, the *spiritual* paradigm and the *environmentalist* paradigm. What these paradigms have in common is that – in sharp contrast to the historical-constructivist understanding of Shinto outlined before – they conceive of Shinto as a unique, singular tradition, the essence of which has remained

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reflective – or as 'primary' and 'emic' – i.e., an original, 'religious' text reflecting a particular institutional agenda – matters greatly for its interpretation, as well as for the evaluation of the value judgements and claims made in the text. I therefore use these categories with caution. I do recognise, however, that they are categories often used in scholarly discourse, reflecting certain attitudes towards texts and practices for classifying them. As such, they are relevant, if normative.

unchanged since ancient times, not influenced by historical particularities. They differ, however, in their understanding of that very essence – and, therefore, in their understanding of the defining aspect(s) of the tradition.

There are some possible objections to my choice to classify essentialist interpretations of 'Shinto' into these six paradigms. As with any classification, I do not claim that this list is exhaustive or definitive – obviously, alternative conceptualisations of Shinto that do not fit well within any of these six categories may exist. Arguably, however, these have not (yet) received paradigmatic status. Furthermore, whether or not it is justified to call a particular understanding of the essence of Shinto a 'paradigm' or not may be subject to debate. Some might argue that what I call the 'local' and the 'spiritual' paradigms are in fact variations of the 'ethnic' paradigm. It is certainly true that these paradigms are not mutually exclusive, and that particular interpretations of Shinto may combine elements of two or three different paradigms. However, I do believe that notions of the essence of Shinto as lying in, respectively, the diversity of rural 'folk' traditions (the local paradigm), or in mystical, non-rational experiences of the divine (the spiritual paradigm) are sufficiently different from the understanding of Shinto as the single ritual Way of the entire Japanese *minzoku* (the ethnic paradigm) as to justify the choice to classify these as different paradigms. Thus, while acknowledging that the classification model I propose may be a somewhat simplified representation of the entire discourse on 'Shinto' and that the choice of terminology and categories may be subject to further debate, I do believe it captures the main approaches to and understandings of Shinto.

As mentioned, my analysis is limited to conceptualisations of Shinto in the modern and contemporary periods. It must be pointed out, however, that these did not emerge *ex nihilo*: they drew upon ideas developed in earlier periods, in particular those of Edo-period *kokugaku* scholars such as Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769), Motoori Norinaga, Hirata Atsutane and Ōkuni Takamasa (1792-1871), which were reinterpreted in accordance with newly developed and imported ideas concerning 'religion', 'nation' and 'race'. While acknowledging the influence of nativists and other premodern ideologues on modern conceptualisations of Shinto, I will primarily focus on ways in which they took shape in the modern and contemporary periods. It was in the modern period, after all, that abstractions of Shinto materialised in radically new ways, and Shinto was established as an institutionally independent, societally and politically differentiated entity. As the main focus of this study is on contemporary developments, I will pay particular attention to ways in which the different paradigms continue to influence ideas and practices today.

5.2   The imperial paradigm

5.2.1   *Shinto: a non-religion?*

As discussed in chapter two, in Japan the modern category 'religion' was first established in the 1850s, partly as a result of foreign pressure, and based on the model of Protestant Christianity. Subsequently, existing traditions were reconceived as 'religions' centred around a particular belief system (see Isomae 2003). During the same period, the socio-political functions of the institutions now redefined as 'religion' changed significantly. First, centuries-old temple-shrine complexes were forced to split up into a 'Buddhist' temple and a 'Shinto' shrine that were to cut all ties (the so-called *shinbutsu bunri*, or separation of Shinto and Buddhism, which took place in 1868 [see Hardacre 1989, 27-28]). Second, temples transformed from semi-public institutions responsible for the registration of all citizens into private religious organisations that had to compete for individual followers. Third, the government reluctantly allowed Christian missionaries to re-enter the country. And fourth, popular local devotional movements had to reorganise and register as 'religions'. In the process, many of them adopted elements from Christianity (theological, soteriological and organisational).

Until the modern period, neither 'Shinto' nor 'religion' existed as independent, differentiated social entities. Hence, it was by no means self-evident that 'Shinto' should be configured as another 'religion' alongside Christianity and Buddhism. The *kokugaku* mythologists had reinvented Shinto as the primordial, divinely inspired tradition of the Japanese people, superior to any other ritual traditions and worldviews. Their ideas were incorporated by some of the architects of the Meiji 'restoration', who intended to reshape Shinto as a national ideology surrounding the divine emperor, and remodel shrine traditions accordingly. During the first decades of the Meiji period, the relations between Shinto, 'religion' and the state were unclear, and subject to continuous negotiation and political experiments. These included debates concerning the nature of Shinto, and the question as to whether Shinto should be conceived of as a religion or not (Hardacre 1989, 34-36).

It was in this period that the imperial paradigm was established: that is, the notion that Shinto is the singular, primordial tradition of the Japanese people, which is fundamentally a 'non-religious' collective ritual tradition surrounding the emperor. As such, it was seen as something fundamentally different from traditions concerned with belief, salvation, pastoral care and rituals for personal benefit, which were reconfigured as 'religion'. As Isomae writes,

> In the period from the year 1882 until the year 1889 when the Imperial Constitution was promulgated, the basic framework of a State Shintō (*Kokka shintō*) system was formulated based upon the theory that Shintō was nonreligious (Murakami 1970). (…) The argument that Shintō was not a religion was constructed in order to protect Shintō, which was closely connected to the emperor institution, from competition with other religions such as Christianity and Buddhism. In order to overcome its doctrinal weakness, the government had attempted to systematize Shintō doctrine during the early 1870s but did not succeed in creating

a unified system. Following this failure the government recognized the incompatibility between doctrinally-oriented religious concepts and Shintō's own practice-oriented characteristics and, boldly turning the tables, sought to reposition Shintō outside the scope of the Western concept of religion (2012, 239-240).

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, 'Shinto' had been established as a non-religious national morality and set of ritual practices, in which all citizens were obliged to take part. 'Religion', by contrast, was seen as a private affair: 'working through the Imperial Constitution (*Teikoku kenpō*) promulgated in 1889 and the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku chokugo*) issued the following year, the state divided the earlier undifferentiated world of *kyō* (teaching) into a private domain left to individual discretion called "religion" and a public domain of national duties called "morality"' (ibid., 237). Shinto clearly belonged to the latter. Thus, it came to be seen as, essentially, emperor-centred and non-religious.

Contrary to what Isomae suggests in the above quotation, however, Nitta has demonstrated convincingly that the notion of Shinto as a 'non-religion' was not merely a government strategy for protecting Shinto from religious competition. Nor, for that matter, was it actively embraced by all Shinto priests. On the contrary, some of them protested the government's decision to forbid shrine priests from engaging in activities that were considered 'religious' (e.g., individual rituals and pastoral care), which had constituted their main source of income. As Nitta shows, the configuration of Shinto as non-religious was the outcome of what may be called an unholy alliance between *kokugaku*-influenced Shinto ideologues seeking to establish their tradition as *the* national ideology of the modern state Japan, and Buddhist leaders from the powerful Jōdo Shinshū school (Pure Land Buddhism) eager to deny shrine priests access to the newly established religious marketplace (Nitta 2000). Thus, the notion of Shinto as a non-religion, serving the entire nation and surrounding the emperor, is not just an ideological construction made by Shinto actors, but was also advocated by some of their rivals – at least in the initial period – for different reasons.

Nevertheless, although Buddhist leaders may have been involved in the establishment of Shinto as a 'non-religion' in the early Meiji period, these notions were subsequently appropriated by powerful members of the ruling oligarchy and prominent Shinto representatives. They used it as a device for the construction of Shinto as a public state cult and morality, participation in which was obligatory for all citizens. As Sarah Thal has argued,

[b]y removing Shinto from the realm of religion, the accumulated rhetoric of decades succeeded in establishing Shinto, in its nineteenth-century form, not as a religious belief but as the fundamental expression of Japanese identity. (…) Using the concept of religion as a political tool, advocates of Shinto confounded the boundaries of church and state, religion and secularism, to shape the very idea of Japaneseness itself (2002a, 112).

As such, Shinto in its Meiji-period shape (i.e., elements derived from shrine worship, which were combined with Confucian notions of ancestor worship, modern nationalism, and imperialism) came to be intimately intertwined with normative notions of what it meant to be Japanese.

5.2.2 'State Shinto'

The imperial paradigm is historically associated with the category 'State Shinto'. Helen Hardacre has defined this as

> the relationship of state patronage and advocacy existing between the Japanese state and the religious practice known as Shintō between 1868 and 1945. (…) This was a period in which the power, authority, and prestige of the Japanese state greatly expanded, and in which its direct influence over many aspects of the lives of the populace increased markedly. Through both ritual and influence within the educational system and local civic administrations, the Shintō priesthood contributed to this expansion of the power of the center over the periphery (1989, 4).

According to this view, between 1868 and 1945 Shinto was appropriated by the state, and became a central part of the ideological state apparatus (to use Althusser's terminology). The priesthood has often been seen as complicit in this process, and the Shinto establishment as partly responsible for the development of imperialism and, ultimately, fascism. By suggesting that 'the government' was the main actor responsible for the construction of Shinto as a state ideology, made possible by the collaboration of 'the priesthood', Hardacre by and large follows Murakami Shigeyoshi's classical account of 'State Shinto' (1970).

The nature and origins of 'State Shinto' is a topic that continues to be subject to heated debate, however. On the one hand, scholars such as Nitta Hitoshi and Sakamoto Koremaru have questioned Murakami's account, arguing that Shinto's role in the development of imperialism and totalitarianism was less prominent than traditionally suggested. Sakamoto, for instance, has argued that in the early Meiji period, the relationship between Shinto and the state had not yet crystallised. According to him, the full integration of shrine Shinto into the state apparatus did not take place until well into the twentieth century; 'State Shinto', he argues, was not fully established until the late 1930s, and was short-lived. Moreover, he has suggested that shrine Shinto was notably different from State Shinto as it was developed by government-related ideologues (Sakamoto 1994; 2000).

On the other hand, the sociologist of religion Shimazono Susumu (2007; 2009) has followed Murakami and Hardacre in arguing that it was developed from the beginning of the Meiji period onwards. Moreover, he has suggested that it has never fully disappeared, and uses the term to refer to postwar attempts to reconfigure Shinto as national ideology, reintroduce imperial rituals and symbols to the public sphere, and re-establish shrines as public, national places of worship (i.e., 'dereligionise' them). As discussed in chapter three, these trends clearly exist. They often go together with historical

revisionism, and an understanding of Shinto as the ancient, emperor-centred and non-religious national tradition (see Breen 2007; 2010a; 2010b; Mullins 2012; Takayama 1993; Teeuwen 1996a). The question, however, is whether they should refer to these trends as instances of 'State Shinto', or evade them category.

The debate on the length and characteristics of 'State Shinto' is partly semantic: whether it is considered to have begun in the 1860s or in the 1930s largely depends on how it is defined. However, it also reflects competing narratives (and corresponding political positions) regarding the responsibility of shrine priests and Shinto representatives for the development of totalitarian ideology. It is perhaps not surprising that scholars such as Sakamoto Koremaru and Nitta Hitoshi, who are considered as conservative historians or even Shinto apologists (Shimazono 2009, 96-98), tend to downplay the involvement of shrines in state affairs, pointing to other actors instead. Be that as it may, Sakamoto and Nitta are not the only ones who have point out that not all shrine priests were actively involved with, and complicit in, the establishment of 'State Shinto'. Other historians – less apologetic and politically outspoken – have also drawn attention to the fact that local shrine priests and parishioners were in many cases victims of government coercion, as they were no longer allowed to perform popular rituals or even forced to close down shrines. By doing so, these historians have drawn attention to local diversity, which was often overlooked in the standard narrative of 'State Shinto' (e.g., Breen 2000; Azegami 2009; Azegami & Teeuwen 2012).

In addition, I would argue that there is another problem with the category 'State Shinto', whether defined narrowly (as Sakamoto does) or broadly (Shimazono's suggestion). As I wrote previously (Rots 2011), the distinction made in academic discourse between 'State Shinto' and shrine Shinto can be misleading: it creates an artificial dichotomy between a political ideology seen as derived from, yet fundamentally different from Shinto, and an 'ancient' worship tradition that is perceived as essentially apolitical. That is, many contemporary Shinto authors suggest that 'State Shinto' was a distortion of 'original' Shinto, which was a peaceful tradition of nature worship and harvest rituals, far removed from the realms of politics and ideology (e.g., Picken 2002, 24-25). The common assumption is that Shinto was 'hijacked' by the totalitarian regime (as well as, perhaps, by some nationalist Shinto ideologists), thus becoming 'State Shinto', but that this was an aberration from its 'original shape', which was restored after the war.

Moreover, categorising all political elements of postwar Shinto under the category 'State Shinto', as Shimazono (2007) does, implies that shrine Shinto proper is *not political* – which is a problematic assumption, for any social organisation is inherently political, as is the very category 'religion'. The conventional category distinction 'shrine Shinto' and 'State Shinto' thus presupposes a distinction between apolitical shrine practices on the one hand, and state-induced political machinations, on the other. As such, it downplays the ideological elements inherent in various shrine practices, and the ongoing involvement of shrine priests in political affairs. It must be emphasised, therefore, that the notion of an 'imperial paradigm' introduced in this chapter does *not* equal the

traditional category 'State Shinto'. The former is a previously authoritative set of assumptions regarding the core essence of Shinto: the centrality, sacredness and transhistorical character of the imperial institution, which is essentially non-religious. The latter term refers to the institutional intertwinement of the state with shrines, and the incorporation of Shinto in state-ordained public ceremonies and dominant ideology.

In any case, whether labelled as 'State Shinto' or not, the imperial paradigm continues to be influential. In 1945, Shinto ceased to be state ideology, and was officially recategorised as 'religion', but this development has been deplored by influential members of the shrine establishment. As Breen and Teeuwen write,

> In February 1946 shrines were registered under a new law as religious juridical persons (*shūkyō hōjin*), and NAS[91] was founded as a new umbrella organisation. Rather than making a radical break with the past, NAS opted to hold on to many elements of the Meiji state cult. It retained the leadership of the Ise Shrine (…). The imperial rituals instituted in the Meiji period have a prominent place on the ritual calendar of member shrines, just as they did before the war. Perhaps most importantly, NAS inherited the Meiji view of Shinto as a non-religion. This partly explains Shinto's weakness as a religious identity. NAS sees Shinto as a 'public' ritual system open to all members of the community irrespective of their 'private' beliefs, not as an exclusivist religion. Thus, if Shinto does not function as a religion, this is primarily due to a choice made by the shrine organization itself (2010, 13).

Thus, members of the conservative establishment continuously strive for a fundamental recategorisation of Shinto – as, indeed, a non-religion. They criticise 'religion' for being a Western import not suited to the Japanese context, and the separation of state and religion for being an artificial construct imposed upon Japan by occupying forces that did not understand Japanese 'traditional culture'. Accordingly, by means of legal struggles as well as political lobby work,[92] they have consistently tried to challenge and reshape the boundaries between Shinto, the emperor, and the Japanese state (Breen 2010a; Hardacre 1989, 133-164; Mullins 2012; Teeuwen 1996a). Ironically, however, the Shinto they wish to re-establish is not very 'traditional' either, but firmly grounded in Meiji-period inventions: the association of locally practised shrine Shinto with emperor worship, the primacy of Ise as the ancestral shrine of the imperial family (see Breen 2010b), the national importance of Yasukuni as a place where war dead (anonymous soldiers as well as condemned war criminals) are enshrined (see chapter three), and the ideological role of 'Shinto' in cultivating national

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[91] NAS is an abbreviation of the National Association of Shrines, the translation used by Breen and Teeuwen to refer to Jinja Honchō. Jinja Honchō is the umbrella organisation for Shinto shrines, with which the majority of all shrines in the country (approximately 80,000, reportedly) are affiliated. Jinja Honchō uses a slightly different English translation: Association of Shinto Shrines. To avoid confusion, in this study, I use the Japanese name of the organisation.
[92] The political lobbying is done by Jinja Honchō's political sister organisation, which has close relations to the powerful conservative party LDP (Liberal Democratic Party): the Shintō Seiji Renmei, commonly abbreviated as Shinseiren, translated as Shinto Association for Spiritual Leadership. For discussions of this organisation, and its objectives and achievements, see Breen 2010a, 74-80; Mullins 2012, 71-80.

pride through education. Thus, the imperial paradigm is closely related to normative notions about Japanese identity, and remains highly politicised.

5.3   The ethnic paradigm

5.3.1   The Way of Japan

In the immediate postwar period, it was not yet clear what shape a new, depoliticised Shinto should take. In 1946, Jinja Honchō (the Association of Shinto Shrines) was founded as a general umbrella organisation. As Breen and Teeuwen have made clear, at the time

> it was far from obvious that Shinto would survive the demise of the old imperial Japan. All agreed that if Shinto was to be rescued from rapid disintegration, it needed to be reinvented. Yet the direction that Shinto would take after Japan's catastrophic defeat in the war was far from clear. The choices made by leaders of the shrine world at this critical junction reveal much about the position of shrines in society, and about the ambiguities of 'Shinto' as a conceptualization of shrine practices (2010, 5).

During the initial stage, they write, there were three 'camps' within Jinja Honchō:

> The first, led by Ashizu Uzuhiko (1909-1992), stressed Shinto's role in uniting the Japanese people under the spiritual guidance of the emperor. The second, drawing on the work of the ethnologist Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), rejected the idea that centralist imperial ideology was at the core of Shinto. Instead, this group stressed the spiritual value of local traditions of worshiping local kami, in all their centrifugal variety. The third, fronted by Orikuchi Shinobu (1887-1953), argued that if Shinto was to survive, it should be developed from an ethnic religion into a universal one. These three positions reflected radically different positions to Shinto. (…) Within NAS, Ashizu fought a hard battle to exclude the influence of Yanagita and Orikuchi from the new shrine organization. (…) Initially, Ashizu prevailed, but over time the alternatives offered by Yanagita and (to a lesser degree) Orikuchi have bounced back (ibid., 6-7).

In these debates concerning the future identity of Shinto, we can distinguish three competing paradigms. I will discuss the views of Yanagita and Orikuchi in more detail in the next sections of this chapter; now, I will focus on what would become the mainstream 'emic' understanding of Shinto in the postwar period, which I refer to as the ethnic paradigm. This paradigm draws upon but is less explicitly political than the imperial paradigm. As we have seen, the latter still exists – especially among conservative-nationalist elements within the Shinto establishment, and their political allies – but it is not as prominent as before 1945, having given way to the ethnic paradigm as the most dominant 'emic' understanding of Shinto.

According to this view, Shinto is *the* indigenous tradition of the Japanese *Volk* or *minzoku* (a concept encompassing yet transcending both 'nation' and 'race'), which has defined Japanese culture

and society since primordial times. While there are significant similarities between the two, the main difference between the imperial and ethnic paradigms is that unlike the former, the latter does not deny the religious character of Shinto *per se*. That is, among its various attributes, it is acknowledged that Shinto includes so-called 'religious' elements such as devotion, worship practices, and a belief in the existence of deities. The following definition by Joseph Kitagawa is illustrative for this approach: 'Shinto (…) is the indigenous religion of Japan', which 'may be regarded as the *ensemble* of contradictory and yet peculiarly Japanese types of religious beliefs, sentiments, and approaches, which have been shaped and conditioned by the historical experience of the Japanese people from the prehistoric period to the present' (Kitagawa 1987, 139; italics in original).

Needless to say, such a definition is fundamentally ahistorical: it essentialises 'the Japanese people' as a single entity, with a singular historical experience, and denies the diversity of beliefs, practices and experiences of the various people who have lived in the areas later configured as 'Japan'. Not surprisingly, Kitagawa was a close colleague of Eliade, whose ahistorical approach to the 'sacred' and religion (see chapter three) he shared. Significantly, however, Kitagawa is only one of the many advocates of this view, which has long been the dominant perception of Shinto among Shinto scholars and priests alike – and, as I have demonstrated, continues to be the description of Shinto used in a variety of popular and even academic introductions.

Whereas Kitagawa referred to Shinto as a religion, it must be pointed out that according to the ethnic paradigm Shinto is not considered to be *merely* a religion, akin to Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. Rather, it is believed to transcend the realm of the religious, encompassing morality, race, and national mentality. Thus, it is seen as the very essence of Japanese identity, today as much as in the ancient past. This conceptualisation of Shinto is clearly in accordance with nationalistic *nihonjinron* ideologies concerning Japan's supposed uniqueness and internal homogeneity. The approach is exemplified by the description of Shinto given in the overview of Japanese religion that was published under the auspices of the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 1972: here, it is defined as 'simply the basic value orientation of the Japanese people' (Ueda 1972, 29).

Another well-known advocate of this view – which, as Kuroda Toshio has pointed out, goes back to the work of Motoori Norinaga – is Hori Ichirō (not surprisingly, one of the editors of aforementioned overview), who has described Shinto as 'the underlying will of Japanese culture' (quoted in Kuroda 1981, 2). In his well-known article, in which he challenged the ahistorical ethnic paradigm, Kuroda summarised this view adequately: 'Even though one can speak of Shinto as a religion along with Buddhism and Taoism, "Shinto-ness" is something deeper. It is the cultural will or energy of the Japanese people, embodied in conventions that *precede* or *transcend* religion' (ibid., 2; my emphasis). Kuroda then rightly points out the continuity between this view and Meiji-period conceptualisations (ibid., 3). Whereas they differ when it comes to the question as to whether Shinto may be called 'religion', the underlying normative assumption – Shinto constitutes the basic worldview and morality of the entire Japanese nation, regardless of historical change – is similar.

As the above quotation by Kitagawa suggests, the ethnic paradigm has long been dominant, influencing scholarly accounts of Shinto in Japan as well as abroad. This is exemplified by the status of Ono Sokyō's classical essentialist introduction to the topic, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (1962), which has been widely quoted, and was long considered the main English-language introduction to the topic. The very first sentence of the introduction shows clearly his ahistorical approach: 'From time immemorial the Japanese people have believed in and worshipped kami as an expression of their native racial faith which arose in the mystic days of remote antiquity' (1962, 1). He also states that 'Shinto is more than a religious faith', then goes on to define it as 'an amalgam of attitudes, ideas, and ways of doing things that through two millenniums and more have become an integral part of the *way* of the Japanese people' (ibid., 3; italics in original). Notions of historical change seem completely absent, and Shinto is conceptualised in accordance with nationalist, even racist ideas about 'Japaneseness'. In addition, throughout the book, popular *nihonjinron* myths about 'the Japanese people' (such as their deep-rooted collectivism, their mystical love for nature, and the purity of the nation and its traditions) are employed to strengthen the core argument: the uniqueness and superiority of Shinto and, *ipso facto*, the Japanese nation as such.

5.3.2   *Asserting otherness*

In narratives adhering to the ethnic paradigm, the otherness of Shinto vis-à-vis 'ordinary' religions is often stressed, usually by means of the claim that unlike other religions Shinto has no founder, no sacred scripture, and no fixed doctrine or dogma (e.g., Ono 1962, 3). The same, incidentally, applies to a great variety of worship traditions worldwide, generally referred to as 'indigenous' religions (an erroneous label, as it presupposes that these traditions have not been transformed by and incorporated external influences); thus, such features can hardly be considered special. Nevertheless, in the case of Shinto, this argument is often employed to assert its uniqueness – the standard for 'religion' is obviously constituted by Shinto's main Other, Christianity (typically labelled 'monotheism'), rather than, say, local worship practices in other parts of Asia.

In fact, when it comes to postwar Shinto, one may question the validity of the statement itself. It may be argued that the notion that Shinto has no dogma has taken on the status of an unquestionable truth, repeated and confirmed by virtually all shrine priests and Shinto scholars, thus paradoxically becoming somewhat of a dogma itself. More concretely, it is well-known that Jinja Honchō has a department responsible for the development and dissemination of Shinto doctrine, and is in charge of the curriculum of priestly education (at the country's two Shinto universities, Kokugakuin in Tokyo and Kōgakkan in Ise). The notion that Shinto is a doctrine-free religion is therefore problematic. While it is true that Jinja Honchō does not have the same power to impose its views on member shrines as, say, the Vatican in the Catholic Church – hence, another argument often made to assert the uniqueness of Shinto is that 'unlike other religions' it has no central authority – the organisation does in fact have

considerable power over its member shrines, apparently including the power to fire shrine priests [see Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 207-208]). It may therefore be argued that, while not possessing the same absolute power as the Holy See, Jinja Honchō has actively tried to become a central authority within the shrine world and structurally attempts to influence the beliefs and opinions of the Shinto clergy. As a matter of fact, such a central authority is non-existent in many branches of Reformed and Evangelical Protestantism, as well as in Sunni Islam.

Likewise, the argument that Shinto has no sacred scripture may be questioned, for it does have texts with canonical status – some used for ritual purposes, some for ideological – the use and status of which are quite unlike the Bible or the Quran, but perhaps not so much unlike textual practices in Buddhism or Hinduism. As for the argument that Shinto has no single historical or mythological founder, that is arguably true – yet, that in itself does not say anything about its age or origin. In practice, however, the claim that Shinto has no founder often goes together with the myth that Shinto goes back to 'ancient times'. The implication is clear: Shinto was not founded (i.e., constructed) by a single person, but it arose naturally from the ancient 'Japanese' people's relation to their physical environment, the land of 'Japan'. Thus, both 'Shinto' and the modern nation state 'Japan' are discursively dehistoricised and naturalised: neither is seen as created, as both are conceived as natural, *sui generis* entities. Indeed, Sonoda Minoru – a scholar and priest schooled in the ethnic paradigm, who later became one of the main advocates of the environmentalist paradigm, which I will discuss in the next chapter – defines Shinto as a 'natural religion' that was 'formed spontaneously' (1987, 3).

Finally, there is one more defining aspect of the ethnic paradigm that should be pointed out: a stress on the fundamental otherness not only of Shinto as a tradition, but also of its deities, *kami*. It has become somewhat of a truism in Shinto discourse that *kami* should not be referred to as 'gods' – for 'god', it is often argued, is a 'Western' term not suitable to the Japanese context. As I discussed in my introduction, however, the term 'gods' (not to be confused with 'God') is a generic term used to refer to a wide variety of supernatural creatures in different cultures and historical periods. There are no compelling reasons not to use the term when discussing *kami*, other than asserting Shinto's essential otherness vis-à-vis 'the West' (i.e., identity politics).

In sum, the ethnic paradigm can be characterised by the following aspects. First, it asserts the transhistorical, *sui generis* character of Shinto, thus naturalising it. Second, while not denying the existence of religious elements in Shinto *per se*, it postulates that Shinto is much more than 'merely' a religion: it is the defining essence of the Japanese nation. Thus, it claims that there is an existential correlation between Shinto and 'the' Japanese nation, which is likewise dehistoricised. Third, consequently, it reifies that nation as a single, unitary entity, thus denying historical or spatial diversity. And fourth, it asserts the uniqueness of Shinto (and its deities, *kami*) vis-à-vis the other religions in the world, based on some questionable assumptions regarding the nature of Shinto. However, while the ethnic paradigm has long been dominant, there are some other conceptualisations of Shinto that

challenge, nuance, and complement aspects of this view; these may be conceived of as alternative paradigms. I will now move on to discuss them in more detail.

5.4   The local paradigm

As said, while the ethnic paradigm has been dominant, there are alternative conceptualisations of Shinto that have achieved paradigmatic status – if not in the curricula of Shinto universities or in the editorial board of *Jinja shinpō* (the weekly newspaper published by Jinja Honchō), at least among circles of Shinto scholars and within the various religious movements that define themselves as Shinto. While equally essentialist – i.e., their underlying assumption is that Shinto has a core essence not susceptible to historical change – they typically resist the explicit nationalism and emperor-centrism that characterises the imperial and ethnic paradigms. I have distinguished three alternative paradigms, which I refer to as the local paradigm, the universal paradigm, and the spiritual paradigm.

The first two are represented by, respectively, the positions of Yanagita Kunio and Orikuchi Shinobu in the early-postwar debates on Shinto's future direction, discussed previously. As Breen and Teeuwen pointed out, while the notion of a unified ethnic tradition has long taken precedence, 'over time the alternatives offered by Yanagita and (to a lesser degree) Orikuchi have bounced back' (2010, 7). Indeed, it may be argued that in contemporary discourse on Shinto, these alternative visions have gained significant popularity, as illustrated by the fact that in recent popular works on Shinto Yanagita and Orikuchi are quoted often. In addition, the Eliadean view that Shinto is a spiritual or mystical tradition that cannot be grasped rationally but only experientially or intuitively has gained significant ground, to the point that it has taken on paradigmatic status. As these three paradigms continue to coexist and shape popular understandings of Shinto, including contemporary environmentalist conceptualisations, I will briefly discuss each of them.

Yanagita Kunio is well known for being the founder of *minzokugaku*, an academic discipline usually referred to in English as 'folklore studies' – or, alternatively, as 'native ethnology' (see Ivy 1995, 66 n. 1). In the first half of the twentieth century, he conducted research on rural culture, collecting so-called 'folktales' and studying local dialects. For instance, one of his best-known works, *The Legends of Tōno* (*Tōno monogatari*), is a compilation of various stories about supernatural creatures (*yōkai*) from Tōno, a rural town in Iwate prefecture (Yanagita 2008). His project was not unlike that of the Grimm brothers in Germany: both are characterised by the romantic-nationalist assumption that in rural stories and cultural practices the 'original' spirit of the nation is preserved and can be rediscovered (see Hawthorne 2006, 165-170). In addition, Yanagita's work displays a strong concern for the loss of local diversity as a result of modernisation, and a corresponding nostalgia for a 'traditional' rural Japan believed to be rapidly disappearing. Hence, in later decades, '[s]cholars interested in Yanagita [saw] in him their model who (…) felt the need to develop a fundamental critique of modern culture by unearthing the primeval ethos of the Japanese' (Takayanagi 1974, 330).

As Marilyn Ivy (1995) has demonstrated, this nostalgic concern for the loss of 'traditional' culture is a central recurring trope in twentieth-century Japan. The discourse of decay, in which 'rapidly changing' modern urban life is juxtaposed with idealised rural traditions supposedly going back to primordial times yet currently threatened by extinction, has become an integral part of modern imaginations of the nation. Thus, it may be argued that, paradoxically, reified 'folk'/'rural'/'local' culture is a product of modernity itself. Idealised notions of a 'disappearing' rural diversity and modern constructions of nationhood are two sides of the same coin. Following De Certeau, Ivy argues that the notion of loss and disappearance, and the corresponding claim of the urgency of conservation, are central to the very enterprise of ethnology: 'the disappearance of the object – whether newly imagined as the folk, the community, authentic voice, or tradition itself – is necessary for its ghostly reappearance in an authoritatively rendered text. The object does not exist outside its own disappearance. (…) There is always a temporal structure of deferral, of loss and recovery, across which the fantasy of folklore, of ethnography, stretches' (ibid., 67).

According to Yanagita, the essence of Shinto is not to be found in ideological abstractions, but rather in rural practices, which have supposedly remained unchanged since ancient times. As one later interpreter has written,

> [Yanagita] distinguishes between Shinto as the indigenous faith (*koyū shinkō*) of Japan, preserved by the common people from prehistoric times to the present, and the Shinto represented by Shinto theologians and historians. The latter, he maintains, is a history of doctrines created by intellectuals; it differs from the history of the indigenous faith that informs the common man (1962, 332-333). Yanagita placed a high value on Motoori Norinaga's view of kokugaku ('national learning'), but criticized him for his selection of materials, saying, 'It is regrettable that he spent his whole life studying only the classics' (1964, 301). Yanagita's determination to make the popular traditions of the common man the material of his study amounts to a strong criticism against so-called intellectual historians and scholars of religion who rely solely on written materials and neglect the common man (Mori 1980, 93-94).

While his critique of the textual, intellectual bias in the study of religion (including but not limited to Shinto) continues to be relevant, Yanagita himself subscribed to a particular normative understanding of Shinto, producing another abstract conceptualisation alongside those that already existed. Instead of classical mythology, he asserted that its essence could be found in the ritual practices and beliefs of 'ordinary men'. However, he did not question the assumption that there was such a thing as an underlying transhistorical core essence. In fact, according to Yanagita, paradoxically it was in the diversity of local practices that the essential unitary character of the nation could be found:

> Though Yanagita acknowledged cultural diversity within Japan during the early stages of his career, he later turned to the articulation of a unifying essence for the Japanese 'mainstream'

population. The *jōmin*, or 'ordinary folk', as he called them, lived in harmonious rural villages, engaged in irrigated rice cultivation, and venerated their ancestors. Yanagita appears to have intended this idyllic image in part as a veiled critique of modernizing society (…). It was co-opted, however, by nationalist ideologues in seeking to foster a sense of unity among the people and allegiance to the state, as symbolized by the emperor. Whatever his original intentions, Yanagita has been a major influence on Japan's recent intellectual history, inspiring any number of *nihonjinron* assertions (Schnell & Hashimoto 2012, 107).

Thus, Yanagita was not opposed to nationalism per se; on the contrary, he seems to have uncritically accepted the notion of a singular, primordial Japanese identity. He was critical, however, of 'State Shinto' as it was developed in prewar Japan, for it '[exploited] the religious traditions of ordinary people' (Mori 1980, 106). In addition, he

opposed the state policy that called for amalgamating small local shrines and incorporating all shrines into a single hierarchy (1962, 39). This policy rested on the officially promoted idea that Shinto was not a religion but an institution for the ritual expression of patriotic feeling. Yanagita countered this idea, maintaining that the relationship between the people and the shrines is unmistakably religious (1962, 431-432) (Mori 1980, 107).[93]

Yanagita's scholarly yet romantic interest in 'traditional' local practices as remnants of a pure, original, pre-Meiji Shinto may not have been influential enough to set the agenda of Jinja Honchō in the immediate postwar period, it has nonetheless regained significant popularity from the 1970s onwards (Takayanagi 1974, 329). Not coincidentally, this resurgence of interest in *minzokugaku* took place around the same time as a new wave of rural nostalgia, which led to the nationwide conservation – or, perhaps, (re)construction – and commodification of 'traditional' rural villages, so-called *furusato* (Moon 1997; Robertson 1988; Schnell 2005). In the 1980s and '90s, this rural nostalgia often went hand in hand with a discourse on 'internationalisation' (*kokusaika*) that paradoxically came down to a reification of the nation as the primary unit defining one's culture and identity, and a reassertion of the uniqueness of Japanese culture (i.e., the Japanese nation – in this discourse, the two are often implicitly equated) vis-à-vis the other cultures in the world (Robertson 1998; cf. Ivy 1995, 2-4).

Significantly, in recent years, this rural nostalgia has been coupled with environmentalist discourse, and given rise to a nationwide movement for the conservation and revitalisation of *satoyama* – idealised hybrid nature-culture landscapes supposedly characterising premodern Japan. I will discuss this topic in more detail in chapter nine. Significantly, in addition to conservation practices, the return of the local paradigm has contributed to a new academic interest in local diversity not only among ethnologists, but also among historians of religion and Shinto scholars. For instance,

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[93] In his celebration of local diversity, and opposition to the 'shrine merger movement' (*jinja gōshi* or *jinja gappei*, a policy implemented in 1906) referred to in this quotation, Yanagita Kunio resembles the scientist-activist Minakata Kumagusu, who was also strongly opposed to this policy. It is no coincidence that in contemporary texts on Shinto, they are often mentioned together. I will discuss Minakata in more detail in chapter seven.

in recent years, the latter have displayed an interest in local shrine histories rather than interpretations of 'State Shinto' as a top-down process (e.g., Ambros 2008; Azegami 2009; Sakurai 2010; Thal 2005). Thus, the local paradigm is alive and well – reflected not only in scholarship, but also in a variety of institutional and discursive practices.

5.5   The universal paradigm

5.5.1   *Early attempts: Orikuchi and Ogasawara*

For all their differences, the non-religious, ethnic and local paradigms have one important similarity: the assumption that there is an fundamental connection between Shinto, however conceptualised, and the Japanese nation. This is not the case for the universal paradigm. That is, while it is recognised that Shinto has emerged and developed in Japan, representatives of this paradigm typically assert that Shinto has (potential) relevance not only for Japanese people, but also abroad. According to them, Shinto is, or should become, a 'world religion' – that is, a religion with universal applicability and appeal. This view is perhaps more marginal today than the local or ethnic paradigm. However, it can be said to constitute a significant sub-current in the modern history of (conceptualisations of) Shinto. Besides, there are some indications that this paradigm is currently gaining new popularity, and is in the process of being revitalised. This is not necessarily the case for the Japanese shrine world, where the existential intertwinement of the Japanese nation and Shinto continues to be the predominant axiom; but, as we shall see, the universal paradigm is advocated by a number of popular authors and priests abroad, as well as by followers of a variety of so-called 'new religions' defining themselves as 'Shinto'.

As we have seen, Breen and Teeuwen associate the idea that Shinto should become a religion with universal appeal and relevance with Orikuchi Shinobu. Unfortunately, they do not elaborate further upon this topic. Like Yanagita, by whom he was influenced, Orikuchi was an ethnologist interested in Japanese 'folklore', rural traditions and stories. Unlike Yanagita, however, he was also strongly interested in classical texts; for instance, he conducted research on the *Man'yōshū*, an eighth-century anthology of classical poetry believed by him and his followers to contain important clues about ancient 'Shinto'. In his later career, he became a professor at Kokugakuin University, where he taught introductory courses on Shinto (Tsushiro 2006a). Orikuchi was no less of a cultural essentialist than Yanagita, and he believed that both Shinto and the imperial institution were ancient traditions intimately connected with the Japanese nation. However, unlike most of his colleagues, he also believed that in the postwar period Shinto should be reconfigured as a religion open to all humankind (Orikuchi 2012).

Orikuchi was not the first to suggest that Shinto could be transformed from an ethnic tradition into a world religion. In the prewar period, a significant number of shrines was built in overseas

occupied areas, in particular Korea and Taiwan. Generally speaking, these were closely associated with imperial rule and ideology; i.e., with 'State Shinto' (Murakami 1970, 192-195). It has been argued, however, that there were also attempts to develop Shinto into a universal religion that were not directly affiliated with imperial rule and oppression: one such example was the work of the Shinto scholar and missionary Ogasawara Shōzō (1892-1970) (see K. Suga 2010). Ogasawara first made attempts to build a shrine in Brazil, after which he developed his ideas on how to spread Shinto in Japan's overseas colonies.

In his article on Ogasawara's ideas and achievements, Suga is critical of earlier State Shinto scholarship (in particular, Murakami 1970) for equating all Shinto shrines in the colonies with imperial ideology and oppression, suggesting that Ogasawara's 'pantheistic' and 'pluralistic' understanding of Shinto – which allowed for a variety of ritual traditions abroad to be redefined as such – is very different from 'State Shinto'. While his article provides a useful overview of the discussion of shrines outside Japan, as well as the ideas of Ogasawara, I find his central argument problematic. As the history of Christian mission makes clear, religious institutions and ideologies have often been embedded within colonial power structures - not only to legitimise inequality, exploitation and violence, but also to discipline people and make them accept colonial rule. Thus, the reappropriation of various local traditions into an institutional and theological 'Shinto' framework can be a strategy for control far more effective than any forced emperor worship. Suga is highly positive of Ogasawara's 'enthusiasm to make shrine Shinto a universal (world) religion' (2010, 47), and even states that 'Ogasawara's religious thought provides some indication of Shinto's potential to contribute toward a pluralistic society by turning its polytheistic characteristics to its advantage' (ibid., 67). However, he completely overlooks the political subtexts underlying Ogasawara's missionary zeal, as illustrated by the latter's evidently imperialist statement that 'whenever Japanese people develop overseas areas, first of all we should establish a shrine and express to the deities our gratitude for their grace; we should strive in our business of pioneering and planting under the conviction of our consent with deities. This is the mandate of our ancestral deities, and the universal mission of us, the Japanese nation' (in K. Suga 2010, 62). As a matter of fact, there are some clear similarities between Ogasawara's 'universal' Shinto, and missionary rhetoric developed by some of his Christian nationalist contemporaries: they all believed that the Japanese had a 'divine mission' to fulfil, which included the annexation of other parts of Asia (see Rots 2010; 2012a, 315-327). Needless to say, such beliefs can have profound political significance.

5.5.2 *Shinto 'new religions'*

The universal paradigm is particularly popular among members of so-called 'sect Shinto' organisations, also referred to as 'new religions'. In fact, there is nothing particularly 'new' about the existence of popular charismatic movements combining healing practices with prophecy, mediumship

(i.e., the communication of a deity or ancestral spirit's messages to humans) and politically subversive utopian and millenarian promises of world renewal (*yonaoshi*). Such movements existed in the Kamakura period (Nichiren Buddhism is the best-known example) as well as in the Muromachi and Edo periods (cf. Davis 1992, 45-81). However, in the Meiji period, these movements were institutionalised and developed in hitherto unknown ways. There were several reasons for this. First, because of the increasing national integration as a result of the development of new infrastructure and mass media, charismatic leaders were able to attract followers outside their own region, acquiring national popularity. For instance, Konkōkyō – a popular movement surrounding an evil spirit-turned-benevolent deity, founded in 1859 by a charismatic preacher from Okayama prefecture – rapidly managed to attract followers and established branch churches throughout the country, in ways that had not been possible a century before. The same applies to a slightly earlier movement, Kurozumikyō (founded in 1846),[94] and a later one, Ōmoto (founded in 1892). The leader of the latter, Deguchi Onisaburō (1871-1948), made inventive use of the latest communication technologies to attract followers nationwide (Stalker 2008).

Second, Meiji-period religious movements not only incorporated existing local traditions and deities, they were also modelled after Christian churches. Thus, they established a system of local and regional 'churches' (*kyōkai*) where members could come together for worship services, including sermons and singing. They generally referred to their belief systems as 'monotheistic', although in fact most of them adopted henotheistic theologies (singling out one particular deity as the supreme God, while seeing other deities as manifestations of that one God). In addition, some of them adopted Christian soteriological and millenarian models, promising apocalyptic destruction, salvation and, ultimately, a perfect new world.

Third, the new legislation concerning 'religion' changed the socio-political status of these groups. If they wished to continue their 'religious' activities – proselytisation, healing, preaching and so on – they had to be registered as *shūkyō*, private religions, membership of which was a matter of personal choice. Thus, despite their historical connection to particular *kami* and, in some cases, shrine worship traditions, they were not configured as 'Shinto' – which, after all, was redefined as a public 'non-religion' for the benefit of the nation and its divine imperial family, participation in which was mandatory. For the groups that conceived of themselves as religious, and did not want to be incorporated into the state cult, a new category was created: 'sect Shinto' (*kyōha shintō*, also referred to as *shūha shintō*).[95] This category included newly developed charismatic movements such as Konkōkyō, Kurozumikyō and Tenrikyō (but, until the end of war, not Ōmoto, which was severely persecuted by the state). It also included a number of movements associated with particular pilgrimage sites and worship traditions that did not want to become part of the newly developed 'Shinto', but

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[94] Kurozumikyō is fairly well-known outside Japan thanks to Helen Hardacre's classical study of the movement. See Hardacre 1986.
[95] For a discussion of the formation of the category 'sect Shinto', see Inoue 2002.

chose to become 'religions' in order to maintain their distinctive traditions (for example, Ontakekyō and Izumo Ōyashirokyō). These religious organisations typically define themselves as 'Shinto'. In the prewar period, they organised themselves in the Sect Shinto League (Kyōha Shintō Rengōkai), an organisation that still exists today even though its composition has changed, today including Ōmoto but not Tenrikyō (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 211-212).

In addition, there is a number of new religions established in the postwar period that are referred to as 'Shinto-derived new religions' (*shintōkei shinshūkyō*). Most of them are from the 'Ōmoto lineage', i.e., the group of religions influenced by the beliefs and practices of Ōmoto. Several of these groups claim to possess secret knowledge going back to ancient times, referred to as *koshintō* ('old Shinto') – a mythical construction, influenced by nineteenth-century European theosophical and anthroposophical beliefs as much as by *kokugaku* fantasies. They typically combine promises of spiritual salvation and millenarian regeneration with a variety of praying and healing practices, as well as social activism, organic agriculture, investment in 'traditional' Japanese arts, and outspoken opposition to organ transplantation. Examples include Sekai Kyūseikyō, Seichō no Ie, Ananaikyō, Worldmate and Sūkyō Mahikari. Whether or not all these movements should be categorised as 'Shinto' may be subject to debate. As I do not subscribe to any normative or essentialist definition of Shinto, I am in no position to decide what does and does not qualify as such. In any case, there is a large, diffuse variety of organisations that, while being significantly different from 'standard' shrines (but then, who decides the standard), lay claim to the 'true' Shinto tradition as much as Jinja Honchō does. Thus, the boundaries of the category Shinto are as unclear and contested as ever.[96]

It is precisely in these 'borderlands' of Shinto, among these religious movements, that the universal paradigm is at its most pronounced. Already in the prewar period, some of them established overseas mission activities and founded shrines. Izumo Ōyashirokyō, for instance, founded a shrine and mission organisation in Hawaii in 1906. Religions such as Tenrikyō, Konkōkyō, Ōmoto, Seichō no Ie and Sekai Kyūseikyō have all employed foreign mission activities. The latter two groups are well-known for having attracted significant numbers of followers in Brazil; others have been active in Europe, the US, Australia, Southeast Asia and Africa, with varying degrees of success (see Clarke 2000). The international orientation of these religions does not make them disregard their Japanese cultural identity, however. On the contrary, some of them are known for their conservative-nationalistic stances, their interest in preserving and revitalising 'traditional Japanese culture' such as *ikebana* and tea ceremony, or even, as in the case of Seichō no Ie, their strong support for the imperial family. Yet, unlike proponents of the ethnic paradigm asserting that Shinto is something intrinsically Japanese, the essence of which cannot be grasped by foreigners, they maintain that this ancient

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[96] For an extensive, remarkably all-inclusive overview of these movements, see Kokugakuin University's online *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, in particular the section on 'modern sectarian groups' (on http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/category.php?categoryID=35; last accessed January 22, 2013). For more in-depth discussions of some of these movements, see Prohl 2006; Staemmler 2009; Staemmler & Dehn 2011; Stalker 2008.

Japanese tradition – or, more precisely, their interpretation of it – has global significance. Accordingly, they believe that it is their task to share this tradition, and its soteriological potential, with the world.

Thus, 'sect Shinto' organisations and 'Shinto-derived new religions' not only proselytise, they are also active in a variety of charity activities, and set up development programs abroad. To name but one example: Ananaikyō, an Ōmoto-derived religion founded in 1949, has set up the international development organisation called Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA; pronounced and transcribed as *oisuka* in Japanese), which has currently projects in around thirty countries focusing on topics such as (organic) agricultural development, reforestation and environmental education.[97] OISCA's current president, Nakano Yoshiko (born 1933), is the adopted daughter of Ananaikyō's founder Nakano Yonosuke (1887-1974) and succeeded him as leader of the movement; she has now been succeeded by another family member (Tsushiro 2005).[98] Organisations such as OISCA are strongly aware of their Japanese heritage, and believe that Japan has a special mission to fulfil in bringing peace and prosperity to other nations of the world. Thus, universalist though its agenda is, the movement is also strikingly nationalistic: the supposedly uniquely Japanese human-nature coexistence (*kyōsei*), and the ancient Shinto tradition responsible for preserving this mentality, are seen as guiding principles in solving environmental problems and poverty worldwide.

Such, indeed, was the message delivered by Nakano Yoshiko during her presentation at a symposium on Shinto and the environment, organised by the Shintō Kokusai Gakkai (International Shinto Foundation) in 2009 (Nakano 2010). Nakano's participation in this event can be considered significant. Founded in 1994, the International Shinto Foundation has constituted a prominent alternative Shinto voice, and has actively supported research on and dissemination of knowledge about Shinto abroad. Its founder, Fukami Tōshū (born 1951), is also the founder and leader of Worldmate, another 'Shinto-derived' new religion.[99] Even though it primarily caters for Japanese audiences, the ISF does have an office in New York organising Shinto activities there, sponsors a chairs at the University of California in Santa Barbara, and has organised several conferences abroad.[100] Thus, like

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[97] For an overview of these projects, see the website: http://www.oisca-international.org/default.aspx (last accessed: January 22, 2013).

[98] This family-based organisational structure corresponds to a common pattern in Japanese (new) religious movements, where leaders are often succeeded by family members. This way, as Mark Mullins puts it, 'the founder's charisma [is] institutionalized along the lines of the traditional household (*ie*) system' (1998, 187). Not surprisingly, then, OISCA's president, executive vice president and vice president are all Nakano family members (http://www.oisca-international.org/profile/default.aspx; last accessed: January 22, 2013).

[99] Fukami was influenced by Sekai Kyūseikyō and Ōmoto, then set up his own religious movement, creatively combining spirit healing with the sale of protective objects, and claiming esoteric 'ancient Jewish' knowledge. The movement is said to have approximately 30,000 members, and have a strong proselytising character (Inoue 2006; cf. Prohl 2006). Worldmate clearly belongs to 'the Ōmoto family', sharing some key characteristics with other religious movements in this family: a focus on spiritual healing techniques, involvement in development projects (the Worldmate website contains information about a hospital and an orphanage set up in Cambodia), and an apparent interest in environmental issues (for instance, every month, Worldmate volunteers clean litter on and around Mount Fuji). See http://www.worldmate.or.jp/index.html (last accessed: February 19, 2013).

[100] Technically speaking, the US-based International Shinto Foundation is now institutionally independent from the Japanese organisation, called Shintō Kokusai Gakkai. Reportedly, the separation of the Japanese and the

organisations such as Sekai Kyūseikyō and OISCA, it has a strong international orientation and agenda, representing a contemporary version of the universalist paradigm. As we shall see, it has also been active in the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm.

Finally, it is worth noting in this context that in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the popularity of Shinto abroad. For a long time, Shinto was not known very well outside Japan; if it was, it was often associated with Japanese imperialism. This has changed in the past years. Not only has there been an increase in academic studies of Shinto and *kami* worship, as we have seen, there has also been an increase in the number of English-language books on Shinto. Some of these describe Shinto as a set of spiritual techniques perfectly suitable for 'Westerners' looking for an alternative, 'non-dogmatic' tradition of nature worship (Picken 2002; Rankin 2010; Yamakage 2006). As these books without exception place strong emphasis on nature, I will discuss some of them in more detail in the next chapter. For now, it is worth noting that they are significant not only because they contribute to the notion of Shinto as an ancient nature religion, but also because they constitute attempts by non-Japanese authors to reinterpret and reappropriate Shinto in such a way that it becomes detached from both the Japanese nation and the shrine establishment. When reading these recent popular books, one cannot help but get the impression that Shinto may gradually be replacing 'Zen' as the quintessentially Japanese spirituality, incorporating corresponding notions of Japanese aesthetics, simplicity, and mystical experiences.[101]

The spread of Shinto abroad is not limited to bookstores, however. In addition to worship centres abroad belonging to the aforementioned religious movements, in recent years several shrines have been founded outside Japan. Unlike previous attempts to build shrines abroad, they were not built by Japanese, nor do they cater primarily to Japanese migrants. The most famous one is probably the Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America (a subsidiary shrine of Tsubaki Ōkami Yashiro in Mie prefecture) in the state of Washington (US), which is run by the American Shinto priest Koichi Barrish. The institution has close links with the aikido movement, and accordingly seems to be strongly influenced by the Ōmoto heritage.[102] Another example is the Amsterdam-based Japanese Dutch Shinzen Foundation, run by the Dutch priest Paul de Leeuw, who was ordained in Yamakage Shinto, a new religion derived from Ontakekyō that claims to possess ancient *koshintō* knowledge.[103] Thus, by means of written publications as well as a variety of ritual and cultural activities, non-Japanese actors

'international' branch of the organisation was a tactic for separating scholarly activities from more 'religious' PR activities. In reality, however, the two organisations are closely intertwined.

[101] This image of Zen was highly influenced by the ideas of D. T. Suzuki (e.g., Suzuki 1959), which continue to be popular today. Much has been written about this idealised, 'Orientalist' image of Zen, and I will refrain from repeating the discussion here. See for instance Cox 2003.

[102] See http://www.tsubakishrine.org/history/index.html (last accessed: 22 January 2013).

[103] For more information on this Dutch Shinto organisation, see http://shinto.nl/about_us.htm (last accessed: January 22, 2013). For an overview of Yamakage Shinto, see Tsushiro 2006b. Yamakage Motohisa, the current leader of the movement, is a prolific writer on a variety of topics. One of his books, discussing Yamakage Shinto's belief system and spiritual techniques, has been translated into English (Yamakage 2006). Not surprisingly, his works containing his radically anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have not (e.g., Yamakage 1985; cf. Goodman & Miyazawa 2000).

are contributing to the internationalisation of Shinto and its spread abroad – however slowly, and however marginal their activities may seem in the eyes of the Japanese mainstream shrine establishment.

5.6   The spiritual paradigm

Finally, there is a fifth approach to Shinto, which I refer to as the spiritual paradigm. It is perhaps not as easily recognisable and clearly demarcated as the other paradigms, as notions of Shinto as a spiritual tradition can and have been combined with each of the ethnic, local, and universal paradigms. Nevertheless, I have decided to classify this as a separate paradigm, as I believe it constitutes a significant, distinctive sub-current in modern representations of Shinto that has acquired paradigmatic status within some circles of Shinto scholars and practitioners. This paradigm comes down to the idea that the core essence of Shinto cannot be known through historical inquiry, intellectual reflection, or ideological reasoning. According to this view, Shinto is fundamentally a non-rational religion that can only be known experientially – an experience that is pre-reflexive, non-discursive, and emotionally moving. For instance, during one of my interviews I talked to a shrine officially who confirmed my impression that there are many different definitions of Shinto, but added that, ultimately, these do not matter – for Shinto is an 'intuitive religion' (*chokkan shūkyō*) that can never be truly understood by words alone, but must be grasped intuitively (interview with a shrine official, February 2011; cf. Yamamura 2011, 51).

I refer to this understanding of Shinto as the 'spiritual paradigm'. That does not mean I endorse the term 'spirituality' as an analytical concept, however, for it is employed in many different ways and is by no means unambiguous, in English nor in Japanese (where it is referred to as *reisei*, *seishin* or *supirichuariti*). But then, it may be exactly this lack of a clearly defined substance that gives the term its ideological potential – for the term is widely used and understood, but hardly reflected upon, let alone historicised. 'Spirituality' is a term signifying a variety of other-world-oriented beliefs and practices – including such things as experiences of the divine, communication with supernatural beings, meditation practices, esoteric ancestry theories and so on – that are not usually considered to be subject to ideology or historical change. 'Religion' may have been configured as politics' Other (Paramore 2010), it is still regularly associated with institutional power, corruption and political 'contamination', especially in Japan. 'Spirituality', on the other hand, is often conceptualised as the essence of religion – communication with and experiences of the divine, however shaped – without its institutions, dogmas and, indeed, politics. As an 'emic' category employed for purposes of academic and religious identity politics, therefore, the term 'spiritual' is highly relevant.

When the spiritual paradigm is combined with the ethnic paradigm, this often leads to the assumption that (most) foreigners/'Westerners' (*gaikokujin*, respectively *seiyōjin*) do not understand what Shinto 'really' is about, as 'they' are rational and analytical, whereas Japanese are allegedly

intuitive, sensitive and emotional, rather than rational. Thus, a classical Orientalist myth is reemployed, and used as a strategy for asserting Shinto's essential otherness and incomprehensible nature. Hence, this notion of Shinto as an 'intuitive religion', the essence of which can only be known through spiritual experience, is clearly compatible with the aforementioned notion of Shinto as a tradition that does not have any fixed dogma or doctrine.

However, it may also be combined with the universal paradigm: the assumption that 'Westerners' are generally incapable of Shinto-type spiritual experiences then gives way to the argument that they may well (re)learn this, if only they overcome the alienation from nature supposedly resulting from 'their' Christian worldview. Accordingly, one sometimes comes across the argument that Shinto is similar to other worship traditions – in particular, those of the Native Americans and those of the ancient Celts, not surprisingly two traditions that have been reinvented and popularised by contemporary followers of 'neopaganism' and 'New Age' –[104] or even that each nation has had its own version of Shinto. However, such statements are often accompanied by the assertion that, in other countries, such 'nature religions' have been marginalised, and the nature they (used to) worship destroyed. Japan, it is argued, is the only country where an 'ancient nature religion' has survived as a central part of contemporary society (e.g., Yamamura 2011, 54-55).

Whether the 'Shinto' spiritual experience is seen as uniquely Japanese or potentially universal, the accompanying rhetoric is the same: critique on the ideological aspects of 'Shinto', on the political involvement of shrine priests and other Shinto actors, or on the historical formation of the category and its corresponding myths is easily discredited by referring to the critic's lack of understanding, supposedly due to his or her overtly rational approach and lack of spiritual sensitivity. Thus, the tradition can be dissociated discursively from 'politics' and 'ideology', which are dismissed as external and peripheral to the spiritual essence, which is essentially apolitical. This is a well-established discursive strategy in religion and religious studies, as Robert Sharf (1998) has demonstrated, and Shinto is no exception.

The following argument by Stuart Picken is illustrative for this combination of the universal and spiritual paradigms, and shows how easily the notion of Shinto as an ancient spiritual tradition can be used to deny its political aspects:

> Sadly, the first image a Westerner may have of Shinto was shaped by the nationalistic propaganda employed by both sides of the Pacific during World War II. State Shinto, as it is called to differentiate itself from the ancient way, hijacked the natural religion of Shinto (…). Close to sixty years after the war, in the new millennium, Shinto has slowly emerged from the gloom of misunderstanding. Apart from a few unenlightened cynics who refuse to believe even the most basic evidence to the contrary, Shinto is returning to its origins and trying again to become what it always was, the spiritual roots of the Japanese people. This is the Shinto I wish you to find – the Shinto whose true characteristics are *caught rather than taught* – for

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[104] For a general discussion of these movements, see Hanegraaff 1998.

this is the Shinto that can revitalize the natural aspects of human spirituality by teaching us how the world is seen with nature by our guide (2002, 24-25; my emphasis).

The implications are clear. First, 'State Shinto' is presented as an evil Trojan horse, that invaded and took over the 'natural' – i.e., apolitical – religion Shinto, seen as a passive victim that was not to blame for any involvement with imperialist ideology. Second, 'true' and 'original' Shinto constitutes the 'spiritual roots' of the Japanese people. Thus, Shinto is conceived of as a singular spiritual (rather than, say, ritual, cultural or ideological) tradition, and 'the' Japanese people are essentialised and dehistoricised in an all-too-familiar way.

Third, it is claimed that Shinto is now returning to these roots; according to the author, there is 'basic evidence' for this, but unfortunately he does not provide his readers with this. He does, however, call people expressing scepticism vis-à-vis this type of apolitical and ahistorical reinterpretations 'unenlightened cynics', suggesting that they have not reached 'enlightenment' yet and therefore fail to see the signs of the new age. This is a clear example of the rhetoric of religious experience mentioned above – the dismissal of disagreeing voices by suggesting that they are simply ignorant when it comes to matters of spiritual truth. Fourth, directly related to the previous point, Shinto is 'caught rather than taught' – that is, it has to be understood intuitively and experientially, not by means of intellectual study. And fifth, Japanese though its origins may be, Shinto is said to provide invaluable spiritual lessons for today's world. The spiritual paradigm and the universal paradigm are often combined in this way – not only in popular introductions as the one quoted above, but also by various 'sect Shinto' organisations and 'new religions', whose discourse is very similar.

The spiritual paradigm can also be combined with the local paradigm, giving way to the belief that the essence of Shinto lies in mystical, spiritual practices that are best preserved in rural and mountainous areas. These include various ascetic practices (*shugyō*), such as *misogi* (praying under a waterfall) and fasting; 'shamanism', i.e., local traditions of spirit mediation, such as those existing in Tohoku (Mount Iwaki and Mount Osore) and the Ryukyu islands; various 'animistic' beliefs and practices; mountain worship traditions (*shugendō*) and pilgrimage; et cetera. One well-known contemporary representative of the spiritual paradigm who is interested in these 'local' practices is Kamata Tōji, whose ideas I have already discussed in chapter three. Kamata has written a number of books on Shinto, as well as on pilgrimage and sacred places (2000b; 2008; 2011). According to him, the essence of Shinto lies in the intuitive, pre-discursive awareness of the sacred power present at these places. Accordingly, in order to grasp this essence, one needs to go there, feel the energy and take part in ascetic and other devotional practices. Kamata sees modern 'State Shinto' as an invention and a distortion of these spiritual traditions, and argues for a revitalisation of *shinbutsu shūgō* beliefs and practices (e.g., 2000b, 89-107). Likewise, the contemporary trend to define shrines as 'powerspots' with strong spiritual energy may be seen as a reinterpretation of Shinto that is in accordance with the spiritual paradigm. As discussed in chapter three, notions of shrines as places with some sort of

'cosmic power' providing all sorts of benefits to visitors are ubiquitous in today's 'powerspot' discourse.

As we shall see, the ideas of authors such as Kamata Tōji – as well as his fellow 'spiritual intellectuals', Umehara Takeshi, Yamaori Tetsuo and Nakazawa Shin'ichi (born 1950) – have come to exercise significant influence upon the discourse on Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship, suggesting that it provides valuable, even crucial resources for overcoming the global environmental crisis. Indeed, they have become some of the most prominent advocates of this view, thus contributing to the development of a new paradigm for conceptualising 'Shinto'. I refer to this as the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm', and it is to this paradigm that I will now turn.

6.   THE SHINTO ENVIRONMENTALIST PARADIGM

6.1   Shinto: a nature religion?

6.1.1   Shinto and the natural environment

In a recent book discussing contemporary issues and challenges in shrine Shinto, journalist Yamamura Akiyoshi wrote as follows: 'Environmental destruction continues worldwide. The Shinto notion of *kami* residing in nature, and of "co-existence and co-prosperity" between humans and nature, is now beginning to be understood internationally. The clue to solving environmental problems lies in Japan's sacred forests (*chinju no mori*)' (2011, 39; my translation). This statement is characteristic for the contemporary understanding of Shinto as a tradition with great potential for solving environmental problems, not only in Japan, but also globally. As Yamamura argues, Shinto is based on the belief that nature is the dwelling place of deities, and, therefore, has sacred properties. Humans and nature are said to be interconnected, existing in a state of mutual dependence and co-existence (*kyōsei* or *kyōzon*) – a worldview often juxtaposed with 'Western', 'monotheistic' anthropocentrism, which is seen as the root cause of global environmental destruction. In the above quotation as well as in other expressions of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, Shinto worldviews are presented as an antidote to environmental problems all over the world.

Considering the discursive association between religion, sacred space and the natural environment internationally, the reimagination of Shinto as an environmentally friendly tradition of nature worship should come as no surprise. In fact, associations of shrine worship with nature, however conceptualised, are by no means recent; nor is the idea that Shinto is concerned with deities residing in and/or becoming manifest in natural elements such as trees, mountains, rivers and celestial bodies. The aforementioned Shinto scholar Ono Sokyō, for instance, noted that shrines are often characterised by beautiful natural surroundings, and that 'natural objects' and 'natural phenomena' have been worshipped as *kami* since ancient times (1962, 7). However, although the notion that there is some sort of connection between *kami* and natural phenomena (mountains, rivers, rocks, trees and so on) has long been around, not until recently has the relation between 'nature', *kami* and 'Shinto' been subject to more serious theoretical reflection.

In particular, the extension of 'nature' to 'the environment', and the explicit association of Shinto with environmental issues, is of fairly recent date. Although such ideas were first expressed in the 1970s, they did not gain much attention and popularity until well into the 1990s. Today, however, 'nature' and 'environmental issues' have become standard tropes in written introductions to Shinto – whether websites, books or tourist pamphlets – and become a central part of many contemporary Shinto self-definitions. In accordance with the spread of the 'religious environmentalist paradigm' worldwide, Shinto has been redefined as an ancient tradition of nature worship that contains valuable cultural and ideological resources for establishing sustainable relationships between humans and

nature. This understanding of Shinto has now become so firmly established that it may be considered to constitute a new paradigm, existing alongside and complementing the five earlier paradigms discussed in the previous chapter.

The 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm' does not negate these earlier paradigms, however. Rather, it incorporates them, and combines them with, on the one hand, contemporary discourse on 'environmental problems' (including topics such as deforestation, nature conservation, biodiversity loss and climate change), and on the other, an idealised image of an 'ancient Japanese' society originally existing in a state of natural equilibrium, which was disturbed by 'foreign' ideological and technological influences. In particular, contemporary discourse on Shinto and the environment reflects notions typical of the local paradigm. It is no coincidence that Yanagita Kunio is often quoted by representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, as is the early-twentieth-century activist Minakata Kumagusu (1867-1941), well-known for his resistance to government corruption and the state-imposed destruction of local shrines (see chapter seven). Contemporary advocates of the notion of Shinto as a nature religion typically focus on the importance of shrines and their forests for empowering local communities, employing concepts such as *furusato* and *satoyama* and attributing ancient ecological knowledge to 'local' people (*jimoto no hitotachi*), who are often dehistoricised and romanticised. Accordingly, most Shinto-related environmental activism has a strongly local character, typically focusing on the preservation of particular shrine forests rather than issues of nationwide (let alone global) significance.

In addition to this idealisation of the 'local', the Shinto environmentalist paradigm has incorporated elements from the ethnic paradigm (the normative notion of Shinto as 'the' ancient tradition of the entire Japanese nation, transcending the realm of religion proper), the spiritual paradigm (the Eliadean notion of 'sacredness' as an intrinsic quality of particular places, which can only truly be known experientially, not rationally) and the universal paradigm (the notion that Shinto has significant salvific potential, not only for Japan, but for all of humanity). By combining elements of these different paradigms, creatively reinterpreting them in the light of recent developments both global and local, the Shinto environmentalist paradigm has succeeded in gaining significant popularity in Japan as well as abroad. It can be said to have contributed in no small degree to contemporary imaginations of 'Shinto' as the singular, transhistorical, 'indigenous' Japanese religious tradition, drawing upon yet transforming earlier understandings of the tradition. In the following two chapters, I will present an overview of this paradigm, trace its development, and discuss the main actors and texts involved.

When using the term 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm', I do not mean to suggest that environmental issues constitute the core concern of contemporary Shinto actors. Rather, I use the term to refer to the trend to conceptualise Shinto as a (religious) tradition intimately connected with 'nature', however defined, and the discursive association with 'the environment', 'nature conservation', and/or 'ecology'. As I have argued in chapter four, 'nature' is a powerful yet fuzzy concept, carrying a

number of different meanings and possessing significant ideological potential. The concept 'environment' is hardly less complicated. It is often associated with 'nature', and the meanings of both terms overlap partially; however, they do not fully equal each other, as the meaning of the concept 'environment' is more limited. For instance, one may speak of 'human nature' to refer to the supposed innate characteristics of human beings, whereas the term 'environment' only refers to aspects of the outside world. Even when it comes to the physical world, 'nature' and 'the environment' do not carry the exact same connotations. Nature may be imagined as 'pure', 'wild' or 'pristine', whereas 'the environment' is usually associated with problems, distorted balance, and destruction (Macnaghten & Urry 1998, 19-21). It is a recent category that has quickly assumed global significance – not least because it serves to explain changes in physical landscapes, and conceptualise the global interconnection of nature and climate.

When using the term 'environment', therefore, I use it as a generic term including a variety of concepts and assumptions that have developed in the last fifty years or so – including notions such as ecology, pollution, and conservation. In contemporary discourse on 'Shinto and the environment' these different notions are present, either implicit or explicit. Thus, they are grounded on the modern notion of the natural environment as a global ecosystem of interconnected organisms and climatological phenomena, ontologically external to yet influenced by or even dependent upon human beings, that is continuously threatened by human activities. Consequently, in my use of the term, 'environmentalism' does not refer to one single current of thought, but rather to a set of ideological positions and practices, all of which somehow assert the importance of environmental issues.

Expressions of environmentalism may differ significantly, however, not only in their conceptualisation of 'the environment' and in the issues considered most urgent and relevant, but also in their historical narratives and in the solutions and models offered for overcoming problems. Accordingly, 'environmentalism' may be associated with left-wing activism, but also with religious conservationism or with popular nationalist discourse – as long as environmental issues take centre stage in discursive practices. The core concepts 'nature', 'environment' and 'ecology' may carry a variety of meanings, and serve different purposes. As such, their symbolic and ideological significance may extend far beyond the realms of the mere physical, biological and climatological.

Environmental issues, it follows, may provide different actors with valuable symbolic capital, which may serve to establish social networks. In fact, it has been argued that it is precisely in the issue of environmental advocacy that temporary alliances can be made between groups and institutions that are in opposition when it comes to other issues. As such, environmental issues can provide an important base for cooperation, and bring about the improvement of social relations between different actors. For instance, Arne Kalland has demonstrated that the issue of whaling 'provides an arena where NGOs and authorities on each side can unite, swapping political legitimacy and building personal relations that can be useful on issues where relations are less harmonious' (2009, back cover). The same, arguably, applies to contemporary Shinto environmentalism. In an online comment to a

blog post written by me on this topic (Rots 2012c), the American Shinto priest Patricia Ormsby made the insightful remark that Shinto 'as it is currently practiced (…) fosters a respectful dialogue between conservative and progressive elements of society, bringing them together in an era of intense polarization, when cooperation is becoming more and more critical' (Ormsby 2012).

Thus, while there is undoubtedly a number of issues that are contested and divide the shrine world (see Breen 2010b), I would argue that it is precisely on the topic of 'the environment' (and, in particular, the importance of *chinju no mori*) that different actors, representing various political and ideological positions, can come together and strengthen ties. 'Nature' and 'the environment' are depoliticised, 'neutral' topics that provide a common ground on which various Shinto institutions, priests and scholars can find each other – at least when it comes to abstract theory and symbolism. Although it may be questioned to what extent environmental problems constitute a top priority for most Shinto leaders and shrine priests, few would deny the value and importance of the natural environment (*shizen kankyō*), whether acting on it or not. Thus, one of the reasons for the establishment and increasing popularity of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm may well be its capacity to unite a diversity of actors – priests, ideologues, scholars and practitioners – around the shared symbolic capital of 'nature', 'the environment', and, most of all, 'sacred forests'.[105]

6.1.2   The category 'nature religion'

As we have seen, the explicit association between environmental problems on the one hand and culture and religion on the other did not become prominent until the 1960s, when Lynn White published his well-known thesis. Of course, the religious and/or spiritual appreciation of nature goes back much longer: the attribution of sacred qualities to '(wild) nature' is a defining characteristic in the oeuvre of well-known nineteenth-century American authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), John Muir (1838-1914) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), and can be traced back to European Romanticism, in particular to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). In fact, similar notions can already be found in earlier religious thought, such as the work of St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). In the twentieth century, the development of religious environmentalism is attributed to scholars such as Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), who developed modern ecological notions and environmental ethics; Arne Næss (1912-2009), seen as the founder of the Deep Ecology

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[105] 'Symbolic capital' is a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Following Bourdieu, Stordalen has defined it as 'the accumulated amounts of prestige, celebrity, honour, authority, etc. that is symbolically represented in a cultural product. It is founded in a dialectic of knowledge and recognition' (2012). I would argue that it is not only 'cultural' products that can possess symbolic capital, but also 'natural' products, as long as they are culturally and discursively mediated.

movement; and James Lovelock (born 1919), who is famous for the Gaia hypothesis, which conceives of the entire planet Earth as a single living organism.[106]

Environmental issues gained widespread international attention in the early 1970s, when the Club of Rome published its well-known report *The Limits of Growth*, and the first international Earth Day was organised. 'Religion' came to be strongly associated with the environment, both as a scapegoat – in particular, as in the Lynn White thesis (1967), 'the Judeo-Christian tradition' – and as a possible resource for tackling environmental problems and (re?)establishing sustainable environmental ethics. As I argued in chapter four based on articles by Lohmann (1993) and Kalland (2008), this has led to the reappropriation of two classical stereotypes. The first of these is the notion of the 'noble savage', who is supposedly intimately in touch with his/her natural environment and in possession of valuable 'indigenous ecological knowledge'. The second stereotype concerns the 'holistic', 'mystical' wisdom of East and South Asia, where philosophical notions concerning the intertwinement and interdependence of all creatures, and an apparent pantheistic (or panentheistic) belief in the presence of divinity within natural elements, are believed to have contributed to centuries of environmentally friendly behaviour. As said, these notions have been challenged, and several scholars have pointed out that historically deforestation, pollution and the exploitation of natural resources were by no means alien to Asian societies (e.g., Kalland 2002; Totman 1989; Tuan 1968). Nevertheless, these stereotypes have exercised considerable influence not only on 'Western' popular understandings of 'other religions', but also on self-definitions and collective identities.

It comes as no surprise, then, that in the 1970s 'nature religions' became one of the most popular topics in the study of religion – as did related (sub)categories that were rediscovered in the works of nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropologists. This renewed interest in 'nature religions' (the term 'primitive' soon lost its appeal, as it was considered pejorative, but the underlying category distinction remained the same [see footnote 82]) coexisted with an interest in topics such as 'sacred time', 'sacred place', mythology and religious experience, and the popularity of the ahistorical phenomenology of religion represented by Mircea Eliade and his followers. Thus, Bron Taylor describes 'nature religion' as

> an umbrella term to mean religious perceptions and practices that are characterized by a reverence for nature and that consider its destruction a desecrating act. Adherents often describe feelings of belonging and connection to the earth – of being bound to and dependent upon the earth's living systems. Over the last few centuries a number of phrases have been used to capture the family resemblance of nature religions, including *natural religion*, *nature worship*, *nature mysticism*, and *earth religion*. Meanwhile, words have been invented to reflect what is taken to be the universal essence of such religiosity, such as *Paganism*, *Animism*, and *Pantheism*. In both popular and scholarly venues the term *nature religion*, which began to be employed regularly at about the time of the first Earth Day celebration in 1970, is used

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[106] For overviews of these and other religious-environmentalist beliefs, see Gottlieb 2006; Smith 2006; Taylor 2010.

increasingly to represent and debate such nature-as-sacred religions (2010, 5; italics in original).

Taylor goes on to attribute this notion to classical works in the study of religion, written by E. B. Tylor (1832-1917), Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), James G. Frazer (1854-1941) and, later, Mircea Eliade. Apparently, the popularisation of the religious-environmentalist view, and the corresponding appropriation of so-called 'nature religions', was firmly grounded in established theories of religion. As such, it may even be said to have contributed to the reinvention and continuous legitimation of classical ethnocentric and social-evolutionist classification models and theories, rather than challenging or replacing them.

As mentioned previously, European scholarly categories have contributed significantly to ways in which 'religion' and 'Shinto' have been imagined and configured in Japan. 'Nature religion' is no exception – and indeed, in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, several authors suggested that Shinto was, originally and essentially, such a 'nature religion'.[107] These authors, whom I will discuss shortly, typically combined ideas and categories derived from European traditions of thought – in particular, evolutionary anthropology and the phenomenology of religion – with ideas about the uniqueness of the Japanese nation that had been developed as part of the modern nation-building project, and achieved 'scientific' legitimation in the context of the proliferation of the cultural-nationalist *nihonjinron* genre in the 1970s and 80s. In particular, they drew upon the environmental determinism of Watsuji Tetsurō, which turned out to be perfectly compatible with Whitean cultural essentialism and religious environmentalism.

White's claim that the Judeo-Christian worldview (and, by extension, 'Western civilisation') was historically responsible for environmental destruction has gained widespread popularity in Japan (Fujimura 2010, 1), and is in accordance with the essentialist East-West dichotomy underlying the nationalist mythmaking of scholars such as Watsuji, Okakura and Anesaki. Significantly, in his famous essay, Lynn White actually raised the question whether Asian religious worldviews might be employed as an alternative to Christian anthropocentrism. In accordance with trends at the time, he explicitly referred to Zen Buddhism, rather than Shinto. His conclusion, however, was that in the end Asian traditions of thought would be too culturally deviant to take root in 'the West', and that another alternative must be found:

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[107] It is worth pointing out that, in English as well as in Japanese, the notion of 'nature religion' has an ambivalent quality: it does not only signify a tradition focused on the worship of nature and natural phenomena, but can also mean that the tradition itself is 'natural'. That is, it presents traditions as having emerged naturally and spontaneously from humans' interaction with their environment, rather than being constructed historically, mediated culturally, and employed politically. The same ambivalence exists in the Japanese language, where, as we have seen, the concept *shizen* not only means 'nature', but also 'spontaneous' – especially when used as an adverb, followed by the particle *ni*. Thus, Shinto is often said to have 'emerged spontaneously' in ancient times, rather than being the outcome of historical processes of construction, adaptation and reinvention.

> What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. The beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view. Zen, however, is as deeply conditioned by Asian history as Christianity is by the experience of the West, and I am dubious of its viability among us (1967, 1206).

White then proceeded to argue for the reappropriation of St. Francis of Assisi as a religious environmentalist *avant la lettre*, whose ideas and practices might serve as guiding principles for transforming Christianity into a religion that cares about sustainability and ecology. His suggestion apparently struck a chord: in 1979, Pope John Paul II declared St. Francis the patron saint of ecology, and later representatives of the religious environmentalist paradigm have repeatedly referred to him as a great example (e.g., Lee 2000, 345; Taylor 2010, 27).[108]

Others, however, were more optimistic about the possible relevance of 'Eastern' thought for environmental advocacy. We have already seen that scholars such as Watanabe Masao, Murota Yasuhiro and Edward Shaner combined White's cultural determinism and environmental concerns with idealised notions of 'the Japanese love of nature' that had been developed and established in the context of the (early) modern nation building project. They did not, however, make explicit reference to 'religion' – in contrast to H. Byron Earhart, who suggested that 'Japanese religion' might become a valuable ideological resource for overcoming the consumerism apparently responsible for environmental problems (1970).[109] Drawing upon his classroom experiences, he suggested that

> American students studying Japanese religion are drawn especially to those features which deal with man's relationship to nature. In the creation story of Japanese mythology many gods participate in the emergence of the cosmos, and the gods remain intimately connected with all phases of life. Almost any dimension of nature – rocks, streams, mountains, thunder – may be or become sacred or kami. The kami, one might say, are a part of nature – but that would be an unfortunate Western way of putting it. It would be more true to the Japanese experience to say that nature itself intrinsically manifests the sacred or is kami. A general principle of Shinto is that man basically is one with nature, and American undergraduates find this side of Shinto fascinating (1970, 2-3).

Thus, Earhart described Shinto as a tradition of nature worship, which apparently appealed to his American students who had become disappointed with Christian traditions. However, he did not expect Shinto to gain international popularity, because

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[108] In March 2013, Jorge Bergoglio (born 1936) was elected pope. His choice to adopt the name Francis – the first pope ever with that name – was, I believe, a significant political act. Saint Francis is commonly associated not only with Christian devotion but also with modesty, poverty and simplicity, and with a deep appreciation of Creation as a whole; he is said to have loved, and preached to, animals. It is no coincidence, I would argue, that Pope Francis has already spoken out on behalf of the environment on several occasions (e.g., Cano 2013).

[109] In fact, as later studies would show, consumerism is by no means alien to Japanese religious institutions and their practices. Quite the contrary: in postwar Japanese society, temple and shrine rituals and ritual objects have come to be commodified to a large extent. See for instance Reader & Tanabe 1998.

of course Shinto is too closely tied to Japanese national history to gain many Occidental 'converts'. Those Westerners who try to adopt some of the Japanese worldview usually do so through the popularized versions of Zen, and its thesis that one must become awakened to his oneness with nature. Zen is rich intellectually, esthetically, and in religious techniques; moreover in its popularized versions it makes a universal claim that all men can and should be awakened (ibid., 3).

It must be noted that at the time of writing, 'Zen' was very popular in the US; not only because it attracted followers interested in meditation practices, but also because it lent itself to a variety of commercial purposes, ranging from garden design to company management. This Zen was largely based on the writings of D. T. Suzuki, and was far removed from the historical reality of Japanese temple practices. As we have seen, Suzuki attributed the supposedly unique Japanese experience of nature, and its aesthetic expressions, to 'Zen' – which he reimagined as the essence of Japanese culture (Suzuki 1959).[110] Shinto, on the other hand, was not (yet) widely perceived as a tradition with potentially universal features – which is not entirely surprising, as Shinto's involvement with Japanese imperialism and wartime aggression was probably still fresh in many people's memories.

Nevertheless, the association between Shinto and environmental ethics had been made, and it was only a matter of time before it would be taken further by others, and the religious environmentalist paradigm would be applied to Shinto more explicitly. Early Japanese formulations of what would later become the Shinto environmentalist paradigm drew on 'indigenous' resources such as the works of Yanagita and Minakata, as well as Whitean arguments, which had rapidly spread internationally in the 1970s. In Japan, the association between Shinto and the environment was made explicitly around 1980, and gradually gained popularity afterwards. In the last fifteen years or so, it has become common to define Shinto as a tradition of nature worship well-suited for solving environmental problems, to the point that it is now possible to speak of a Shinto environmentalist paradigm.

Significantly, however, this paradigm is not merely an academic construct: there are various actors involved in the development of this discourse, not all of which operate in an academic context. Hence, in order to understand the different aspects of this development, we have to take into consideration several discursive fields. The first of these fields covers a variety of academic practices and texts, such as symposia, conferences and scholarly papers. While using the term 'academic', it

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[110] Suzuki has been criticised not only for his cultural essentialism, romantic nationalism, and historically inaccurate representations of the Zen tradition, but also for equating Zen with Japanese culture as a whole, including all its artistic expressions. Interestingly, in his recent study of Shinto spirituality (2004), philosopher Thomas Kasulis does not seem to disagree with Suzuki's essentialist constructions of a singular, transhistorical Japanese culture; he does take offense, however, at the latter's habit of equating this culture with Zen and overlooking other influences. Kasulis argues that it is due to the popularity of Suzuki's work that 'the Japanese emphasis on naturalness and simplicity' is often mistakenly associated with Zen, whereas according to him this '[s]implicity and naturalness were part of Japanese culture and represented in Shinto practices centuries before Zen's emergence in the thirteenth century' (2004, 44-45). In fact, Kasulis does not really depart from Suzuki's basic ideas; he takes over many of his assumptions, yet replaces 'Zen' by 'Shinto' as the eternal substratum of 'Japanese culture'.

must be pointed out that in Japan the boundaries between 'academic' and 'religious' discourse are not always clear. For instance, events organised by the International Shinto Foundation usually bring together scholars as well as so-called religious actors (i.e., shrine priests and representatives of 'Shinto-derived new religions'). Generally speaking, these events have an abstract, cerebral character, and are not practically oriented. And while lengthy symposia and public lectures in Japan are ubiquitous, attracting not only scholars but also a 'general audience' made up of interested outsiders, this type of events still only addresses a particular segment of the public and is therefore not necessarily representative for developments in society as a whole. That said, many of the contemporary ideas about Shinto do take shape in this discursive context, and ideas expressed in academic texts undeniably influence local practices and popular understandings.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will present an overview of the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in this type of Japanese popular-academic discourse. However, as suggested previously, although most of the discourse on Shinto is in Japanese, it is important to bear in mind that the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is not merely a domestic affair but has a strong transnational component as well. This is not only because events and organisations in Japan often define themselves as 'international', and, in a few cases, express a cross-border missionary zeal; but also, more importantly, because discursive and institutional practices in Japan are influenced by developments abroad. Accordingly, in this chapter, I will start by examining Japanese academic discourse, but then move on to discuss non-Japanese contributions to the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. Finally, I will discuss notions of Shinto, nature and the environment as they have been developed and disseminated in popular culture, by analysing the arguably influential works of Miyazaki Hayao.

6.2   The Shinto environmentalist paradigm in Japanese academic discourse

6.2.1   *The emergence of the* chinju no mori *movement*

From the 1980s onwards, a number of scholars, scientists and shrine leaders have spread the view of Shinto as an ancient 'nature religion'. Roughly speaking, the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in Japanese academic discourse can be attributed to two concurrent scholarly trends. The first of these is represented by a group of scholars known for their popular writings, in which they combine an interest in various spiritual matters with *nihonjinron*-type theories concerning the unique, transhistorical features of the Japanese nation and, often, a Watsujiesque environmental determinism. As mentioned before, some of these scholars have been categorised and labelled as 'spiritual intellectuals' (Prohl 2000; Shimazono 1996). However, it may be argued that, rather than 'spirituality' *per se*, the essence and origins of the Japanese nation constitute their main research interest, and their descriptions of Japanese spirituality and sacred places are imbedded within

a more explicitly ideological narrative concerning the question of what it means to be Japanese. Many of their works, therefore, may be considered examples of modern academic identity politics; they have clear romantic-nationalist subtexts, and are characterised by a nostalgic lamentation of lost values and traditions not unlike that found in Yanagita Kunio's work.

Considering their interest in the relationship between the nation and religion/spirituality/sacredness, it should come as no surprise that some of these authors have written about Shinto, as well as 'Japanese religion' as a whole. In their writings, they typically subscribe to the view that Meiji-period Shinto was an unfortunate aberration, and that the essence of Shinto can be found in supposedly ancient local traditions of nature worship, as well as in beliefs concerning nature's divine character which are also said to have influenced Japanese Buddhism. These beliefs and practices are often referred to by the nineteenth-century European term 'animism', and are believed to date from the Jōmon period (approximately 14,000-300 BCE). At the time, it is suggested, Japan was a 'forest civilisation' characterised by a perfect ecological and social equilibrium. According to this view, in the Jōmon period 'Japanese' society was built upon a deep awareness of the coexistence and interdependence between humans, nature and *kami*, which gave birth to a spirit of reverence and gratitude vis-à-vis nature's divine forces.

Scholars and authors who have developed and contributed to these ideas include, on alphabetical order, Iwata Keiji (1993), Kamata Tōji (2000b; 2008; 2011), Makino Kazuharu (1994; 2009), Nakazawa Shin'ichi (2006), Umehara Takeshi (1989; 1995; 2009), Yamaori Tetsuo (1996; 2001) and Yasuda Yoshinori (1990; 1995; 2006). Not all of these authors would personally identify with Shinto (Nakazawa and Umehara, for instance, have also written extensively about Buddhism); some write about Japanese culture and/or religion in general, rather than Shinto *per se*. However, they all share an interest in nature worship, environmental issues (however vaguely defined), (sacred) forests, spirituality, and Japanese national identity. As such, there is undeniably a family resemblance between them. Moreover, they have all contributed to the popularisation of the notion that Shinto is primarily a tradition of nature worship, intimately connected not only to the Japanese nation but also to its physical territories. I will return to this topic in chapter eight.

The second scholarly trend responsible for the redefinition of Shinto as a nature religion is more closely connected with Shinto institutions, as illustrated by the fact that some of the representatives of this trend are active as shrine priests. It is not limited to Shinto circles, however, but also includes a number of scientists not directly affiliated with shrines. This trend consists of the close association of Shinto with sacred shrine forests (*chinju no mori*) and nature conservation. Since the early 1980s, a number of prominent scholars and scientists have pointed out the ecological and cultural significance of these forests, which have since become one of the core symbols of contemporary Shinto as well as urban environmentalist groups. In contrast to the diffuse group of scholars discussed above, scholars, scientists and priests interested in the topic of shrine forest conservation have actually

joined forces, and set up organisations for this purpose. As such, they can be considered as belonging to a single movement. Using their core concept, I will refer to this as the *chinju no mori* movement.

From the initial period, the *chinju no mori* movement has had an interdisciplinary character, bringing together scholars and scientists from a variety of disciplines. One of the most prominent representatives of the movement is the architect and urban planner Ueda Atsushi (born 1930) (A. Ueda 2001; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2007). Ueda's 1984 work *Chinju no mori* (a revised version of which was published in 2007) can be considered one of the movement's foundational texts. In this book, Ueda introduced the topic of *chinju no mori* to a general audience, and argued for the preservation of these small urban forests. His approach was primarily geographical, mapping various *chinju no mori* still existing at the time (with a strong focus on the situation in Shiga prefecture), but he also made reference to history, spirituality and ecology – topics that would be discussed more elaborately by other representatives of the movement. In particular, Ueda's geographical study of existing shrine forests was complemented by the work of the internationally famous ecologist Miyawaki Akira (born 1928), who has devoted his long career to forest ecology and, in particular, reforestation projects (Miyawaki 2000; Nanami 2010). In 1982, Miyawaki published a long essay in the weekly shrine newspaper *Jinja shinpō*,[111] in which he urged shrine priests to take the initiative in preserving and replanting shrine forests, and instructed them on the best ways to do so (Miyawaki 1982). According to Miyawaki, a healthy ecosystem is best achieved by planting native tree species, which he refers to as *furusato* trees.

Soon thereafter, the shrine newspaper published a series of reports on a symposium on the topic of 'shrines and green' (*jinja to midori*) (*Jinja shinpō* 1982a; 1982b; 1982c). At this symposium, in which several well-known scholars and scientists participated, a number of issues was addressed that would later become core topics and tropes in Shinto environmentalist discourse. Among the participants was Ueda Kenji,[112] one of the most prominent postwar Shinto intellectuals known for his attempts to develop a 'Shinto theology' (e.g., K. Ueda 2011); Shirai Eiji and Fukushima Hiroyuki, at the time head priests of, respectively, Tsurugaoka Hachimangū in Kamakura and Meiji Jingū in Tokyo; and two scientists who have published widely on environmental issues and forest preservation, Tomiyama Kazuko and Tsutsui Michio. Thus, the symposium established an important trend:

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[111] Generally speaking, the weekly shrine newspaper *Jinja shinpō* gives a representative view of the priorities and interests of the Jinja Honchō establishment. In addition, it reports on cultural, educational and academic activities organised by shrines and other shrine-related organisations. It constitutes an important source for research on postwar Shinto, as it gives a clear indication of Jinja Honchō's ideological position(s) as well as trends in the shrine world. In this newspaper, environmental issues received little or no attention until the early 1980s. From that moment on, however, they were mentioned occasionally – in particular, reference was made to the topics of shrine forest conservation and forest-based (environmental, moral and cultural) education. While arguably not the shrine establishment's main priority (see chapters seven and eleven), environmental issues, nature conservation and reforestation have become recurring topics, periodically referred to in *Jinja shinpō* articles on shrine activism, reports of academic events, and even in columns and editorials.

[112] For clarity's sake: in this study, I will refer to three different scholars, all of whom are called Ueda. As far as I know, they are not related. They are Shinto scholar Ueda Kenji (1927-2003), architect Ueda Atsushi (born 1930), and Ueda Masaaki (born 1927), who is a historian as well as a Shinto priest. They should not be confused: while having ideas in common, they all have contributed to the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in different ways.

discourse on Shinto and the environment generally has a multidisciplinary character, at least when it comes to the background of the contributors. Conferences, symposia and workshops on Shinto, religion, environmental issues and sacred forests often bring together scholars and scientists from a variety of disciplines (including history, religious studies, archaeology, urban planning, forestry and environmental sciences), as well as religious actors (Shinto priests, representatives of 'new religions', and sometimes Buddhist or Christian priests), artists and even, occasionally, 'green' entrepreneurs.

In the *Jinja shinpō* report on the 1982 symposium, Shinto's relation to the environment, and its current state of affairs, were summarised as follows:

> 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. From this environment, Shinto, the faith of the Japanese, emerged spontaneously. However, recently, because of rapid modernisation, forests have been destroyed (…). Forests have been turned into roads, power plants and houses (…). As so much of Japan's green is disappearing, people are now once again becoming aware of the importance of shrine forests (*chinju no mori*) all over the country. The awareness that with these forests, the only remaining green places in Japan's cities, the Japanese people's living environment must be protected is now spreading – not only among shrine people, policy makers and nature conservation organisations, but also among the ordinary citizens (1982c; my translation).

As this quotation makes clear, in the early 1980s, the *chinju no mori* conservation movement was gradually spreading and gaining attention. Importantly, as this symposium indicates, it was not only spread by scientists such as Ueda Masaaki and Miyawaki Akira, but also embraced by some Shinto priests and scholars. In particular, Ueda Kenji's participation in the symposium is significant, as he is generally considered to have been one of the most prominent postwar Shinto scholars. At this symposium, he contributed to the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm by giving it a sounder theological basis:

> The Japanese people sensed the presence of God in nature. Even today, there is an awareness that the deities of nature and the deities of our ancestors together give birth to God.[113] An awareness of this arises when people go into nature and reach tranquillity of mind; when they feel a sense of fulfilment of life. I think that this is the fundamental reason why they have always had the feeling that they wanted to take good care of nature. But I think the biggest

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[113] Ueda's uses the word *kami* in different ways, which is somewhat confusing. As I argued previously, the choice to either translate *kami* or leave it untranslated is not innocent or arbitrary; it reflects certain assumptions regarding the translatability and comparability of shrine rituals and beliefs in general. In the case of Ueda Kenji, the problem gets more complicated, as he uses the plural *kamigami* (which I translated as 'deities') differently from the honorific *kamisama*, which can be either singular or plural, and which can refer to anthropomorphic deities as well as a transcendent God (significantly, the term is also used by Japanese Christians to refer to their God). In this text, '*kamisama*' probably refers to an abstract entity, the divine principle that encompasses and transcends particular deities. Hence my choice to translate it as 'God'. It may also be translated as *Kami* (with a capital 'K', to distinguish it from the various *kami* worshipped at shrines).

problem we are facing now is that, as Western thought and the wave of modernisation has rapidly made us think of convenience only, we have lost this awareness (ibid.; my translation).

The collaboration between scientists, conservationists and Shinto priests that first emerged at the 1982 symposium was taken further in subsequent years. As *chinju no mori* gradually took on more significance, ecologically as well as symbolically, several Shinto scholars joined forces with Ueda Atsushi and Miyawaki Akira. Two of the most prominent are Ueda Masaaki (born 1927) and Sonoda Minoru (born 1936). The former is a historian specialising in prehistorical East Asia, and head priest of Obata Jinja in the city of Kameoka (Kyoto prefecture); the latter is a scholar of religion specialising in *matsuri* traditions, and head priest of Chichibu Jinja in Saitama prefecture. Both scholars have published extensively on topics related to Shinto and nature, in particular *chinju no mori*, which they see not only as important ecological resources but also as invaluable remnants of an ancient Japanese culture that needs to be revitalised in order to overcome the challenges of today (Sonoda 1997; 1998; 2000; 2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2009; 2010; 2012; M. Ueda 2001a; 2001b; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2010; 2011).

There are some significant similarities between Sonoda and Ueda Masaaki on the one hand, and some of the 'spiritual intellectuals', on the other – in particular when it comes to their belief in the intimate intertwinement of the Japanese nation, the physical landscape of Japan (in particular, its forests), and ancient 'Shinto' beliefs and practices. For instance, Ueda Masaaki and Umehara Takeshi have engaged in dialogues concerning what they believed to be the current state of Japan, discussing possible solutions to its perceived problems (Ueda & Umehara 2001). However, there are some differences as well, not only when it comes to institutional affiliation – both Ueda and Sonoda are active as shrine priests, which Umehara and his followers are not – but also in terms of ideological position. For instance, Ueda Masaaki has argued that Umehara is too single-mindedly focused on the Jōmon period (and, hence, the 'forest civilisation'), while overlooking the importance of the subsequent Yayoi period (300 BCE-250 CE), in which wet rice cultivation was introduced to the Japanese isles and hunter-gatherer societies gave way to agricultural ones (interview, December 2011; see chapter eight). In addition, he has suggested that Umehara's thought is relevant and interesting, yet too abstract; hence, he has criticised him for not being practically oriented, and for not making any concrete suggestions as to how exactly this forest civilisation might be re-established (ibid.).

Indeed, if there is one thing that distinguishes the *chinju no mori* movement from the academic discourse on Jōmon period 'forest thought', animism and spirituality, it is the former's practical orientation. Ueda Atsushi, Ueda Masaaki and Sonoda Minoru have not only been active as scholars, they have also set up a movement devoted to the study and preservation of sacred forests. This association is called Shasō Gakkai, and it was founded in 2002. Through its annual conferences, regular symposia, annual journal (*Shasōgaku kenkyū*; 'research in sacred forest studies') and book publications (M. Ueda & A. Ueda 2001; M. Ueda et al. 2003; M. Ueda 2004c), Shasō Gakkai has done

much to facilitate the interdisciplinary (i.e., ecological, historical, archaeological and geographical) study of shrine forests. And while it has been criticised by some local activists for being too abstract and academic (interview data, November 2011), it also seeks to educate shrine priests in forest management by offering courses on the topic, and disseminate knowledge about various local shrine initiatives. I will discuss this organisation in more detail in chapter ten.

6.2.2   The International Shinto Foundation

Shasō Gakkai is not the only academic-religious non-profit organisation that has actively contributed to the establishment of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. In the previous chapter, I already mentioned the International Shinto Foundation, a non-profit organisation founded in 1994, devoted to the dual purpose of facilitating the academic study of Shinto and spreading a positive image of the tradition both in Japan and abroad.[114] This hybrid character is reflected in the activities it organises, where religious leaders and priests sit on panels together with scholars and scientists. The ISF was founded by Fukami Tōshū, founder and leader of the new religion Worldmate (see chapter five); accordingly, some scholars have expressed scepticism concerning ISF's academic character (e.g., Antoni 2001). Such accusations notwithstanding, the organisation facilitates the research of Shinto in history without interfering with the contents of this research. Academic freedom is guaranteed, and some of the regular speakers at ISF conferences (such as John Breen and Fabio Rambelli) have a historical-constructivist approach to Shinto that is significantly different from the essentialist narratives typical of 'emic' Shinto discourse.

That said, the organisation does have an agenda that goes beyond mere academic activities. In particular, it has contributed to spreading the image of Shinto as a nature religion with relevance for environmental issues, in Japan as well as abroad, by organising a number of symposia on this topic. In 1998, it organised a bilingual symposium entitled 'The Kyoto Protocol, The Environment and Shinto' at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York (Shintō Kokusai Gakkai 2000); in 2009, there was a symposium in Japanese on 'the world environment seen from the perspective of Shinto' in Chichibu (Saitama prefecture) (Shintō Kokusai Gakkai 2010); and in 2011, the United Nations International Year of Forests, there was another bilingual symposium on the topic of 'the forest culture

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[114] Some years ago, the organisation was split into two: the International Shinto Foundation, which has an office in New York and is said to be primarily devoted to supporting academic research on Shinto, and the Japan-based Shintō Kokusai Gakkai, more focused on spreading a positive image by means of various popular-academic events. Initially, however, they were one and the same organisation. Its agenda was well summarised by the late director-general Umeda Yoshimi when he said: 'Scholars (…) erroneously believe that Shinto, Japan's pre-war state religion, was the factor that drove the country into World War II. Such a conclusion is based on a lack of serious understanding of the background of Shinto. The International Shinto Foundation has been established to dispel such misunderstandings. The foundation is also convinced that Shinto is one of the most liberal and broad-minded religions on this planet, being among the few sects [*sic*] in the world which does not oppose any other religion's philosophy' (Umeda 2000).

of *shinbutsu*' (i.e., the combination of *kami* and Buddhas) held in Kumano (Shintō Kokusai Gakkai 2012).[115]

The symposium on the Kyoto Protocol and Shinto clearly illustrates the International Shinto Foundation's multifaceted character. Among the speakers brought together for this event were a UN representative, a diplomat who had been involved in the negotiations for the Kyoto Protocol, an American environmentalist specialised in climate change, a scholar of religion active in interreligious initiatives, and Fukami Tōshū himself. While such a multidisciplinary encounter can be fruitful, the conference proceedings suggest a symposium in which each speaker talked about their own topic of expertise, without engaging in serious cross-disciplinary dialogue. In particular, the interesting but difficult question as to how exactly Shinto might contribute to the success of the Kyoto Protocol – e.g., what can shrines do to promote the use of alternative energy and contribute to the fight against climate change; what is the significance of climate change when perceived from a Shinto perspective; what might a Shinto-based, philosophically sound environmental ethics look like, and what possible consequences could it have for policymaking – was not really addressed. The first three speakers mainly talked about the politics of climate change and the Kyoto protocol, but did not have anything to say about the possible role Shinto and/or religion in general might play in this respect. The other two speakers, by contrast, talked about religion, but did not seriously address the topic of climate change (Brinkman 2000; Fukami 2000).

Eleven years after the New York symposium, the ISF organised another symposium devoted to the question of Shinto and the environment (Shintō Kokusai Gakkai 2010). By now, Sonoda Minoru had replaced Fukami as president of the organisation, pointing to a direct connection between the ISF and the *chinju no mori* movement. The symposium took place at the shrine where he is head priest, Chichibu Jinja in Saitama prefecture, and he was also one of the speakers. As mentioned, Sonoda is one of the leading contemporary representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, actively spreading the interpretation of Shinto as an ancient, collective worship tradition based on an intimate connection between human communities and their natural surroundings (or *fūdo*). He is one of today's most vocal Shinto ideologues, who has not only written a significant number of books and articles, but also given many speeches, presentations, and interviews. In addition, he has great missionary zeal, and is actively trying to promote the image of Shinto as an ecological tradition that has an important message for today's world. That is, while defined by the Japanese *fūdo* in which it took shape, Shinto is seen as a tradition of which the contemporary environmental relevance extends far beyond the borders of Japan. Hence the title of his lecture, '*chinju no mori* to the world' (Sonoda 2010).

In addition to Sonoda, there were three other speakers at the symposium. In the previous chapter, I already mentioned the contribution by Nakano Yoshiko, president of the Ananaikyō-

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[115] This is a direct translation of the Japanese title of the symposium; the English title was 'Kami and Hotoke: Spirituality and Forests in Japanese Culture'. The choice to use the term *hotoke* instead of Buddhas is interesting, as it is multi-interpretable: *hotoke* does not only refer to Buddhas, but also to ancestral spirits.

affiliated development organisation OISCA (Nakano 2010). It is no coincidence that she was invited to speak on a conference devoted to the topic of *the world*'s environment (*sekai no kankyō*): in contrast to most shrine activism, which has a strong local character, her organisation is active in reforestation projects and (environmental) education abroad, especially in the global south. Thus, it is based on a combination of a *nihonjinron*-type idealisation of 'traditional' Japanese attitudes to nature with an internationally oriented missionary zeal – quite in accordance with Sonoda's own views, it seems.

The international perspective was also represented by the paper presented by the Korean scholar Lee Choon Ja (also known in Japan as Lee Haruko), which was of a more academic nature (Lee 2010). Lee is a professor at Kobe Women's University and long-term resident of Japan, who has done comparative research on the topic of sacred forests in East Asia (Lee 2009; 2011). Although *chinju no mori* are usually associated with Shinto and, by extension, Japanese culture and history, Lee also applies the term to sacred trees and green temple surroundings in Korea and Taiwan. Her work constitutes an interesting exception to the overall discourse on this topic. That is, in a field where the term 'international' is applied often, but usually serves as a rhetoric device to provide extra legitimacy for academic activities and/or assert the uniqueness of the Japanese nation (cf. Robertson 1998), Lee's comparative research in various East Asian countries constitutes an unusual but interesting attempt to transcend the particularism and Japanocentrism typical of most Shinto environmentalist discourse. Finally, the last speaker at the 2009 symposium was Hatakeyama Shigeatsu, an oyster fisherman from coastal Miyagi prefecture in the Tohoku region, who has set up a non-profit organisation devoted to local reforestation (Hatakeyama 2010; cf. *Highlighting Japan* 2010).[116]

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[116] Hatakeyama's story is an interesting one. Having worked as an oyster fisherman for most of his life, he was concerned about the increasing pollution of the sea. In particular, from the mid-1960s onwards, there was a dramatic increase in red plankton, which had a devastating impact on the oyster population. Hatakeyama realised that there is an intimate connection between the ecosystems of the sea, of the Okawa River flowing into the sea, and the forests upstream. He discovered that industrial waste produced by a factory, as well as domestic sewage, flowed straight into the river, as the neglected cedar plantation forests along the river could not soak up any water. In 1989, he set up an ambitious reforestation project, using the slogan 'the forest is the lover of the sea' (*mori wa umi no koibito*). This project was carried out on and around Mount Murone, and organised in collaboration with the local shrine, Murone Jinja (Hatakeyama 2010, 34-35). Many volunteers joined forces and planted trees, including many children, and the project has been lauded for its positive educational impact. Hatakeyama has cooperated with scientists, shrine priests, artists, fishermen and a large number of volunteers. Hence, his project provides a clear example of the potential of environmental advocacy activities for fostering relationships between actors from a variety of backgrounds. Sadly, in March 2011, the area was severely affected by the tsunami. However, Hatakeyama has continued his activities, all the more relevant now that the area has suffered damage and pollution because of the disaster. In 2012, he received a prestigious UN award (the Forest Hero Award Asia) for his work. His organisation has received much positive media attention nationwide and even internationally. As the list of recent and upcoming events on the website indicates, today it is perhaps more active than ever before. See also the short documentary film on the UN website, http://www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011/forests-for-people/awards-and-contests/forest-heroes-video/ (last accessed: February 21, 2013); and the website of the organisation, http://www.mori-umi.org/ (last accessed: February 21, 2013).

In the summer of 2011, the ISF once more organised an international symposium on the topic of Shinto and nature. 2011 was the International Year of Forests, organised by the United Nations.[117] Not surprisingly in a country often defined as a forest civilisation (e.g., Nakamura 2009; Umehara 1995), this received considerable media attention, and several special conferences and symposia were organised addressing the topic of forests. One of these was the ISF symposium, which in contrast to the 2009 symposium was international not only in theory but also in practice: it was bilingual, and there were foreign speakers representing international organisations such as UNESCO. Indeed, it was organised at a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kumano Hongū Taisha – more precisely, at the Kumano Hongū Heritage Centre, a building that would be severely damaged by the typhoons that hit the area only two months after the symposium.[118] Kumano Hongū is one of the three shrines of Kumano, located on the Kii peninsula in southern Wakayama prefecture – a beautiful rugged, forested area, crisscrossed by centuries-old pilgrimage trails connecting the sacred centre Kumano with other centres of worship, such as Mount Kōya, Ise Jingū and Yoshino. This area is historically associated with *shinbutsu shūgō*: there were large shrine-temple complexes (still visible at Kumano Nachi Taisha, the main shrine building of which is located immediately next to the famous Seiganto-ji temple, devoted to the bodhisattva Kannon [Avalokiteshvara]), and *kami* were worshipped as incarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (Moerman 2005; cf. Teeuwen & Rambelli 2003).

The choice made by ISF to give the symposium the title 'the forest culture of *kami* and Buddhas (*shinbutsu*)' – rather than, say, 'the forest culture of Shinto' – is significant, as it suggests a renewed interest in pre-modern combinatory worship, and represents an attempt to overcome the rigid post-1868 institutional separation between Buddhist and Shinto organisations.[119] The focus on *shinbutsu shūgō* was clear in two papers presented at the symposium, which focused on the topics of, respectively, Kumano's *shugendō* (mountain ascetism) tradition (Miyake 2012); and its history of sacred-placemaking, such as the mandalisation of the physical landscape (Moerman 2012). By contrast, some of the other papers had a less scholarly, more spiritual and/or religious character, addressing issues related to faith, religious experience, and 'spiritual leadership', and reformulating notions of spiritual and ecological awakening typical of the religious environmentalist paradigm.

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[117] For background information on the International Year of Forests, see http://www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011/ (last accessed: February 21, 2013).

[118] I will discuss the topic of Shinto responses to natural disasters in the last chapter.

[119] In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in pre-Meiji *shinbutsu shūgō* practices and beliefs – i.e., a combination of Buddhism and Shinto, and the integrated worship of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and kami – on the part of some institutions. For instance, in their 2010 book, Breen and Teeuwen briefly discuss a noteworthy recent initiative: an organisation called Shinbutsu Reijōkai ('Association of Combined Shinto-Buddhist Sacred Sites'), which is setting up combined Shinto-Buddhist tourist itineraries, and provides an opportunity for Shinto and Buddhist priests to interact. As they write optimistically, '[a]t present, "involvement" [in this organisation] amounts to little more than inclusion in a published compendium of Shinto-Buddhist pilgrimage sites, but the association offers the tantalizing specter of a distant future in which shrines will once more engage dynamically with Buddhist temples' (2010, 220). Incidentally, this was not the first time ISF addressed the topic of Buddhas and *kami*: on February 27, 2011, there was an ISF seminar in Kamakura entitled '*Kami* and Buddhas in the eyes of foreign researchers' (*Gaikokujin gakusha no me ni utsutta kami/hotoke*). See http://www.shinto.org/seminar/15thseminar.htm (last accessed: February 22, 2013).

6.2.3   The Shintō Bunka Kai

In addition to the International Shinto Foundation, there are some other organisations that have organised seminars and conferences on the topic of Shinto and ecology in recent years. Particularly relevant in this context is the Shintō Bunka Kai, or Shinto Culture Society, a Jinja Honchō-affiliated academic organisation devoted to research on a number of Shinto-related topics. In recent years, this organisation has brought together a number of scholars to discuss the topic of 'nature and Shinto culture' (*shizen to shintō bunka*) in a series of conferences. In total, there were nine conferences, each of which addressed Shinto's supposed relation to one particular natural phenomenon. In 1999, there was a conference on the topic of 'the sea and Shinto culture', followed by conferences on 'mountains and Shinto culture' in 2000 and on 'rivers and Shinto culture' in 2001. The proceedings of the first three conferences were published together as a book several years later (Shintō Bunka Kai 2009a). Subsequently, there were conferences on, respectively, 'trees and Shinto culture' in 2002; 'fire and Shinto culture' in 2003; and 'soil and Shinto culture' in 2004. The proceedings of these three conferences were published together soon after the first book (Shintō Bunka Kai 2009b). Finally, there were conferences on the topics of 'water and Shinto culture' in 2005, 'the wind and Shinto culture' in 2006, and 'iron and Shinto culture' in 2007; the proceedings of these were published together in 2010 (Shinto Bunka Kai 2010).

What is noteworthy about this categorisation is that there has been relatively much attention to issues related to water (three out of nine conferences), but there was no conference that specifically addressed the topic of forests. This is somewhat surprising, considering the central position of forests in contemporary discourse on Shinto, the environment and the Japanese nation. In fact, reference was made to forests and *chinju no mori* at some of the other conferences – in particular, those concerning trees, mountains, and soil – yet it is not clear why there was no separate conference on the topic of forests. Second, what is surprising is that most conferences addressed inorganic elements of the physical landscape – mountains, rivers, land – or phenomena such as fire and wind. The only conference of the nine addressing non-human organisms was the one on trees; there was hardly any reference to animals (an association that could have easily been made, considering the symbolic significance in shrine traditions of animals such as foxes, monkeys or mice [cf. Watanabe 2001]), or to ecology in general. The conclusion must be that, rather than 'nature' as a whole, the conferences more specifically addressed the relationship between Shinto – or, more accurately, shrine worship traditions – and (elements of) *the physical landscape* of Japan. Indeed, at least some of the papers and discussions display a Watsujiesque nationalist environmental determinism.

As I wrote with regard to the seminars and conferences discussed previously, one of the characteristics of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is that it tends to bring together scholars and scientists from a variety of disciplines, as well as shrine priests and religious leaders. 'Nature',

'forests' and 'the environment' provide a common ground for various actors to interact and foster social relations. The same applies to the Shintō Bunka Kai conferences. There were papers presented by, among others, archaeologists (Kobayashi 2009; Matsumoto 2010); Shinto scholars (Motegi 2009; Motozawa 2010); ethnologists (Katō 2009; Nomoto 2009); religious studies scholars (Kawano 2010; Miyake 2009); environmental and forest scientists (Hirano 2009; Nakamura 2009); and popular authors writing about topics related to religion and spirituality (Makino 2009; Okamura 2009). At times, this situation may have provided participants and audiences with new perspectives, and created opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue – especially since every conference included a lengthy panel discussion. At other times, however, one gets the impression of more or less isolated papers, some of which seriously address the question as to what relationship there might be between 'Shinto culture' and 'nature', while others are limited to the description of disparate topics such as archaeological findings, contemporary *matsuri* practices, and environmental history.

Different though the various contributions were, the underlying assumption of the conferences was clear: Shinto is intimately connected with the Japanese natural environment, and with the Japanese people's alleged ancient spirit of gratitude for nature's bounty. This tradition has been disturbed, it is suggested, by modernisation and the import of 'Western' technology; the solution to environmental problems, then, lies in the rediscovery of ancient Shinto values. As suggested in the preface,

> our country Japan is an island country surrounded by sea, and approximately 73% of the land is mountainous, while 66% is covered by forests. Because of these special geographical characteristics, we were given abundant nature, and the four seasons. While living in coexistence (*kyōsei*) with nature, we Japanese have come to be grateful for receiving the various blessings of the sea and the mountains in our daily lives. The evidence for that certainly lies in the fact that natural phenomena [literally: mountains, rivers, grass and trees] are worshipped and venerated one-by-one as the myriad deities (*yaoyorozu no kamigami*), displayed in the country's 80,000 shrines and their *matsuri*. (…) A special traditional folk culture has been developed, which is devoted to this mind of gratitude for nature's grace. However, in modern times, the influx of the West European scientific and technological civilisation has led to the all-too-sudden industrialisation of the last 150 years. As a result, today, in this so-called advanced information society, our lives are full of convenience and affluence. However, the other side of the story is that humans have attacked nature, and it is a fact that the American–European value system and thought that conceives of nature as a mere possession has influenced our society as a whole, as well as the minds (*kokoro*) of the people (Matsuyama 2009, 1-2; my translation).

The author continues by arguing that this 'European and American sense of values' is responsible not only for the erosion of the traditional Japanese spirit of gratitude and love of nature, but also for the destruction of the environment. Not surprisingly, the solution for today's problems is to be found in 'the Shinto value system and sense of nature that has been raised as intellectual thought, and that has been the traditional culture of our country since ancient times' (ibid., 2). This excerpt sums up

adequately the main axioms underlying the Shinto environmentalist paradigm: first, there is an intimate connection between Shinto and nature, going back to ancient times; second, 'the' Japanese have a long history of nature-loving and ecologically sustainable behaviour, much of which has sadly been lost due to the twin evils of 'modernisation' and 'Westernisation'; and, third, the Japanese 'forest civilisation' – of which *chinju no mori* are said to be the sole remnant – is diametrically opposed to 'Western' civilisation and its Judeo-Christian heritage, which supposedly stipulates that nature is subordinate to man.

6.3   A transnational trend

6.3.1   *Shinto and ecology in global academic discourse*

Thus far, I have mainly discussed examples of Shinto environmentalism as it has developed in Japanese academic discourse. In the following chapters, I will continue my exploration of this paradigm in popular discourse and contemporary Shinto ideology. I will also examine the notion of *chinju no mori* and its ecological significance, as well as different ways in which shrines and shrine-related local actors have appropriated, enacted and transformed these notions. The main focus will therefore be on ideas and practices that have developed and taken place in Japan. However, it is important to emphasise that the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is not merely a Japanese phenomenon that can be studied as a more or less isolated development.[120] Conceptualisations of 'Shinto' or 'nature' (or even of the Japanese nation as such) may have developed in Japan, but they have done so in constant interaction with 'foreign' ideas and developments, language differences notwithstanding. The same is true for the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. Therefore, before continuing my examination of Japanese discourse and practices, I would like to discuss a few examples of non-Japanese texts that have contributed to the establishment and popularisation of this paradigm.

The following analysis will mainly address the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in non-Japanese Anglophone discourse, rather than other languages. I have got the impression that notions about Shinto and the environment are more pronounced in English-language discourse than in other languages (as far as I am aware, at least). This is possibly related to the fact that many of the institutions responsible for the proliferation of the religious environmentalist paradigm are located in either the US or the UK: for instance, the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, the Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology, and the UN

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[120] The same, of course, is true for virtually all contemporary cultural and ideological expressions, which are 'glocal' in the sense that they are the product of an interplay between local and transnational elements. Nevertheless, it may be argued that most texts produced in the field of 'Japanese studies' (as well as, presumably, other 'area studies' disciplines where the 'area' of choice is constituted by a single nation state) continue to have a strongly mononational character, not usually taking into consideration global and/or transnational developments, nor engaging in cross-border comparative research.

headquarters are all in the US, while the Alliance of Religions and Conservation is based in the UK. That said, it would be too simple to see the Shinto environmentalist paradigm as merely an Anglo-Saxon-Japanese coproduction. In France, for instance, the philosopher and geographer Augustin Berque is well-known for his work on Japanese perceptions of nature (encompassing Shinto views), and his attempts at developing a spatial philosophy based upon, among other things, Watsuji's *fūdo* thought (e.g., Berque 1986; 1994).[121] Significantly, he has also contributed to the *chinju no mori* movement by giving a keynote presentation at one of the annual Shasō Gakkai conferences (Berque 2006). In Germany, meanwhile, much research has been done on the thought of so-called 'spiritual' authors such as Umehara Takeshi, Kamata Tōji and Nakazawa Shin'ichi, who have all contributed to the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. For critical analyses of their thought, therefore, one should turn to scholarly discourse in German rather than English (e.g., Gebhardt 2001a; Prohl 2000). However, these scholars have not actively contributed to the conceptualisation of Shinto as a nature religion.

Apparently, the understanding of Shinto as a nature religion with environmental relevance has also spread in other parts of Asia: already in the 1990s, the Chinese philosopher Wang Shou Hua wrote a book about Shinto, a lengthy chapter of which was devoted to the topic of Shinto and the natural environment (1997, 125-154). According to Wang,

> Shinto is based on nature worship; nature and natural phenomena are worshipped as the deeds of the gods, or as the gods themselves. The view that gods become integrated with humans and nature is useful for protecting the natural environment. Objectively speaking, Japan's natural environment is comparatively well preserved. Especially, the natural environment surrounding Shinto shrines is preserved best. Therefore, it can be said that 'Shinto is a religion of nature conservation' (ibid., 127).[122]

As we have seen, the explicit association between Japanese religion and environmental issues was first made in the United States in the 1960s and 70s. At the time, however, reference was made to Zen rather than Shinto (White 1967; Earhart 1970). In Japan, these notions quickly gained popularity, and the Shinto environmentalist paradigm emerged in tandem with the *chinju no mori* preservation movement. In academia outside Japan, however, the explicit association between *Shinto* and the natural environment was not made until much later. Yet, with the establishment and success of the

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[121] Berque refers to his own approach by the names *mésologie*, the study of *milieux*; and *mésologiques*, the logics of *milieux*. A *milieu*, he maintains, is not the same as an 'environment'; the latter term is based on an ontological subject-object distinction, while the term *milieu* encompasses individual organisms *as well as* the larger structures of which they are a part and with which they interact. Although both authors do not refer to each other's work (as far as I know), there are significant similarities between the ideas of Berque and those of Tim Ingold (2000; 2011). Both draw upon the work of the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944), and his distinction between *Umwelt* and *Umgebung*. Berque keeps an interesting weblog, entitled *Mésologiques*, where he and others write short philosophical papers about a variety of topics from a 'mesological' perspective. See http://ecoumene.blogspot.com/ (last accessed: February 26, 2013).

[122] This is my translation of the Japanese translation (the original text was in Chinese).

religious environmentalist paradigm, it was inevitable that the link would be made at some point. This happened in the course of the 1990s.

I have already mentioned the 'Religions of the World and Ecology' conference series, organised by Harvard University between 1996 and 1998. The third of these was devoted to the topic of 'Shinto and Ecology' and took place in March 1997. It was convened by Rosemarie Bernard, who would later summarise the conference's main conclusions as follows:

> Japanese indigenous religion and its orientation to the world, which are interconnected with nature and aesthetics, have a great deal to offer in the struggle to conserve the environment. The Shinto beliefs and attitudes toward nature which are relevant to the problem of environmental preservation include three key points. First, great value is accorded sacred space and time, generally as shrines in groves, the boundaries of which are demarcated as distinct from the secular world. The location of Shinto shrines in local landscapes is an important dimension of their sacredness. (…)
>
> The second point notes a close relation between nature, deities (kami), and human beings. The interactivity of those three is such that human beings also act upon the world they inhabit with nature and deities. (…) Finally, the idea of purification is a key aspect of all ritual activity in Shinto. (…) Harm done or accreted pollution can be neutralized by means of ritual purification. The latter, in particular, is a key dimension of the relationship between the Japanese and nature, which warrants 'cultivation' and exploitation of the environment on the one hand, yet which on the other emphasizes the need to rectify imbalances between nature, humans, and deities. (…)
>
> At present, the only significant green spaces in crowded Japanese urban centers are the groves that surround Shinto shrines. Even the simple preservation of those shrine groves is a difficult task to achieve given the onslaught of pollution as well as pressures to make spatial concessions to further urban growth. The Shinto community is aware of the importance of its special position as guarantor of groves of urban and outlying greenery. Moreover, they are aware of the crucial challenges of translating tradition into modern relevance, so as to transform belief systems into environmental practice (2004).

The conference took place in March 1997, and brought together Japanese Shinto leaders as well as foreign scholars. Among the participants were representatives of the Shinto religious paradigm and the (at the time) emerging *chinju no mori* movement, such as Miyawaki Akira, Motegi Sadasumi and Sonoda Minoru. In addition, there were well-known scholars such as Carmen Blacker, Allan Grapard, Norman Havens, Miyake Hitoshi, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney and Sakurai Haruo. [123] Unfortunately, for whatever reason, of the ten conferences addressing the relationship between ecology and particular religious traditions – ranging from Christianity, Islam and Buddhism to Jainism, Taoism and 'Indigenous Traditions' – the conference on Shinto was the only one that never made it

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[123] The conference program is available on the website of Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology, a follow-up project of the Harvard University conference series. See http://fore.research.yale.edu/archivedconferencefiles/shinto.html (last accessed: February 26, 2013). Unfortunately, no conference papers or abstracts can be found online.

into a book.[124] Nevertheless, it probably constituted an important confirmation and justification of interpretations of Shinto as a nature- and environment-oriented tradition. The impressive line-up at least suggests that there was some serious interest in the issue, which was later carried further.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the idea of Shinto as a nature religion with significance for environmental issues gradually spread among the (Anglophone) academic community. In a lecture given on the occasion of the inaugural symposium of the International Shinto Foundation in 1994, the late Carmen Blacker, well-known for her work on Japanese shamanism (1986), gave a speech entitled 'Shinto and the Sacred Dimension of Nature' (Blacker 1994; cf. Bocking 2004, 265). In this speech, she said: 'From 30 years of study of Shinto and of respect for its divinities I am convinced that it can guide us to a new way of looking at the world around us. It can remind us that there is a holy dimension in natural objects' (Blacker 1994). This new perspective was not to be found in 'State Shinto' – 'a recent and disastrous aberration of the traditional beliefs' – but in something 'older and more universal', 'which has always been part of Japanese culture, but which can be understood elsewhere.' That is, 'Shinto can remind us that the natural world is not a machine put there for our sole enjoyment' (ibid.).

Likewise, sociologist John Clammer has advocated the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, arguing (in reference to Sonoda 2000) that the 'self-conscious positioning of Shinto as an ecologically sensitive religion does indeed have its basis in the characteristics of the religion' (2010, 99; cf. Clammer 2001, 217-243; 2004). According to him, '[n]ature in Shinto is thus not separate from humans as in many forms of Western religion and social science and philosophical thinking and Shinto has been variously described as a form of symbolic immanentism (as opposed to transcendentalism), a religious expression of vitalism, as a nature religion well aware of the impermanence of all things, as a sophisticated form of animism and as a deeply world affirming religion or perhaps set of intuitions (there being no fixed scriptures or absolutely defined ceremonial)' (2010, 99). These features, he argues, give Shinto the potential to address environmental issues: 'Shinto then both lies at the basis of much of Japanese culture and potentially provides a means by which the life-affirming and eco-centric nature of that culture might creatively address the current global crisis, and especially its environmental aspects' (ibid., 100).

6.3.2 *Shinto in the contemporary Orientalist imagination*

Blacker, Clammer and Bernard have a few things in common. First, they perceive of Shinto as an ancient religion, the essence of which lies in an awareness of the interdependence of humans, nature,

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[124] For a complete list of all the conferences and books, see
http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/about/history/ecology.html (last accessed: February 26, 2013). Although the English-language conference proceedings were never published, there is a version in Japanese, but it was not distributed widely (Jinja Honchō 2000).

and deities. Second, they have a tendency to essentialise this religion (in these texts, at least), describing it as a unique, singular tradition with particular defining features, rather than an abstract concept that leads itself to a variety of interpretations and uses. And third, they believe Shinto contains some relevant clues for addressing today's environmental problems. As such, their arguments arguably are not in accordance with recent historical-constructivists accounts of the history of Shinto(isation). Nevertheless, they are reputable scholars, and their arguments are based on long-term research on Japanese 'religion' and/or society. More problematic, from a scholarly point of view, is the growing body of literature in which Shinto is described as the quintessential and transhistorical Japanese 'nature spirituality', and in which it is assumed uncritically that 'Shinto' views of nature provide ways of relating to the environment that may help 'us Westerners' overcome 'our alienation from nature'.

For instance, such ideas were expressed in a recent paper on Shinto and ecology, presented at an international conference on the topic of nature and sacred space (Bergmann et al. 2009). The author, Daniel Shaw, begins his paper by stating that he wants to 'convince the reader that the beliefs and values exhibited in Shinto spirituality can play a fundamental role in developing a post-modern Japanese ecological attitude fit for the needs of twenty-first century Japan' (2009, 311). This initial statement immediately raises a number of questions. First, what are these 'beliefs and values exhibited in Shinto spirituality'; more importantly, as there is obviously no single objective answer to that question possible, who gets to decide and define them? Second, why does this 'Japanese ecological attitude' have to be post-modern; and what does this term, which can be (and has been) used in a wide variety of ways, signify in this context? Third, who are the actors responsible for developing this attitude (and how, for that matter, can a national attitude be 'developed')? If the author of the article is the person responsible for 'developing' this 'attitude', is it still 'Japanese'? And finally, who gets to decide what are 'the needs of twenty-first century Japan', and what attitude is deemed 'fit' for them?

Unfortunately, none of these questions are answered. The problem is not merely a careless, non-reflexive use of language; the entire article is based on a problematic cultural-essentialist understanding of Shinto (the concept itself is neither defined nor historicised), a lack of reference to any primary sources, and the absence of any historical perspective. I will refrain from discussing it at length here, but one does wonder how it is possible that such a paper was accepted at an academic conference, and subsequently included in a scholarly book. Perhaps the conclusion must be that ahistorical, essentialist stories of 'spirituality' and 'sacred places', in which neither term is problematised, continue to be told in the discipline of religious studies – a hybrid construct, after all, including sound critical scholarship as well as pseudo-religious mythmaking. Rather than asking the question *how* places and objects come to be perceived as 'sacred', such articles readily legitimise claims of sacredness, and take them as a natural given. Moreover, they all-too-often romanticise and exoticise the 'Oriental' and/or 'indigenous' Other, as is obviously the case here. As such, they are more similar to popular 'spiritual' texts than to serious academic texts. The problem is, however, that

they provide such popular spiritual ideas with 'scientific' legitimation because they are academically sanctioned.

Indeed, the notion of Shinto as some sort of neo-pagan nature spirituality is spreading outside Japan – as is, apparently, the number of non-Japanese people engaging in nature-oriented meditation and worship practices labelled as 'Shinto'. These days, European and American spiritual tourists come to Japan to take part in *misogi* ceremonies (ritual purification in rivers or under waterfalls) (*Jinja shinpō* 2011d) or go on organised '*shugendō* experience' mountain worship trips. Now that 'Zen' seems to have lost some of its appeal as a result of its mass popularisation and commercialisation, and is perhaps no longer as exotic or trendy as it once was, the 'nature spirituality' Shinto seems to be gaining ground internationally.

Not surprisingly, then, the few Shinto shrines that have been established abroad by non-Japanese priests typically emphasise nature's central importance. In the Netherlands, for instance, the notion of Shinto as a nature religion has been advocated by the aforementioned Yamakage Shinto priest Paul de Leeuw. On his website, he describes Shinto as 'an ancient tradition to live in harmony with nature. This tradition was existent in all ancient civilisations and has perished with them. However, it is still fully alive in Japan, the second economy in the world. The core of [S]hinto is the sense of nature as a living source of energy, nourishing body, mind and spirit.' [125] A similar interpretation of Shinto is advocated by the Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America. On its facebook page, it states that Shinto is 'the way of progressing in harmony with divine nature', which can teach us how to overcome the challenges of modernity by helping us get back to our ancient roots:

> The modern world we inhabit changes very quickly – our society now relies on email, cell phones, web-based social networking and 24/7 internet access. The nature of our human minds and human spirituality however is relatively unchanged since ancient times. Jinja Shinto originating in the spontaneous reverence for Nature of Japan's deep pre-history represents the basic of human spirituality and human experience. Something in the pristine nature of the Jinja Shinto experience can help reconnect us to our primal intuitive roots while the purifying straightening and invigorating action can help us to meet the challenges of the present fast-changing and sometimes confusing times. The Shinto Shrine is an enriched environment where Divine Nature's Life Giving Forces are commemorated like parents. The Shrine is a place where all things in Nature gather together and receive renewal.[126]

This popularisation of Shinto as 'nature spirituality' abroad is not limited to overseas shrine practices or spiritual tourism, but also exemplified by a number of books. In particular, scholars such as Thomas Kasulis and Stuart Picken have contributed to this understanding of Shinto. The former wrote a book in which he identified Shinto as the basic substratum of Japanese culture; in elegant yet

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[125] From http://www.shinzen.nl/about_us.htm (last accessed: February 26, 2013).
[126] From
https://www.facebook.com/index.php?lh=b6838f77cca6214a820d2604fcee278e&eu=p7zB-Mts4jjqFJMvxVYSTg#!/groups/TsubakiShintoShrine/members/ (last accessed: February 26, 2013).

essentialist prose, he describes Shinto as being characterised by 'naturalness' and 'simplicity'. Naturalness, he argues, 'is a prominent theme in almost every serious discussion of Shinto – and rightly so. (…) [The term] has two senses for the Japanese: either a close connection between humans and nature or the cultivated ability to *make* things natural' (2004, 42-43; emphasis in original). Simplicity, then, 'follows from Shinto's emphasis on naturalness. (…) The natural surroundings of the shrine may be groomed, but the landscaping usually does not have the planned design associated with "Japanese gardens". (…) The best way to make something natural is to keep it simple' (ibid., 44). This is a puzzling statement, not only because those well-designed Japanese gardens are often praised for these very same qualities, but also because the 'cooked', artificially simple 'nature' represented by cultural artefacts such as *ikebana* flowers or *bonsai* trees is arguably far removed from the 'raw' natural (i.e., not culturally mediated and transformed) shape of the organisms involved. In contrast to what Kasulis suggests, it may actually be argued that nature as a whole is not simple at all, but very complex indeed.

Kasulis' book, and its conceptualisation of Shinto, has received serious criticism (e.g., Thal 2006), but it remains within the limits of scholarly interpretation. That is arguably not the case for some of the works by Stuart Picken. His book *Shinto Meditations for Revering the Earth* (2002), for instance, contains a number of English-language 'Shinto' prayers for nature worship, written by himself. It constitutes one of the most outspoken examples of the reinterpretation of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature spirituality, the purpose of which is made clear in the preface:

> I would like to help awaken you to what religion began as, when nature was the spirit's only guide. Before prophets and gurus, priests and preachers, human beings followed their own inner stirrings, and their religion was natural religion. It was not manmade, artificial, or invented. Its sentiments, beliefs, and responses were drawn from direct communion with the natural. (…) This religion really was in every sense of the term 'pre-historic'. *It emerged before history was invented* to tell us who we are, where we came from, and what we should do with ourselves. It predates the great religions of history. (…). This simple approach to religion that listens to nature, that enriches spirituality, and that restores purity does exist. It has survived in only one modern technological society. It is called *Shinto*, and it lives in modern Japan (2002, 9-10; first emphasis mine).

Shinto is here presented as the archetypal *Ur*-religion; it is defined as the very remnant of the pure, spontaneous religious spirit of our ancient ancestors, which supposedly existed before the advent of manmade dogmatic religion. It was not constructed, but emerged spontaneously, as 'the communal response of the ancient immigrant dwellers of Japan to the stunning natural environment in which they found themselves' (ibid., 16). Any historical connection to politics or ideology is denied, or downplayed as an unfortunate aberration, as 'real' Shinto supposedly transcends both history and politics (ibid., 24-25). 'Nature' itself is presented as the ultimate cause. Thus, in works such as this one, Shinto is mythologised in the Barthesian sense of the world: it is literally naturalised, and thus depoliticised. Contrary to what Picken suggests, the ahistorical, depoliticised understanding of Shinto

as a 'nature religion' is inherently ideological, and can be employed for a variety of purposes not necessarily characterised by 'purity'.

Finally, a recent initiative that deserves to be mentioned in this context is the weblog *Green Shinto*. It is written by John Dougill, a Kyoto-based professor in English literature, and author of travel guidebooks and popular-scientific books on a wide range of topics. On *Green Shinto*, he writes on issues related to Shinto, shrine worship and the natural environment. The blog is said to be

> dedicated to the promotion of an open, international and environmental Shinto. It seeks to celebrate the rich heritage of the tradition, from sacred rocks and shamanistic roots to bawdy myths and fertility festivals. It believes Shinto to be essentially diverse, localised and community oriented. It looks to a Shinto free of borders, liberated from its past to meet the demands of a new age. It looks in short to a Shinto that is green in deed as well as in word.[127]

Thus, Dougill is fairly explicit about his agenda and understanding of Shinto, which clearly does not correspond to conservative Japanese conceptualisations of the tradition. That is, in his weblog articles, he expresses numerous opinions – anti-nationalist, anti-nuclear and anti-whaling, for instance – that most certainly are not shared by conservative members of the Jinja Honchō establishment, its political lobby organisation, and the *Jinja shinpō* editorial board. Hence, one may question to what extent Dougill's interpretation is representative of Shinto as a whole. But then, he does not claim it is, and readily acknowledges the fact that this weblog merely represents his personal opinions and interests (personal communication, September 2011). In fact, rather than idealising and depoliticising Shinto by presenting it as, say, peaceful nature worship – as authors like Shaw and Picken have done – Dougill regularly posts about controversial and political issues, such as official Yasukuni shrine visits and the ultra-nationalist, imperialist 'Shinto' ideology by which some members of the current LDP government are apparently informed.[128] In addition, however, he writes about a range of local traditions – *matsuri*, shrines, little-known *shinbutsu shūgō* practices, Hindu deities incorporated into shrine worship and so on – and publishes book reviews, interviews with priests and scholars, and travel accounts. Consequently, his weblog is informative, and arguably moves beyond the 'green Orientalist' imagination found in other contemporary sources.

6.4   Shinto and the environment in popular discourse: Miyazaki Hayao

6.4.1   Shinto and popular culture

Thus far, I have examined the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in Japanese academic discourse, as well as in transnational discourse, both academic and popular-religious.

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[127] From http://www.greenshinto.com/wp/about/ (last accessed: August 8, 2013).

[128] See for instance http://www.greenshinto.com/wp/2013/08/02/yasukuni-in-the-news/ and http://www.greenshinto.com/wp/2013/08/04/shinto-the-big-choice/ (last accessed: August 8, 2013).

However, although the Shinto environmentalist paradigm undeniably has a strong academic component, it is not solely a theoretical affair. In order to get a more complete understanding of contemporary notions and reinterpretations of Shinto, therefore, it is important to address other societal and discursive fields that are relevant in this context. In the next chapter, I will look at the various ways in which shrine actors have contributed to the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. First, however, I will briefly examine the possible influence of popular culture in this respect – in particular, some of the works of Miyazaki Hayao (born 1941).

'Popular culture' is a somewhat diffuse generic category that includes *manga* comic books and *anime* films as well as mass media texts and consumer goods. It may be argued that contemporary understandings of Shinto, shrines and deities are partly influenced by some of these popular culture texts. Although it is difficult to determine how far-reaching this influence is, to the majority of Japanese popular media texts are an important – if not the only – source of information. *Matsuri* and other events, such as the ritual rebuilding (*shikinen sengū*) of Ise, typically receive a lot of attention in mass media. Mass media thus contribute to attracting visitors, most of whom are not likely to give much thought to the categories 'Shinto' and 'religion'. Likewise, the recent popularisation of shrines as 'powerspots' and the reported 'powerspot boom' are largely media inventions: as discussed in chapter three, TV programmes and magazines reported on the miraculous powers of particular places, which then became highly popular.

Furthermore, in recent years there has been a remarkable rise in the number of *manga* and *anime* creatively reimagining themes and characters derived from so-called religious traditions (as well as inventing new ones), some of which have gained significant popularity. Examples include such diverse works as *Seinto Oniisan* (*Saint Young Men*) by Nakamura Hikaru, which depicts Jesus and Gautama Buddha in twenty-first century Tokyo; *Onmyōji* by Okano Reiko, about a medieval Yin-Yang ritualist; *Mushi shi* by Urushibara Yuki and *Tokyo Babylon* by Clamp, spiritual detectives that reimagine a variety of supernatural creatures; *Kannagi* by Takenashi Eri, which tells the story of a goddess who has become homeless after her *shinboku* (sacred tree) was cut down; and even the ultra-nationalist work of the historical revisionist Kobayashi Yoshinori, which employs mythological imagery to emphasise the divine nature of the imperial family. Not all of these texts have contributed to the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, and not all of them are 'religious' in the narrow sense of the word – some of them may even be considered blasphemous. Nevertheless, it may be argued that these *manga* and *anime* (and many others) draw upon religious traditions, as well as a variety of popular myths and beliefs. Even the usually conservative shrine establishment seems to have realised the effect of popular imaginations of *kami* and related topics, a genre which is now referred to by the term 'Shinto *anime*' (Ishihara 2009).

I do not have the space here to discuss the topic of 'Shinto *anime*' at length; nor will I try to answer the question whether or not these texts should be categorised as 'Shinto' and/or 'religion'.[129] As I do not adhere to any substantial definition of either category, seeing them as second-order concepts that can be employed and appropriated in principle by anyone, I do not consider myself to be in a position to decide what popular *manga* and *anime* texts do or do not belong to these categories. Having said that, it is important to bear in mind the crucial distinction between, on the one hand, manga and anime *produced by* religious institutions in order to communicate mythological and theological narratives to young audiences (e.g., Christian institutions' publications of the Bible in *manga* version, or Jinja Honchō's publication of a *manga* version of the *Kojiki*), and on the other, the work of individual, independent artists reinterpreting elements from existing traditions and creating new 'spiritual' themes and characters. While the former are adaptations of established sacred texts, the latter are contemporary fictional creations. While undeniably drawing upon them and incorporating some elements, we should be careful not to *equate* apparently religious imagery in popular culture with traditions of worship and beliefs as they have evolved over the centuries.

This may seem obvious, but when reading interpretations of and commentaries upon *anime* and *manga* – in scholarly essays, online reviews, internet fora *et cetera* – one often comes across superficial assumptions regarding the 'religious' character of these texts. The term 'religious', however, is not usually defined or operationalised. This is especially the case for films made by the world-famous director Miyazaki Hayao, several of which are seen as 'religious' and said to contain many elements of 'Shinto' and/or 'folk religion' (e.g., Boyd & Nishimura 2004; Wright 2005). As Ogihara-Schluck has pointed out, this focus on the so-called 'religious' elements of Miyazaki's films – not only Shinto, but also, it has been argued, Christian – has been especially pronounced in the United States (2010). Miyazaki himself, by contrast, has always been reluctant to see his own works as 'religious', and has never claimed that they represent 'Shinto' as such.[130] Nevertheless, considering the often-made discursive association between Miyazaki's films, their ecological subtexts, and Shinto (or Japanese 'folk religion'), his oeuvre has undoubtedly contributed to popular understandings of Shinto and nature, in Japan as well as abroad. For instance, some of these films are so influential and well-

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[129] One scholar has suggested a new category for this type of pseudo-religious popular reimaginations. As he wrote, '[t]he artificial distinction between religion and entertainment upon which these earlier analyses [of religion and *anime*] are based neglects the historical tendency within Japan for the conflation of, or oscillations between, the two. In many instances, and particularly in the contemporary context, this combined religion-entertainment has been a prevalent part of Japanese culture, and can be seen in a number of products and activities, some of which include *manga* and *anime* and their production. Here, using the words *shūkyō* (religion) and *asobi* (play/entertainment), I propose the term *shūkyō asobi* to describe this area of Japanese religious culture' (Thomas 2007).

[130] For instance, he insisted that originally, he did not want his film *Nausicaä and the Valley of the Wind* to be a religious story: 'I wanted to get rid of any religious undertone. (...) I do like animism. I can understand the idea of ascribing character to stones or wind. But I didn't want to laud it as a religion' (Miyazaki 2009, 332). On the other hand, he has also stated that 'the role of Nausicaä herself was not to become an actual leader or even a guide for her people. Rather, it was to act as a type of *miko*, a shaman-maiden who works at a Shinto shrine' (ibid., 407). Miyazaki refuses to associate his films with any particular religious tradition, yet he does make occasional reference to aspects of these traditions.

known that scholars now refer to them to explain particular worship traditions and/or Japanese attitudes vis-à-vis nature (e.g., Nakamura 2009, 30). Hence, some of his works are of immediate relevance for this study – not only because of their apparent influence and popularity, but also because they illustrate some of the core themes and topics of Shinto environmentalist discourse.

Miyazaki Hayao is one of Japan's most successful contemporary artists. He is the creator of a number of internationally acclaimed animated films, and artistic leader of Studio Ghibli, one of the country's best-known film studios. The international rights of his films are currently owned by Disney, but his films differ significantly from those produced by his American counterpart, in terms of visual style as well as narrative. Whereas Disney films tend to be based on an ontological distinction between good and evil, the epic confrontation of which is a central motive in the narrative, many of Miyazaki's characters are morally ambiguous creatures, whose actions are motivated by a variety of concerns that do not fit neatly within a good-bad dichotomy. In several of his films, spirits and deities play a central part, as do notions of (divine) nature, pollution, environmental destruction and traditional Japanese landscapes.

Miyazaki himself has criticised the utopian and nationalist tendencies inherent in some recent interpretations of Japanese animism, in particular the works of Umehara Takeshi (Inaga 1999, 125; cf. Umehara 1989; 1995); nevertheless, there are some significant, undeniable similarities between his films on the one hand, and the recent discourse on Shinto, nature and Japanese identity, on the other. Not only are his films appropriated by contemporary scholars reemploying mythical notions of 'the Japanese view of nature' (e.g., Hori 2008); as argued, they also seem to influence understandings of Shinto abroad, as many authors commenting on Miyazaki films uncritically assume that the spirit worlds portrayed in them correspond to Shinto worldviews (e.g., Boyd & Nishimura 2004; Wright 2005). For instance, as one of them wrote: 'Miyazaki is cinematically practicing the ancient form of Shinto, which emphasised an intuitive continuity with the natural world' (Wright 2005, abstract). Such ahistorical, romantic images of a singular, pure, nature-oriented ancient Shinto are surprisingly common, not only in popular but also in academic discourse. Hence, the hypothesis that Miyazaki's films have significantly influenced popular understandings of Shinto, in particular with regard to its supposed relationship with 'nature', seems justified.

Rather than 'practicing the ancient form of Shinto' or simply being influenced by Shinto worldviews, it may also be argued that, in fact, the opposite has been the case: by creatively reimagining spirits and deities as well as ancient landscapes, Miyazaki has actively contributed to the discursive construction of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship. Even though he has not explicitly referred to his own fiction as being representative of 'Shinto' as such, his works do convey images and notions that are central to the contemporary discourse on Shinto, nature and the environment. In this respect, four of Miyazaki's works are of particular interest, as they represent different motives in contemporary Shinto ideology. I will discuss them in chronological order.

6.4.2   Miyazaki's films

The modern classic *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no tani no Naushika*, 1984) is one of Miyazaki's best-known films, and was produced just before he founded Studio Ghibli. In subsequent years, its story and characters were developed further in a series of *manga* books. A science fiction dystopia, *Nausicaä* combines a critique of environmental exploitation with apocalyptic fantasies. It tells the story of a toxic, post-nuclear world, inhabited by small isolated communities of human beings. They coexist with large isopod-like creatures called *ōmu*, which are of crucial importance for preserving the fragile ecosystem, as they are agents of purification.[131] Nausicaä is a princess and warrior from the Valley of the Wind, a place where people have learned to live in harmony with their natural surroundings. She has to protect the *ōmu*, as well as the jungle in which they live, from destruction by battleships from the neighbouring country Tolmekia. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* has strong environmentalist and pacifist subtexts, suggesting that the ruthless exploitation of natural resources leads to the destruction of ecosystems and, ultimately, widespread violence and suffering.

Not surprisingly, then, the film has been lauded as an important ecological critique, and was appropriated as a symbol for the environmental movement in Japan in the 1980s. Nevertheless, Miyazaki has expressed himself in critical terms about some ecological ideas and practices – and, accordingly, about the human desire to control, understand, and predict the natural environment:

> In the story of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, the Sea of Decay was supposed to have been created by humans a thousand years earlier to cleanse the environment. But even the ancient people who made it had no way of predicting how the Sea would eventually be transformed. No matter how many genius ecologists were consulted, no one could have forecast what would actually happen. (…) When we think we can predict something, we're really just revealing our own arrogance. (…) What is intended and what actually happens are two entirely different things. So although in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* the Sea of Decay began as an artificially created ecosystem, over time it changed. Similarly, rather than saying that it's no use maintaining trees planted by man because they can never become a truly natural, primeval, or virgin forest, I prefer to think that even man-made forests can ultimately function on their own and that they will eventually become ecosystems far more complex than we can imagine (2009, 169).

Elsewhere, he has commented upon the violent character of the Sea of Decay, in relation to the common myth of nature as being gentle and benign:

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[131] The names of the insect and the religious organisation Aum Shinrikyō, which was responsible for the 1995 Tokyo subway attacks, are said to have similar roots: both can be seen as appropriations of the Sanskrit sound *om* or *aum* (ॐ), which is used in Buddhist and Hindu worship practices. As Miyazaki says, the creatures' name is 'a mixture of the words for the king's worm [*ō* means king; *mu* is derived from *mushi*, insect], the sandworm from *Dune* [a famous science fiction classic] and Daijirō Morohoshi [another *manga* artist]'s Buddhist term "ohm"' (2009, 416). It has even been argued that Asahara Shōkō, the leader of Aum Shinrikyō, was inspired by these creatures: as Inaga states, Asahara was 'a fervent reader' of the comic books, who 'seems to have willingly assumed (…) the role of the Aum insect and the purifying forest in this disgracefully polluted world' (1999, 120).

At the end of *Macbeth* there is a scene of a forest moving. (…) With that idea in mind, I thought it would be interesting to overturn the concept of defenseless plants always being destroyed and instead create a forest that was on the offensive. In other words, isn't it the height of arrogance to keep showing nature as needing protection to keep from disappearing? This is what I don't care for. Everyone depicts nature as being charming. But it is something more fearsome. That is why I think there is something missing in our current view of nature. (…) I feel we cannot forget that within our historic memory there was a period when the forest was overwhelmingly powerful. This is why a forest on the attack can exist (ibid., 417-418).

Thus, Miyazaki argues that nature is not merely the passive object of human action, whether protective or exploitative; indeed, it can be violent and unpredictable. Significantly, this sort of apocalyptic motives can be found in environmentalist discourse worldwide (cf. Skrimshire 2010), and is central to the millenarian narratives of environmental destruction currently employed by several 'Shinto-derived' religious movements in Japan, such as Ōmoto. For instance, when I visited the Ōmoto centre in the city of Kameoka (Kyoto prefecture), I was told that the current environmental crisis will lead to the demise of the contemporary world order, and ultimately give way to a new one – as predicted in the original Ōmoto scriptures (interview with Ōmoto official, November 2011). Similar ideas have been expressed by some of the leading contemporary 'green' Shinto thinkers, such as Ueda Masaaki (personal interview, December 2011) and Kamata Tōji (2011; see chapter eleven).

Very different in style is *My Neighbor Totoro* (*Tonari no Totoro*, 1988). It tells the story of two young girls, who move with their father to an old farmhouse somewhere on the Japanese countryside. They live next to a small sacred grove, surrounded by ancient trees and inhabited by a large teddybear-like spirit/deity named Totoro,[132] as well as some smaller spirits. Loved by children and adults alike, *My Neighbor Totoro* is probably one of the most popular and well-known media texts in Japan today. In fact, it may be argued that the film has achieved paradigmatic status – and not only because Totoro itself has become an iconic figure, present in every kindergarten or souvenir shop, that has come to represent innocence, benevolence and social harmony. Reportedly, Japanese landscape planners today use the term 'Totoro' to refer to 'traditional Japanese' landscapes, in which humans actively interact with and give shape to their natural surroundings through agriculture and other practices. As mentioned previously, this model is referred to as *satoyama* by today's ecologists (e.g., Takeuchi et al. 2003), and constitutes a challenge to traditional conservationist notions of pure nature as 'wild' and untouched by humans.

My Neighbor Totoro shows an idyllic image of a traditional rural Japan, in which people live in harmony with their human and non-human neighbours. It corresponds to and revitalises popular

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[132] Miyazaki has described the character as follows: '"Totoro" is what five-year-old Mei, one of the main characters in the film, named these creatures. No one knows their real name. They have inhabited our country's forests for eons, since the time hardly any humans live here. Apparently they live for over a thousand years. Larger *totoro* are over two meters tall. Covered in fluffy fur, they look like giant owls or badgers or bears' (2009, 255-256).

notions of uniquely Japanese ways of coexisting with nature, as well as a correlated nostalgic longing for a 'lost past' (cf. Yoshioka 2010). Thus, the film has come to represent a particular view on human-nature relationships and authentic Japanese landscapes that has gained great popularity in recent years. This cultural-nationalist subtext is illustrated by Miyazaki's notes:

> Until a short time ago, when asked 'what can Japan proudly show to the world?' grown-ups and children alike would answer, 'The beauty in nature and the four seasons.' No one says this anymore. Though we live in Japan, and are without a doubt Japanese, we continue to create animation films that avoid depicting Japan. Has our nation become such a miserable place, devoid of dreams? In this age of internationalization, we know that *the essentially national is what can become most international*. Why, then, don't we make fun, wonderful films actually set in Japan? (2009, 255; my emphasis).

In addition, the character of Totoro represents an idea that has taken centre stage in contemporary Shinto discourse: the previously mentioned notion of *chinju no mori*, or sacred forest. While smaller and more explicitly associated with shrines, *chinju no mori* can be said to be discursively associated with *satoyama*, representing the same idealised traditional values and alleged ecological significance (e.g., Iwatsuki 2008). They are generally conceptualised as small, old forests, with a strong local character. *Chinju no mori* are seen as the dwelling places of deities, who are strongly connected to (and, for that matter, dependent on) their particular locales. If treated well, these deities are generally benevolent, and protect nearby communities. Similarly, Totoro lives in a small grove, surrounded by high, old trees, and his dwelling place is recognisable as a Shinto shrine because of its *shimenawa* rope and small *torii* gate. Totoro is a protective creature, who rescues little Mei when she is lost; moreover, he is life-giving, as he performs the ritual dance that makes the acorns grow. Thus, the film has popularised several of the notions associated with *chinju no mori*, even though the term itself is not used. I will discuss the notion of *chinju no mori*, and its discursive associations, in more detail in chapter nine.

The ancient forest motive, typical of some expressions of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm (in particular those stressing Shinto's 'animistic' essence), is central to Miyazaki's masterpiece *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke Hime*, 1997). Reportedly set in the Muromachi period (1337-1573), it also reflects idealised notions of the prehistorical Jōmon period, while simultaneously criticising ideas of 'progress' and the exploitation of natural resources that have come with modernity's industrialisation process. The film tells a story of deities and spirits living in deep primeval forests,[133] who turn into violent demons as a result of the destruction of their dwelling places. It can be interpreted as a story about an existential battle between human society, which has embraced modern technology and become alienated from the nature it exploits, and the animal deities who live

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[133] Incidentally, the forests in Princess Mononoke are modelled after those on the island Yakushima. This UNESCO World Heritage site is one of the last remaining areas of real primeval forest in Japan; constituting the archetypal Jōmon forest, it is regularly mentioned in contemporary discourse on forests, Japanese culture and Shinto.

in and are dependent upon the forest for their survival. In other words, it is a critique of the destruction of the balance between human beings and their non-human (animal, divine, environmental) Others, which is seen as the consequence of the modernisation project.

Like *Nausicaä*, *Princess Mononoke* is strongly apocalyptic, showing the irreversible process of the destruction of (sacred) nature on which humankind has embarked, and the moral nihilism by which it is accompanied. The film follows the same basic narrative of decline as can be found in the works of contemporary intellectuals such as Umehara and Ueda Masaaki. Simultaneously, however, it also follows them in their portrayal of forests as places that are divine, inhabited by spirits, life-giving and eventually of crucial importance for the survival of humankind. As such, its message is not unambiguously pessimistic. Even though a powerful forest deity is killed in the end – symbolising the destruction of the forest by human beings – its death gives birth to new plants, suggesting that in a post-disaster environment nature can, and will, recover. As Miyazaki wrote before making the film,

> *Princess Mononoke* does not purport to solve the problems of the entire world. The battle between rampaging forest gods and humanity cannot end well; there can be no happy ending. Yet, even amid the hatred and slaughter, there are things worthy of life. It is possible for wonderful encounters to occur and for beautiful things to exist. I will depict hatred, but only to show that there is something more valuable (2009, 274).

Finally, whereas *Nausicaä* and *Mononoke* visualise the problem of environmental destruction explicitly and uncompromisingly, Academy Award winner *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chichiro no kamikakushi*, 2001) addresses the problem in a more implicit and, perhaps, sophisticated way. The film tells the story of a ten-year old girl, Chihiro, who gets lost and ends up in a world inhabited by spirits, deities and other non-human creatures. She finds work in a public bath, where the deities come to get clean, and enjoy nice food and entertainment. It may be argued that the film reflects several central aspects of shrine worship, historically as well as today: the importance of ritual and physical cleanliness and purification; food offerings; performances for deities, such as ritual dances; and playfulness and joyful celebrations during festivals. In one scene, the bath is visited by an incredibly dirty and smelly creature, believed to be some sort of demon. Chihiro is given the unpleasant job of taking care of this unusual customer. With some luck and a little help from her friends, she succeeds in cleaning him – by pulling a large amount of garbage, rusty bicycle wrecks, old machines and, perhaps, toxic waste out of him. The demon turns out to be an ancient river god, whose river has become polluted and filled with garbage, and who has not been able to find peace until liberated and purified by a helpful child. Thus, Miyazaki creatively reinterprets one of Shinto's core concerns, pollution and purification, and extends its meaning beyond the realm of the merely ritual to include the physical pollution of the natural environment.

Together, these films represent a number of motives central to contemporary writing on Shinto and the environment: 1) anti-modern and anti-capitalist critiques; 2) apocalyptic expectations of

environmental destruction and rebirth; 3) idealised notions of ancient forest societies, which may serve as models for the future; 4) a nostalgic interest in traditional rural landscapes, and associated socio-cultural values and practices; and 5) a renewed interest in the topics of purity and pollution, reinterpreting centuries-old ritual notions in contemporary ecological ways. Hence, Miyazaki's contributions are relevant to any discussion of the discursive construction of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship and/or utopian theories of ancient forest societies as symbolic resources for the construction of a collective Japanese identity. If not academic discourse, at least they have significantly affected the public imagination.

7. SHRINES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

7.1 Prewar shrine activism

7.1.1 Pre-modern preservation?

As we have seen, the Shinto environmentalist paradigm was developed in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. It was based on, first, existing discourse on Shinto as Japan's indigenous religion, best preserved in local ritual traditions (in particular, the ethnologies of Yanagita Kunio and Orikuchi Shinobu); second, notions of 'nature' and Japanese national identity, as well as Watsuji's *fūdo*-centred environmental determinism; and third, the Lynn White thesis and the religious environmentalist paradigm, which have transformed religious practices and identities worldwide. The movement for the protection of *chinju no mori* emerged around the same time, thanks to the efforts of the scientists Ueda Atsushi and Miyawaki Akira, whose ideas influenced a number of Shinto scholars and priests that became active in conservation efforts. Recent though these developments may be, they are often grounded in the belief that shrine forests have always been perceived as sacred, and have therefore been preserved since ancient times. The recent developments, then, are seen as *the continuation of existing practices.*

Some scholars have questioned this historical narrative. Conrad Totman, for instance, has argued that this type of pre-modern conservation can hardly be considered significant (1989, 179). Likewise, Fabio Rambelli has questioned the assumption that conservation practices were the consequence of some sort of 'animistic' awareness of the intrinsic sacredness of trees. As he has demonstrated, in medieval Japan forests were primarily seen in economical terms, and conservation efforts were primarily motivated by temples' concerns about the depletion of natural resources (i.e., timber and other forest products) in temple lands (2007, 156-161). 'Provincial temples', he states, 'invoke[d] notions of sacredness as an ideological tool in the attempt to stop the exploitation of their lands' (ibid., 160). Although Rambelli primarily addresses Buddhism, his analysis also applies to shrines and *kami* worship – especially considering the fact that in *shinbutsu-shūgō* Japan, there was significant overlap between these categories, and many temples and shrines were integrated. For example, as we have seen, the sacralisation of Mount Miwa was a strategy employed by the shrine authorities to prevent the exploitation of land 'by gatherers of firewood, stones, or mushrooms, and by people cutting trees or even making fields for agriculture' (Domenig 1997, 101).

Thus, to what extent we can speak of environmental awareness in pre-modern Japan remains an open question. Edo-period reforestation and forest management practices have been lauded by contemporary authors for their alleged sustainability (Nakamura 2009; Tawara 2010; cf. Brown 2009) – but these, too, emerged as a response by the authorities to increasing deforestation and corresponding natural disasters (see Totman 1989), rather than as the logical consequence of some sort of innate Japanese awareness of the intrinsic sacredness of forests. Arguably, the projection of

contemporary notions of nature, conservation and environmental issues onto beliefs and practices developed in earlier periods of history often comes down to anachronistic thinking. Yet, this is precisely the rhetoric device employed by representatives of (and scholars doing research on) various 'non-Western' religions and culture; as discussed previously, the reinterpretation of these traditions as 'ancient ecological knowledge' for purposes of identity politics is an integral part of what Pedersen (1995) and Kalland (2008) have referred to as the 'religious environmentalist paradigm'.

Nevertheless, there does seem to be some truth to the argument that, until the beginning of the twentieth century, shrine forests were preserved comparatively well. Whether this is because these forests were seen as intrinsically sacred and intimately connected with deities, because of some proto-environmentalist concern for forest conservation, or because shrines wanted to prevent the natural resources in their forests from being exploited by others may be subject to debate. Perhaps it is not either/or: economical concerns may have given rise to attempts at conservation, which were legitimised by means of sacralisation processes. In any case, there are plenty of historical texts, maps and illustrations documenting the existence of shrine forests and forested sacred mountains in the medieval and pre-modern periods (e.g., Kanasaka 2001). These forests and mountains were associated with the deities worshipped at the shrine (or temple), and exploitation by outsiders was not usually allowed – at least in theory. Whether 'primeval' or not, some of today's shrine forests do indeed go back to the medieval period (or even before), and have been preserved (more or less) for centuries, although they may be smaller now than they used to be in the past. Well-known examples include the forests of Shimogamo Jinja in Kyoto and Kasuga Taisha in Nara.

Accordingly, much academic discourse on *chinju no mori* is characterised by a nostalgic longing for the Edo period. This is seen as a time when traditional Japanese animistic sentiments were expressed in *shinbutsu shūgō* beliefs and rituals, as well as in nature conservation practices.[134] The Meiji period, by contrast, is usually described in negative terms – as is 'State Shinto', which is seen as a distortion of 'original' Shinto as it was supposedly practiced in rural village communities, intertwined with and complementary to Buddhism (Sonoda 1997, 74-79; M. Ueda 2001b, 60-65). But this view of the Edo period as a golden age for shrine-temple forests and devotional practices, and the Meiji period as an age of decline, is not fully accurate. As Domenig has pointed out, in the early Meiji period

> the condition of the shrines all over the country was studied and the details were noted down in special records (*jinja meisaichō*). It was found that the shrines were not only very numerous, but often in bad conditions also with respect to the state of their groves. Various measures were therefore taken to improve the situation. Sometimes a neglected shrine with a very poor

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[134] Some scholars have even argued that *shinbutsu shūgō* is the 'natural' state of Japanese religion, rather than the institutional separation of Buddhism and Shinto, which they see as a modern aberration (e.g., Kamata 2011, 42-46). In contrast to adherents of the imperial paradigm, who want to restore Shinto as an emperor-centred national cult, these scholars argue for a 'return' to pre-Meiji combinatory practices.

grove would be moved to another where it could be newly built in an attractive forest as was thought to be necessary for preserving its majesty or dignity (1997, 108).

As this quotation suggests, it would be too simple to say that the exploitation of shrine forests is a Meiji phenomenon that did not occur previously, or that shrine forests were much better preserved before the establishment of the Meiji regime than after. Hence, the common narrative – shrine forests were well preserved until the end of the Edo period, but decreased in number from the Meiji period onwards due to the implementation of 'Western' technology and the corresponding ideology of exploitation – is not entirely correct. While in the Meiji period some shrine forests may have fallen victim to construction projects, others were subjected to new conservation policies implemented to 'preserve their dignity'. Moreover, several (mainly coniferous) shrine forests existing today were planted (or replanted) during the Meiji period. One such example is Kashihara Jingū in Nara prefecture: surrounded by forest, and located at the site where the mythical emperor Jinmu is believed to have been buried, it was not built until 1889. Another well-known example of a newly constructed shrine forest is the forest of Meiji Jingū, which I will discuss in chapter ten.

7.1.2   Minakata Kumagusu

The main reason why advocates of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm commonly associate Meiji- and Taishō-period imperial Shinto with the destruction of shrine forests is the *jinja gōshi* (or *jinja gappei*) policy implemented at the time. Known in English as the 'amalgamation of shrines' or 'shrine mergers', in the early twentieth century the government ruled that villages should have only one shrine, and forced many local shrines to 'merge' – i.e., deities enshrined at smaller shrines were moved to the village's main shrine, after which the other shrines were demolished or abandoned. Most shrines disappeared in the period between 1906 and 1912, although the policy remained in effect until the late 1920s (Fridell 1973; Hardacre 1989, 98-99). The policy was not implemented equally in different parts of the country: comparatively speaking, most shrines disappeared from Wakayama and Mie prefectures (M. Ueda 2001b, 65) – i.e., the two prefectures historically associated with the famous shrine complexes of, respectively, Kumano and Ise. Between 1906 and 1923, the total number of shrines in Japan is said to have been reduced from approximately 193,000 to 110,000 (Sonoda 2006b, 3). As shrines disappeared, so did, in most cases, their forests – the land was confiscated or sold, and the trees were felled and used for timber.

One person who became famous for opposing this policy was Minakata Kumagusu, a scientist from Wakayama prefecture. He was a multi-talented man, largely autodidactic, who has done research on a wide variety of topics; his expertise ranged from ethnology to mycology, from comparative

mythology to entomology, and from astrology to Chinese medicine (Blacker 1983).[135] Among his many publications are a total of fifty (!) short articles in *Nature* (ibid., 139). At the end of the nineteenth century, he lived six years in the United States, followed by eight years in London; he left impoverished, however, after he had been briefly imprisoned for hitting an official at the British Museum. Back in Japan, he settled in the city of Tanabe (Wakayama), where he continued his various research projects. In addition to his scholarly and scientific achievements, he is well-known for his opposition to the *jinja gōshi* policy. As he stressed the importance of shrine forests for plants and animals, he has been called 'a pioneer in ecological thinking' (Domenig 1997, 113); his protest movement, accordingly, has been labelled as an 'environmental movement' (Katō 1999, 85).

Thus, today Minakata Kumagusu is remembered as Japan's first environmental activist; as a scholar who has made significant contributions to both *minzokugaku* and biology; and also, by some at least, as a great spiritual writer. Nakazawa Shin'ichi, for instance, has developed his theories on 'forest spirituality' and 'totemism' largely based on his (arguably idiosyncratic) interpretation of Minakata's work; according to him, Minakata's intuitive appreciation of the sacredness of forests (as expressed in a drawing by the latter, referred to by later scholars as the 'Minakata mandala') draws on the ancient Japanese forest-oriented mysticism said to constitute Shinto's original shape (Nakazawa 2006).[136] Ueda Masaaki and Sonoda Minoru have also written about Minakata in positive terms, suggesting he was the first person who actively tried to protect shrine forests from demolishment. Both stress the similarities between Minakata's project to protect shrine forests (which was based on a combination of interdisciplinary scholarship and political activism) and their own work. Ueda Masaaki emphasises the continuity between the work of Minakata one century ago, and the activities of Shasō Gakkai today (2001a, ii-iii). Both Minakata and Shasō Gakkai combine scholarship and science with a practical, activist orientation; moreover, both are inherently interdisciplinary in their approach to shrine forests, stressing the importance of these forests for plants and animals (i.e., ecosystems) as well as local communities and their cultural traditions (2001b, 66-67).

Similarly, Sonoda – who is also an active board member of Shasō Gakkai – points out the similarities between Minakata's work and his own. Like Nakazawa, he interprets Minakata's work in accordance with his own ideas and agenda, stressing cultural and spiritual decline over ecological issues:

> as [Minakata] argues, perhaps the heaviest blow this shrine merger programme dealt to the
> nation has been the spiritual decline it left in its wake. The tendency was strengthened for the
> feelings of reverence for nature and spiritual intuition formerly held by the Japanese people,

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[135] Minakata's research interests were so diffuse, that later interpreters have described them in a wide variety of ways, stressing different scholarly achievements – including, remarkably, his achievements as a 'gay historian' said to have 'assembled a large collection of queer studies' (Norton 2005). I do not know whether the claim concerning Minakata's sexual orientation is correct – he did have a wife and children – but it does illustrate the wide range of his scholarship.

[136] For an adequate and to-the-point summary of Nakazawa's main ideas, see Prohl 2000, 22-25.

with the shrine grove as their focus, to be disregarded from a viewpoint of civilisation and enlightenment.[137] As social and economic modernisation has progressed, the tendency to value things in rational, material terms has spread to the management of shrines, so that not only have sacred trees in shrine precincts and groves been sold off in the 'public interest', but shrine groves themselves have come to be seen as common property to be used for the production of timber by the forest industry. Here we see how the traditional view of the shrine grove as a religious-cultural heritage, the dwelling place of the *kami* which has underpinned the sense of belonging to one's home community, has given way to a purely economic view which sees it as a place to be jointly exploited in order to ease the burden on the population (2006b, 4).

Following Minakata, Sonoda then moves on to condemn the materialism and economical pragmatism said to have led to the destruction of shrine forests; a process that, according to him, has continued in the postwar period, not because of shrine mergers but because of economic incentives (as well as, it is suggested, spiritual and moral decline). Hence, Sonoda explicitly states that he wishes to follow 'in the footsteps of' Minakata, 'to consider once again the significance of the shrine grove in our spiritual culture' (ibid., 5).

7.1.3   An early environmentalist?

Minakata explained his reasons for opposing the policy of merging shrines in a long letter addressed to a professor in botany in Tokyo, written in 1912 (Minakata 1971, 529-565; Katō 1999, 83), as well as in a number of short essays published in the journal *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* ['Japan and the Japanese'] in the same year (republished as *Jinja gappei hantai iken* ['opinion against shrine mergers'], Minakata 1981, 249-289). In these texts, he listed eight reasons why he was against the shrine merger policy. First, he suggested, it would lead people away from their gods instead of increase devotion (Katō 1999, 87-88). Second, it would undermine community cohesion, leading to conflicts between groups worshipping different deities (ibid., 88). Third, the new law required shrines to raise funds, which would bring about difficulties for their communities and therefore weaken the economic position of the provinces (ibid., 89). Fourth, by replacing shrine forests with new shrine buildings, it would undermine traditional beliefs and, hence, morality; without the presence of a sacred forest, Minakata suggested, people would become 'unkind' and disregard 'social manners' (ibid., 89-90).

Fifth, he continued, without *matsuri* and shrine forests, people might lose their 'existential attachment' to their homeland (ibid., 90-91). Sixth, the loss of shrine forests would have a negative impact on public wellbeing, as people were said to need these forests for their mental stability; as such, it might also lead to a loss of public security and stability. Minakata here made the link between mental health, social stability and 'biological ecology', writing about 'the balance of nature and human

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[137] In the English translation, this sentence is somewhat unclear. Sonoda is suggesting that, because of the Meiji-period 'modernisation' project, Japan's traditional nature spirituality has disappeared. Cf. Sonoda 2006a, 6.

beings' that must be preserved (ibid., 91-93). Seventh, Minakata pointed out the importance of shrines as 'historical sites' containing 'ancient memories of the land'; in today's vocabulary, as national heritage (ibid., 93-94). And last, he stated that '[t]he natural landscapes, monuments and species unique to the region will be lost through amalgamation'; thus, he argued for the conservation of natural landscapes in order to preserve plant species (ibid., 94-96).

Looking at this list, we may draw the conclusion that defining Minakata's opposition as an 'environmentalist movement' (ibid., 85) is somewhat anachronistic; after all, at the time, the modern understanding of 'the environment' as something essentially different from yet threatened by human society and technology had not yet developed. Although Minakata did use the word 'ecology' to refer to the interrelationship between different species (ibid., 93) – the scientific discipline 'ecology' had just been established – that term probably did not yet carry the connotations of sustainability and biodiversity, which it does today. More importantly, rather than taking the preservation of natural landscapes and plant species as his main focus, he did not refer to these issues until the very end of his plea. Rather than 'the environment' *per se*, then, Minakata seems primarily interested in the significance of shrine forests *for human communities*, while species preservation was only of secondary importance.

Instead of 'environmentalist', therefore, Minakata's views may be called 'conservationist' and 'holistic': 'conservationist' because he wanted to preserve shrines and shrine forests, as well as the traditions they represent, for the benefit of community cohesion and economic wellbeing (as such, he is also a 'conservative' in the classical sense of the word); and 'holistic' because he stressed the fundamental intertwinement of individual wellbeing, devotional practices, morality, community cohesion, local autonomy, economical stability and natural landscapes. Ultimately, his focal point was the local community and its physical space, rather than the nation as a whole. Hence, he has also been described, quite rightly, as a 'regionalist' (Tsurumi 1981, 232) – not unlike Yanagita Kunio, with whom he was acquainted. Furthermore, Minakata was an idealist and political activist: his anger did not only concern the policy itself, but also the corruption it brought about, legitimating the destruction of shrine forests for economical purposes (e.g., shrine priests making large profits by selling timber and shrine lands, or desacralising the land by using it for mulberry cultivation [Minakata 1981, 256]). What is clear, in sum, is that Minakata's concerns were as manifold as his scholarship; as such, it is perhaps not very surprising that today, depending on the interpreter's focus, he is lauded as an early environmentalist (Katō 1999); an influential folklorist (Blacker 1983); a great spiritual thinker (Nakazawa 2006); and the first person who emphasised the ecological, social and cultural importance of shrine forest preservation (Sonoda 2006b; M. Ueda 2001b).

7.2   The shrine establishment today

When discussing postwar and contemporary Shinto-related institutional practices, we should distinguish between three different categories. First, there is the shrine establishment, made up of Jinja Honchō, prefectural Jinja Honchō offices, and umbrella shrine organisations not affiliated with Jinja Honchō (the Fushimi Inari shrine management, in particular [see Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 213-214]). Second, there are the various local shrines throughout the country, and the clergy working there. The majority of these shrines are too small and economically insignificant to organise activities other than the most common ritual ceremonies, having only one priest or no priest at all. Some of the larger ones, however, have set up (or been involved in) activities related to forest preservation and maintenance, as well as environmental education. Third, there are the so-called 'Shinto-derived new religions' introduced in the previous chapter; i.e., a number of membership-based religious organisations that define themselves as (standing in the tradition of) Shinto.

To begin with the third: in general, perhaps the most vocal advocates of religious environmentalism and sustainable practices are not shrine priests, but representatives of some of these 'Shinto' movements or 'new religions'. Seichō no Ie, for instance, places great emphasis on environmental issues. It is currently in the process of building completely new, carbon-neutral and sustainable headquarters, the 'office in the forest' (*mori no naka no ofisu*) in mountainous Yamanashi prefecture, a new base from where it wants to contribute to building a society in which humans and nature live in balance.[138] Likewise, Sekai Kyūseikyō also expresses an interest in nature and environmental issues. It is especially known for its emphasis on organic farming, but also for its utopian sacred gardens that are said to 'purify the spirit'.[139] Fascinating though these developments are, I do not have the space to discuss them extensively in this study. Suffice to say that developments and attitudes towards nature and the environment in these movements, and the wider subculture to which

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[138] During a visit to the Seichō no Ie temple in the town of Uji (near Kyoto), I was told that Seichō no Ie is the world's first sustainable religion, but I am not sure to what extent this claim is justified. In any case, several followers of the organisation to whom I spoke expressed a concern for environmental issues and were active in the kind of nature-related activities one also comes across at shrines – tree planting, rice cultivation, cleaning litter and so on – as part of their spiritual training. Several volunteers proudly told me about the 'office in the forest' project, which is seen as an important step towards a sustainable future, integrating religion into the natural environment physically as well as symbolically. One does wonder, however, what other reasons there may have been for moving the headquarters from downtown Tokyo to rural Yamanashi. For more background information on this ambitious project, see Taniguchi & Taniguchi 2010; http://office-in-the-forest.jp.seicho-no-ie.org/ (last accessed: February 19, 2013).

[139] According to the website, there are three such gardens in Japan (in Atami, Hakone and Kyoto), and three abroad (in Thailand, Brazil and, under construction, Angola). In addition to its involvement in organic farming, Sekai Kyūseikyō's interest in environmental issues is illustrated by its contribution to the development of technology for purifying polluted water. See, respectively, http://www.izunome.jp/en/holy_place/ and http://www.izunome.jp/en/action/envi/ (last accessed: February 19, 2013).

they belong (which is increasingly taking on transnational shapes), would constitute interesting and potentially relevant topics for future research.[140]

Likewise, Jinja Honchō has contributed to the view of Shinto as an environmentally friendly tradition. However, its attitude to environmental issues is arguably more ambivalent than that of some of the new religions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jinja Honchō is generally considered to be a conservative organisation, devoted not only to priestly education and fundraising for the ritual rebuilding of Ise Jingū every twenty years, but also to the support and re-sacralisation of institutions such as the imperial family and Yasukuni Jinja. Accordingly, some scholars have expressed scepticism towards Jinja Honchō's expressions of environmentalism, which are significantly more pronounced in English- than in Japanese-language publications, and questioned the motives behind them (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 207-209; Kalland 2012; Nelson 2000, 246-247). For instance, while the organisation has actively lobbied for the (re)establishment of imperial symbols and against equal rights for women or immigrants (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 201-202), it has done little or nothing to convince the government to improve its environmental policies. Accordingly, John Breen has argued that Jinja Honchō's 'real concerns are not nature-oriented at all', and that the organisation has an 'obsession with prewar, emperor-oriented ethics and rites' (ibid, 208).

Be that as it may, 'nature', 'sacred forests' and 'the environment' have become central to Jinja Honchō's self-definition, conceptually as well as symbolically. Jinja Honchō regularly employs the *chinju no mori* trope; in its weekly newspaper *Jinja shinpō* as well as books and other publications (e.g., Jinja Honchō 1999; Sōyō 2001), it is a recurring topic. But shrine forests are not only valued because of their ecological importance or natural beauty. According to an editorial in *Jinja shinpō,* 'the real value of shrine forests lies in their ability to generate, in children especially, love of local community and so patriotic love of Japan. Shrine forests are nothing less, the reader learns, than the key to restoring an ethical core to the nation's education system, emasculated by 60 years of malign Western influence' (Breen and Teeuwen 2010, 209). Significantly, Jinja Honchō publishes educational texts for children entitled *Chinju no mori shinbun* (*Chinju no mori* newspaper), containing a group of

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[140] I tentatively refer to this subculture as 'the Ōmoto family', as all groups and practices belonging to the subculture are derived from (groups that are derived from) Deguchi Onisaburō and Deguchi Nao's popular movement. Their teachings and spiritual healing practices gained widespread popularity in the first decades of the twentieth century, but the movement later fell apart, partly as a result of severe government persecution. Some of the ideas and practices, however, have remained – not only in religious movements such as Seichō no Ie, Sekai Kyūseikyō and Sūkyō Mahikari, but also in apparently 'secular' practices such as organic farming, martial arts (e.g., aikido), alternative medicine and developmental NGOs (e.g., OISCA). Thus far, there have been some studies of Ōmoto and its descendants, but these typically focus on the topics traditionally studied by scholars of religion (belief systems, ritual practices, 'spirituality' and organisational history) (e.g., Stalker 2008; Staemmler 2009), rather than topics such as organic agriculture or development aid – which nevertheless constitute a significant part of the subculture. Thus, the classical, implicit distinction between 'religion' and other practices is reflected in the scholarship on these movements. However, as they are spreading (and changing) outside Japan – especially in emerging economies in the global South, such as Brazil, Thailand and some African countries – an overview study of the origins, developments and contemporary expressions of this subculture would be most relevant.

cute forest characters –[141] including a red maple leaf, a stag beetle, a cat wearing a watermelon, a tree seedling and a *kappa.* In these texts, children are taught the importance of rice cultivation, the proper way of praying at a shrine, how to support Japan at international football tournaments, not to bully classmates, and a number of other virtues not normally associated with environmental education (Jinja Honchō 2010).[142]

Nevertheless, in its English-language publications, Jinja Honchō has repeatedly stressed Shinto's unique appreciation of nature, and argued that Shinto may serve as a blueprint for environmental ethics. For instance, in a well-known pamphlet containing a 'message from Shinto' to the world, it explicitly stated that 'the' Shinto view of nature offers solutions to environmental problems that science and technology cannot provide:

> 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 measure for natural preservation, amenity improvement, and pollution control. (…)
>
> As repeatedly mentioned, Shinto regards the land and its environment as children of Kami. In another word, Shinto sees that nature is the divinity itself. These days, people often say, 'Be gentle to nature', or 'Be gentle to the earth'. But these expressions sound somehow fault[y] like putting the cart before the horse. We feel it as man's arrogance. It seems that the human c[a]n dominate nature as the master so that people can repair nature, using means of techno-science. (…)
>
> [T]he Japanese spirituality inherited from the ancient ancestors has been gradually lost or hidden somewhere deep in to unconsciousness. It might not be too exaggerated if we said that not only environmental conservation but also all problems of the modern society have been caused by the lack of awesomeness, reverence, and appreciation for nature that ancient people used to have and taught us about. Environmental issues, after all, depend on our self-awareness of the problems and determination to take our responsibility. We often say that things look different according to the viewpoint. So, Shinto suggests to shift a point of view and to look our environment with the spirit of 'reverence and gratitude', that is, with the spirit of parental care for children or with the spirit of brotherhood. And if we could extend this spirit to our neighbors, to our society members, to our country members, to people of the world, and to nature, too, beyond the difference of thoughts, ethics, religions, then this spirit will be the base to foster criteria and morals indispensable for keeping our human life healthy (Jinja Honchō not dated a; also published in Palmer & Finlay 2003, 127-129).

In this text, environmental problems are directly attributed to a perceived loss of the 'ancient' spirit of 'reverence and gratitude'. The solution to these problems, it follows, is a restoration of this

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[141] In Japan, 'cute' (*kawaii*) zoomorphic characters are ubiquitous, and widely employed for promotion purposes. They promote anything ranging from sports events, to tourist destinations, to government policies and all sorts of commodities. Even religious institutions now have their own promotional characters, developed in cooperation with local authorities – as exemplified by the cute yellow cat from Shimane prefecture, whose head is shaped like the *honden* (main hall) of Izumo Taisha.

[142] See also the website *Omiya kizzu* ('shrine kids'): http://www.omiyakids.com/index.html (last accessed: August 8, 2013).

worldview. Environmental problems are thus reduced to problems of moral and cultural decline, and technological and scientific advancements are dismissed for 'putting the cart before the horse' and displaying 'man's arrogance'. However, no concrete suggestions are made as to how exactly the 'Shinto view of nature' might contribute to dealing with the 'rise of temperature of the earth, [the] destruction of the ozone layer, [the] exhaustion of natural resources, and [the] massive dumping of waste'. Importantly, as Arne Kalland (2002) has rightly pointed out, notions of nature as divine do not automatically lead to environmentally friendly behaviour.

It is worth noting, however, that Jinja Honchō is a fairly large and diffuse organisation, and that concerns and agendas of different departments within the organisation are not necessarily similar. Significantly, members of the international department have recently engaged in several activities oriented towards greater environmental awareness. As mentioned in the introduction, Jinja Honchō is officially affiliated with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). It has been actively involved in a joint program (together with the ARC, the WWF and the Lutheran Church in Sweden) to establish a 'Religious Forestry Standard' formulating principles for the management of religious forests worldwide. In 2007, at the inaugural 'Faiths and Forests' meeting in Visby (Gotland, Sweden), a number of religious organisations from a variety of countries agreed to create this standard, with the purpose of formulating criteria for forest management that are 'religiously compatible', 'environmentally appropriate', 'socially beneficial' and 'economically viable'.[143]

According to the plans, the actual agreement will be signed in 2014, at a great international conference in Ise. Members of Jinja Honchō are currently preparing this event, in cooperation with a Tokyo-based PR company. Organising a large interreligious and environment-oriented conference at Shinto's most sacred site would provide international recognition and legitimation for Jinja Honchō's claims regarding the fundamental, primordial interdependence between Japan's natural environment, Shinto, and imperial power. Simultaneously, it would strengthen Shinto's international profile as a pluralistic, environmentally friendly religion, thus contributing to the dissociation of Shinto from wartime imperialism and nationalist revisionism. Thus, while the commitment of some Jinja Honchō members to forest conservation and international cooperation may be sincere, Jinja Honchō's active cooperation with ARC and contribution to the establishment of a 'Religious Forestry Standard' also serves PR purposes, and arguably contributes to the depoliticisation of Shinto internationally. This may explain why the activities of Jinja Honchō's international department do not seem to meet with resistance within the organisation. Even though many conservative members of the organisation are fairly indifferent towards environmental issues, nobody actively opposes or disagrees with them (interview with Jinja Honchō officials, November 2011). Apparently, the stress on nature conservation is not seen as antithetical to imperial agendas, but rather as complementary (or, perhaps, as peripheral). I will return to this topic in chapter eleven.

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[143] Alliance of Religions and Conservation website. 'Initial Agreement on Religious Forestry Standards'. From http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=335. Last accessed: February 6, 2012.

The cooperation between Jinja Honchō and ARC has been going on for many years, and the plans to organise a large conference in 2014 suggest a fruitful relationship. As early as 2000, Jinja Honchō made a pledge 'not only to manage all of their sacred forests in sustainable ways but also only to buy timber from sustainably managed forests on behalf of their 80,000 or more shrines'.[144] This is a far-reaching statement, but it does raise some questions. First of all, thirteen years after the promise was made, it is unclear as to whether the promise has been kept, as no report on recent developments has been made since (as far as I am aware). More fundamentally, it is questionable whether Jinja Honchō is in a position to make such a promise on behalf of its member shrines. In recent years, the relationship between the umbrella organisation and its members has not always been harmonious. There has been a number of conflicts, mainly concerning financial issues, as Jinja Honchō requires small shrines with limited means to contribute financially to the central organisation and to the rebuilding of the shrines of Ise (Breen 2010b).

Shinto representatives and intellectuals repeatedly assert that Shinto is a tradition without official doctrines and without a central hierarchy. While making these claims, however, Jinja Honchō not only actively tries to formulate official Shinto doctrine and teach it to future shrine clergy, it also makes continuous attempts to limit the autonomy of local shrines financially, organisationally and doctrinally (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 202-207; Breen 2010b). Crucially, however, Jinja Honchō does not manage the funds and buildings of local shrines. Hence, if a shrine were to decide to use inexpensive imported timber for rebuilding a roof, Jinja Honchō would probably not be able to do anything about it. As such, no matter how many promises it makes 'on behalf of its 80,000 member shrines', those shrines manage their own finances, and cannot easily be forced to use expensive sustainably produced timber. Hence, in order to understand developments in the contemporary shrine world, an examination of the ideas and activities of Jinja Honchō alone is not sufficient: we must also take into account individual shrines.

7.3   Shrines, priests, and environmental advocacy

7.3.1   Shrine activism

This brings us to the topic of local shrines and their priests. As the Japanese scholar Fujimura Ken'ichi has noted recently, ever since the publication of Lynn White's article there has been ample discourse on the topic of religion and the environment worldwide, and Japan obviously is no exception. However, as he rightly points out, the vast majority of texts on this topic addresses issues related to faith, doctrine and sacred scriptures, while there has been remarkably little research on the attitudes and ideas concerning nature and environmental issues expressed by individual clergy and practitioners

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[144] Alliance of Religions and Conservation website. 'Japan: Shintos [*sic*] commit to sustainable management of sacred forests'. On http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=161. Last accessed: March 14, 2013.

(Fujimura 2010). It is important to bear in mind, though, that ideas concerning Shinto and nature are neither limited to academic settings, nor fully controlled by umbrella organisations such as Jinja Honchō. The establishment of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm was not simply a top-down process, but the outcome of a complex interplay between local shrine actors, academics, and Shinto leaders. Significantly, as exemplified by Ueda Masaaki and Sonoda Minoru, some of the main scholars and ideologues involved in the development are shrine priests themselves, thus operating on both a 'local' and a more '(inter)national' scale.

Until fairly recently, it was not very common for shrine priests to speak out on environmental issues or organise activities aimed at nature conservation. However, the association between shrines and environmental advocacy has been made regularly. For instance, in his 2000 monograph of Kamigamo Jinja in Kyoto (based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the early 1990s), John Nelson wrote that

> Distracted by particularistic interests, local shrine Shinto has never found a socially active role for itself. (…) The need for social activism in response to the rights of women, minorities, and even common citizens wandering in Japan's tangled economic jungle cries out for organized response from the country's religious institutions. As suggested first by Earhart (1970), the environment could be the issue around which shrines organize and empower local communities. After all, the natural world is considered the realm most obviously identified with *kami* and their powers. Standing up to golf course developers, demanding more public parks and natural recreation areas, and serving as watchdogs for companies polluting the ecosystem could all be justified as sanctified concerns of a shrine (2000, 248).

In this paragraph, Nelson was expressing his personal opinion considering what he thought shrines should do, rather than the opinion of a shrine priest or spokesperson; as such, it was based on his own interests and ideas, not on ethnographic observations. However, it may be argued that, in some ways at least, his words have been prophetic: in the thirteen years since these words were published, the environment has indeed become one of the issues around which several shrines try to organise and empower local communities. Moreover, some shrines have indeed stood up against construction projects, with mixed results. In fact, at the time of publication, there were already a few cases of shrine-related environmental movements.

The association between shrines, community involvement and forest preservation and/or construction goes back to at least the Meiji and Taishō periods, when several collective tree-planting projects were set up. The most famous of these took place at Shimogamo Jinja in Kyoto and Meiji Jingū in Tokyo, which I will discuss these in chapters ten and eleven, respectively. There are similar cases of shrines in the postwar periods, where local community members engaged in seemingly spontaneous acts of donating and planting trees in order to (re)construct a shrine forest. For instance, Yamamura describes a shrine in Chiba prefecture that had lost most of its trees during the war, but was successfully reforested thanks to the efforts of the people living around it (2011, 40-48).

It would probably be anachronistic, however, to interpret these cases as expressions of environmental advocacy, as there was little awareness of environmental issues at the time. In recent decades, however, there are some examples of shrine priests who stood up against planned construction projects, in order to protect their shrine forest and/or a sacred mountain from demolition. It may be argued that these constitute examples of environmental advocacy. For instance, the head priest of the small Shishigaguchi Suwa Jinja in Yamagata prefecture (located near Dewa Sanzan, mountains historically associated with *shugendō* and mountain worship) was successful in opposing a construction project that would have led to the destruction of a sacred forest. In order to prevent this, he cooperated with the communist party, a somewhat unusual alliance given the latter's opposition to the imperial institution – but reportedly they were the only politicians interested in helping him, initially at least. And, as Yamamura argues, Shinto is ultimately concerned with nature and *matsuri*, and transcends ideology; consequently, it is 'even' compatible with communism (2011, 61-67).

A second interesting case of shrine-related environmental advocacy took place in the forested western part of Tokyo prefecture in the early 1990s. This case considered a local mountain, Mount Konpira, in the vicinity of Mount Takao (Hachiōji city). At the time, there were far-reaching plans to 'develop' this area by destroying part of the mountain using dynamite, then use the land for a new school building. A movement emerged to protect the mountain and its forest, made up of local activists and a group of foreign expats (see *Asahi taunzu* 1992; Hitomi not dated). In order to prevent the environmental destruction, they started restoration work on the dilapidated local shrine, Kotohira Jinja (devoted to the maritime deity Konpira or Kotohira, whose main shrine is located in Shikoku [see Thal 2005]), and revitalised shrine worship. As the shrine did not have a priest, one of them, Patricia Ormsby, went to Shikoku to undergo training and be ordained as a shrine priest in the Konpira tradition – the first non-Japanese to do so, reportedly (personal communication, November 2011). The movement received quite a bit of media coverage, and eventually succeeded in protecting the mountain, an achievement that impelled one local newspaper to report on the movement's activities in a series of lengthy articles (*Tosei shinpō* 1993). It has also been active trying to protect other parts of the Mount Takao region, and opposed the construction of a tunnel, but in this case it was not successful (Richard Evanoff, personal communication). Today, the area attracts many visitors from Tokyo who come to enjoy the natural surroundings and the hiking trails. The shrine is still in use, and some of the members of the original movement reunite at the mountain every month to enjoy a picnic together.

The Konpira movement is perhaps somewhat unusual, for two reasons. First, from the initial period, non-Japanese activists were among the movement's most vocal members, bringing their own ideas about nature conversation. This is not the case for most other shrine initiatives, which generally do not have such an international character. Second, the Konpira movement emerged because of a shared environmental concern: the revitalisation of the shrine served the activists' agenda, but was ultimately secondary to the goal of preventing the destruction of the mountain. Most other examples of

shrine-based environmental advocacy involve priests becoming activists; the Konpira movement, by contrast, involved activists becoming priests.

7.3.2   Chinju no mori *projects*

The majority of environment-related shrine movements are related to *chinju no mori*. In some cases, priests and local volunteers try to prevent their *chinju no mori* from being destroyed in order to give way to (rail)roads or buildings (more often, however, *chinju no mori* are destroyed without much organised opposition at all). Other movements focus on forest maintenance or reconstruction, tree planting and reforestation, cleaning litter, and various educational activities. While being concerned with shrines and shrine forests, these activities are typically organised by non-profit organisations (*NPO hōjin*) that are *de facto* related to the shrine, but *de jure* independent. The founders and organisers may be shrine priests, but this is not always the case: there are also examples of local *chinju no mori* movements that are founded by scientists or non-clergy shrine staff. In any case, as they usually have very limited financial means, the success of all these movements depends on the involvement and engagement of a handful of active volunteers, not all of whom necessarily identify with Shinto.

In the thirty years or so since the pioneering work of Ueda Atsushi and Miyawaki Akira, and the emergence of the national *chinju no mori* movement, shrine forests have gradually taken on symbolic significance. Today, the concept has become widely used, and few people in the shrine world would deny the threefold (ecological, socio-cultural, and moral) importance attributed to these forests. Moreover, a new generation of shrine priests has come to the fore, most of whom have little or no personal connection with war-related issues or 'State Shinto' imperialism, but who are well familiar with the *chinju no mori* concept and the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. They may well have attended one of the several *chinju no mori* information markets organised by prefectural Shinto young people's associations (*seinenkai*), and participated in tree- and/or rice-planting activities or similar events organised by shrines. Naturally, not all of them have the time or financial means to organise activities at their own shrine; nevertheless, in recent years, shrine-centred environmental and cultural education programs have been set up throughout the country, and many priests now express a concern for nature conservation and other environmental issues.

While most shrine initiatives have a strongly local character, and are not necessarily long-lived (their success generally depends on the commitment of one or a few individuals), there are a few examples of well-organised projects that have been going on for several years, and received nationwide attention. One of the earliest examples of a local *chinju no mori* conservation movement is the Sennen no Mori no Kai ('thousand-year forest association'), affiliated with Gosho Komagataki Jinja, a local shrine near the city of Sakuragawa in Ibaraki prefecture (Sakurai 1999; 2009; see chapter 10). It was one of the first such initiatives, and it may well be considered a paradigmatic case. That is,

it was here that the explicit association was made – discursive *as well as* practical – between forest preservation, environmental awareness, moral education, a renewed sense of community, and a revitalisation of a supposed 'traditional culture' and 'ancient Japanese spirit', which is prominent in many later movements. I will discuss this organisation in more detail in chapter ten.

Another well-known example of an early *chinju no mori* project is Tadasu no Mori Zaidan. This is a project set up by Shimogamo Jinja in Kyoto to improve the quality of its old forest, Tadasu no Mori, and contribute to local neighbourhood cohesion. Significantly, this project constitutes one of the examples on which Shasō Gakkai has based its activities, and has inspired other forest reconstruction projects nationwide (see Araki 2003). A few kilometres further north, Kamigamo Jinja has set up Afuhi Project (pronounced as 'aoi project') with the purpose of reintroducing plants with great historical and mythological significance into the local ecosystem, organising local neighbourhood events, and teaching children the basics of Shinto. This combination of environmental and cultural education can also be found in the activities of Enju no Kai at Tsurugaoka Hachimangū in Kamakura, which combines an interest in nature preservation with the organisation of various cultural activities, and wants to instil patriotic sentiments into participants' minds – as well as, interestingly, contribute to internationalisation.[145] Likewise, Meiji Jingū has set up NPO Hibiki, which organises guided forest walks, acorn-collecting and tree-planting activities, nature camps for teenagers, and rice planting events, all of which have an environmental as well as an educational component. In recent years, similar projects have been set up at shrines throughout the country: examples include Ōmi Jingū in Shiga prefecture, Mukō Jinja in Kyoto prefecture and Hiraoka Jinja in Osaka prefecture (Hamagami 2006; Morikawa 2006; Ueda 2006). I have also heard about active shrine-related forest conservation movements in Kumamoto and Gifu prefectures.

The majority of these initiatives not only serves to preserve or improve shrine forests and their ecosystems. The organisers are equally committed to the teaching of 'traditional culture', the reestablishment of a 'community spirit', and, often, a revitalisation of supposedly traditional Japanese values (including but not limited to patriotic pride). To what extent they represent cases of genuine environmental advocacy, or merely appropriate natural symbols for purposes of identity politics, may be subject to debate – and probably differs from project to project, and from person to person. In any case, it is important to bear in mind that different actors within a single movement (priests, organisers, volunteers and participants) may have different motivations and priorities, and that nationalist or culturalist motives are not *a priori* incompatible with a genuine concern for forest conservation and ecology.

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[145] See http://news.hachimangu.or.jp/dispdtinfo.asp?M_ID=148&C_ID=3 (last accessed: March 16, 2013).

7.3.3 *Energy issues*

As long as environmentalism is limited to small-scale and/or symbolic practices such as tree planting, and no far-reaching claims are made with regard to financial matters or land use, these movements meet with little or no opposition. It becomes a different story, however, when shrine priests actively oppose construction projects, especially if there are significant economic interests at stake. For instance, Breen and Teeuwen discuss an interesting recent case of a shrine priest in Yamaguchi prefecture, Hayashi Haruhiko (head priest of the Shidaishō Hachimangū in the town of Kaminoseki), who opposed plans to use shrine lands for the construction of a nuclear power plant. As they write, '[Hayashi] opposed nuclear power on the grounds of its capacity to destroy the environment and human life; it was his responsibility, he maintained, to protect sacred shrine land' (2010, 208). His position met with much opposition within his shrine committee, however, as influential members of the local community (*ujiko*) were in favour of allowing the power plant to be built. Eventually, Jinja Honchō became involved in the conflict, and forced him to resign. Soon thereafter, in 2004, the shrine sold its lands to the energy company responsible for constructing the plant. Opposition has continued to be fierce, however, especially since the 2011 nuclear crisis in Fukushima. At present, it remains unclear whether and when the power plant will become fully operational.[146]

By forcing the head priest to resign, Jinja Honchō provided the local shrine committee with the opportunity to sell shrine lands, which would subsequently be used for a nuclear power plant. Arguably, this is not the kind of approach one would expect from a self-declared nature religion. Part of the discussion concerns the perceived sacredness of the lands in question: Hayashi argued that he must protect 'sacred shrine land', while Sonoda Minoru – ironically, one of the leading representatives of the *chinju no mori* movement – reportedly justified the shrine committee and Jinja Honchō's decision on the grounds that this particular area did not constitute a sacred *chinju no mori* and, hence, did not have to be preserved at all costs (Sandvik 2011, 69). Thus, the environmental concerns of Jinja Honchō and Sonoda Minoru apparently do not outweigh concerns of a more economical nature; environmental advocacy, it seems, is only considered appropriate when pertaining to particular, demarcated sacred shrine forests, not to other areas. Their environmentalism, it follows, is *particularistic* and *situational* instead of holistic or deep-ecological, as is sometimes suggested.[147]

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[146] For a fascinating, in-depth study of the politics behind the nuclear power plant in Kaminoseki, strategies for convincing local populations, and the establishment of an opposition movement, see Dusinberre 2012.

[147] Some representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm have associated Shinto with 'deep ecology'. Worldmate leader Fukami Tōshū, for instance, has argued that 'Shinto belongs to deep ecology' (2000, 35). Similar associations have been made by Sonoda Minoru (2007) and Kamata Tōji (2000b, 128-139). 'Deep ecology' is a radically environmentalist, non-anthropocentric philosophical movement, founded by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss. Næss outlined seven underlying principles for this movement: 1) a relational understanding of organisms (i.e., organisms develop in constant interaction with each other) instead of a model that perceives of an individual as being surrounded by an environment; 2) ecological egalitarianism (i.e., in principle all beings are of equal value); 3) a recognition of the biological importance of diversity and symbiosis (rather than the 'survival of the fittest' model); 4) an anti-class attitude and a striving for classless diversity; 5)

From the beginning, the discursive association between Shinto and the natural environment has been intimately connected with the topics of deforestation and forest conservation, and with the emerging movement that focused upon the protection and cultivation of *chinju no mori*. Until today, Shinto environmentalist discourse and practices predominantly focus on the historical and ecological importance of sacred forests, investing in forest conservation and reforestation in Japan, while other topics – for instance, issues related to (toxic) waste, air and water pollution, and alternative energy – have received comparatively little attention.[148] In particular, until 2011, energy issues received little or no attention in the shrine world – which may explain why nuclear power was not seen as a problem by Jinja Honchō.[149] In fact, the only reference made to energy issues in Jinja Honchō's weekly shrine newspaper was an article by a climate sceptic arguing that climate change does not constitute a significant threat, and is not even caused by greenhouse gas emissions (Itō 2009) – not the kind of argument one would immediately associate with an 'ecological religion'.

This situation has changed dramatically, however, after the 2011 nuclear crisis and subsequent energy shortage. All of a sudden, electricity became a scarce commodity in Japan, and the reduction of energy consumption was established as an important new national priority. As a result, apparently for the first time, there was some awareness of the issue on the part of Shinto actors. In September 2011, *Jinja shinpō* reported on a shrine in the city of Shibetsu (Hokkaido) that had installed solar panels. The head priest was quoted saying 'we would the like the value of the blessing of the sun, of nature's energy, to be reacknowledged' (*Jinja shinpō* 2011f) – perhaps significantly, the shrine is devoted to Amaterasu, the sun goddess. One month later, the newspaper published an essay by a professor at Chiba University, who argued that shrines should take the initiative in developing local community projects for generating alternative energy – an argument he has repeated at several other occasions, including Shasō Gakkai symposia (Hiroi 2011; 2012).

Finally, while I am not aware of any shrine priests active in the anti-nuclear power movement (as opposed to Buddhist priests), it is worth mentioning that some prominent scholars and Shinto

struggles against pollution and resource depletion; 6) a preference for 'complexity', not for 'complication'; and 7) a focus on local autonomy and decentralisation. While some of these principles may be in accordance with contemporary Shinto attitudes, others arguably are not – especially when it comes to deep ecology's more politically subversive aspects. See Næss 1995; cf. Drengson & Inoue 1995.

[148] This argument was also made by the head priest of a shrine devoted to the maritime deity Ebisu. He professed a concern for environmental issues, opposed the use of nuclear energy, and was worried about the perceived alienation of humans from their natural surroundings, suggesting that Shinto might have an important part to play in supporting sustainable behaviour. However, he was one of the few people I met who was downright critical of the *chinju no mori* movement: while not opposed to forest conservation *per se*, he was critical of what he considered Shinto organisations' and priests' one-sided focus on shrine forests. According to him, there was a serious lack of interest in other environmental problems, such as the pollution of the oceans (interview with a shrine priest, October 2011).

[149] The same, in fact, applies to Japanese society in general: even though the 1997 UN climate change protocol is known by the name of the Japanese city where it was agreed upon (Kyoto), before 2011 energy issues did not receive much attention in Japan. There was comparatively little investment in alternative energy, nor in energy efficiency. The attitude can be illustrated by a few well-known examples: Japanese buildings are often poorly insulated; any first-time visitor to the country is surprised by the sheer quantity of energy-consuming vending machines; and, until recently, stores and companies made excessive use of air-conditioning.

intellectuals have also spoken out against nuclear energy. Ueda Masaaki, for instance, has stated that Japan should immediately stop using nuclear power (personal interview, December 2011). Likewise, at the ISF conference held in the summer of 2011 (see chapter six), Miyake Hitoshi – a well-known scholar in the field of Japanese religion and ethnology – concluded by making an interesting remark about nuclear power. Reinterpreting the *shugendō* belief in and worship of the powerful forces of nature in the light of contemporary events, he stated that we ought to turn to these forces again, now as a means to generate energy. Thus, he argued for a nationwide increase in the production of wind, water and solar energy, the argument for which was similar to that of the shrine priest from Hokkaido.[150] Who knows, these initiatives may come to represent an important new trend in contemporary shrine Shinto.

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[150] Incidentally, this part of Miyake's talk is not included in the written proceedings, but it is recorded and can be watched on the symposium DVD that is enclosed with the proceedings (Shintō Kokusai Gakkai 2012).

PART III   SHINTO'S SACRED FORESTS

8.   A FOREST RELIGION?

8.1   The forest trope

Japan is one of the countries with the highest percentage of forest cover in the world, a fact that is often mentioned in texts on Shinto and the environment. Japanese sources speak of 'approximately 66%' (Matsuyama 2009, 1; Nakamura 2009, 22) and of 'nearly 70%' (Shintō Kokusai Gakkai 2012, 3). According to the UN, in 2005 Japan had a total forest area of nearly 25 million hectare (250,000 km²), which comes down to 68.2% of the total land area.[151] Japan's forests are predominantly located in the mountains: 73% of the total land area is said to be mountainous, most of which is covered by forest. The remaining 27% is used for living, industry and agriculture; these areas are very densely populated, and there is hardly any piece of non-mountainous land that is neither cultivated nor inhabited. Thus, there are clear spatial divisions between the forested mountains, where few people live and work, and the densely populated lowlands.

Considering the omnipresence of forested mountains, it should come as no surprise that Japan has been defined as 'the country of forests' (Sonoda & Mogi 2006), or as a country that has given birth to a unique 'forest civilisation' (Nakamura 2009; Umehara 1995). Accordingly, the notion that forests are the birthplace of Japanese 'religion' (and, by extension, of Japanese culture and society) is one of the axioms underlying the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, and has been advocated by a number of influential Japanese scholars (e.g., Nakazawa 2006; Sonoda 1997; 2000; M. Ueda 2001b; 2004b; Umehara 1989; 1995; Yamaori 2001). Whether these interpretations of forests as the cradle of Japanese civilisation are historically accurate or not may be subject to debate. In any case, it is probably safe to say that forests (and mountains, but in Japan there is significant overlap between the two) have long played a central part in the Japanese imagination, representing an 'other' world associated with deities, ancestral spirits and death (e.g., Blacker 1986, 69-85; Miyake 2009, 109-110; Sonoda 1998, 46-51). As such, forests and mountains may have symbolised, and evoked memories of, ancestral pasts, inducing feelings of nostalgia and longing as well as mystery and fear. This is not uniquely Japanese: as Robert Harrison has pointed out, forests have featured prominently in the 'Western' cultural imagination as well. According to him, 'forests have the psychological effect of evoking memories of the past' and may even 'become figures for memory itself' (1992, 156). This statement is particularly relevant for Japan as well, as forests have long constituted a powerful trope

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[151] According to data provided by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, on http://www.fao.org/forestry/32032/en/ (last accessed: March 26, 2013). At the time, there were only about fifteen countries in the world with a higher forest cover percentage (including Finland, Laos, Gabon, Guyana, Suriname and a number of small island states); Japan's forest cover percentage was higher than that of well-known forested countries such as Sweden, Russia, Indonesia and Brazil.

there, associated with the afterlife, the ancestral past, and (lost) cultural and spiritual traditions (cf. Abe Auestad forthcoming).

Needless to say, the specific meanings attributed to forests, and the discursive contexts in which they operate, are subject to historical change. Nevertheless, the symbolic and ideological significance of forests in Japan is said to go back to the ancient period, and to have continued until today. Forests are associated with the (idealised) past, and figure prominently in nostalgic narratives lamenting a supposed loss of traditional worldviews and practices, for instance in the oeuvre of Yanagita Kunio (Hamashita 2004; cf. H. Satō 2008, 5-22). Not surprisingly, then, in modern times, forests have come to be associated with the (origins of the) Japanese nation, constituting an important aspect of the Japanese 'ethnoscape' (i.e., a 'historic and poetic landscape, one imbued with the culture and history of a group' [Smith 1999, 150]). We have already seen how the myth of the Japanese love of nature was developed and appropriated in the context of the Japanese nation building project (as well as, eventually, of imperialism); not surprisingly, the forest trope has become a prominent aspect of this myth. That is, 'the Japanese' are said to have an intimate connection with forests, which are not only said to evoke gratitude, creativity and fear, but which are also imagined as the primordial space where the nation originated.

Such an intimate connection between forests and nationhood is not only found in Japan. In countries such as Germany, Finland and the United States, for instance, forests are also associated with national history and identity (Schama 1995; Jones 2011). However, as Augustin Berque has pointed out, in Japan the forest has been conceptualised not only as a marker of national identity, but also as the very origin of the nation:

> In Japan, as in Europe, there is a myth about the primordial forest, the haunt of ancestral fears, but there is also nostalgia for a nature which is disappearing. Unlike Europe, however, and for obvious reasons, this forest has joined the mythological constellation of things essentially Japanese; in effect, in the mind of the Japanese of today, it plays the role of the original matrix in which national authenticity is rooted. This forest has a name: the glossy-leaved forest that once covered the plains of most of the larger islands (*shōyōjurin*). (…) The underlying concept is that this forest milieu, that of Jōmon prehistoric culture, was the crucible from which Shintoism was born (1997, 88-89).

As the above discussion makes clear, forests are closely associated with cultural memory, nostalgia, and notions of nationhood. That does not mean, however, that their symbolism is unequivocal. On the contrary: as sites of memory, they are inevitably subject to conflicting interpretations and diverse ideological appropriations. The forest trope may be employed for nationalist or even imperialist purposes, but it has also been used for alternative counter-narratives. As Reiko Abe Auestad has written,

> It is interesting to note here that the forest becomes a vehicle for memories of the past deemed worthy of remembering, but, depending on who is doing the remembering, the object of

remembrance seems to vary. To draw on Japanese examples, Miyazaki Hayao, [film director] Kawase Naomi, [novelist] Murakami Haruki and advocates of shrine forest are some of the recent examples that illustrate the wide ranging, discursive use of the forest in popular imagination. As one of the most quintessential Japanese landscapes that continue to evoke nostalgia, the forest in their rendition seems to become figurative spaces, transmitting their respective approaches and views of the past. The contours of the past projected in them, however, differ (forthcoming, 6-7).

Abe Auestad suggests that the conceptualisation of ancient forests found in contemporary discourse on *chinju no mori* is in line with dominant narratives stressing the singularity and continuity of the Japanese nation since ancient times. By contrast, in Japanese literature, there are several examples of alternative uses of the trope. For instance,

> Memories of the past evoked in the forest landscape in the literature by [Nobel Prize winner] Ōe [Kenzaburō], and other writers such as Nakagami Kenji and Tsushima Yūko (…), belong to what might be called a counter-national heritage. These writers use 'forests' to deconstruct the myth of Japanese origins going back to the ancient imperial times. That is to say, forests are appropriated as a figure of memory for marginal groups of people who have been left out of the master narrative of Japanese history (ibid., 8).

As Abe Auestad demonstrates, 'forests' constitute a powerful trope in Japanese literature, religion and popular culture. Intimately connected with notions of Japanese history, culture and national identity, they carry profound ideological significance. However, their meaning is by no means fixed, but subject to continuous negotiation and reinterpretation. Consequently, in contemporary Japan, 'forests' are employed for a wide variety of ideological purposes, ranging from neo-imperialism and nationalism to the symbolic empowerment of marginal groups. Moreover, forests today carry profound commercial significance, and not only because of their natural resources. For instance, in recent years, they have come to be seen as valuable resources for public health: sanctioned by scientific research, throughout the country 'forest therapy' (*shinrin yoku* or *shinrin serapii*) walking trails have been designed and promoted by local authorities and tourist agencies (see Hirano 2009).

Significantly, however, in today's Japan the term 'forest' does not always refer to actual tree communities. That is, the term is also used as a euphemism, employed for the discursive naturalisation of human-made spaces such as apartment complexes, urban parks and even, ironically, waste facilities (Kirby 2011). As Kirby has pointed out, '[c]ontemporary Japanese development projects, whether public or private, are full of such Orwellian euphemisms as "Forest Park", names that index greenery or wildlife or breathtaking vistas in the relative (or, frequently, total) absence of the feature in question' (ibid., 204-205). For instance, the small park in Nakano ward (Tokyo) named 'Peace Forest Park' (*Heiwa no mori kōen*) is built on the site of the former Toyotama Prison, where until 1945 political prisoners and members of 'subversive' religious movements were incarcerated (including Marxist philosopher Miki Kiyoshi [1897-1945], who died in this prison, and Sōka Gakkai co-founder

Toda Jōsei [1900-1958]). As such, the 'Peace Forest Park' constitutes a clear example of the depoliticisation of a place through naturalisation (Barthes 1957) – both discursive *and* by means of spatial practice (i.e., park design).

In sum, the trope of the forest carries a number of positive connotations, ranging from naturalness to healing to the origins of the nation. As such, it lends itself to a variety of purposes. As we shall see, these various connotations can also be found in contemporary discourse on the significance of sacred shrine forests.

8.2   The forest civilisation

8.2.1   *A country of forests*

We have seen that Japan is one the most-forested countries in the world, boasting a forest cover of more than two-thirds of the total land size. This geographical fact has received ample scholarly attention, and inspired a large number of studies on the conditions and history of Japan's forests. Roughly speaking, contemporary Japanese academic discourse on the country's forest situation can be categorised into three basic themes or approaches. First, Japan's high forest cover is often presented as the logical consequence of the nation's traditional reverence for nature, which is supposed to have given rise to various forest conservation policies developed in the premodern period. Those who adhere to this view have described Japan as a 'forest civilisation', and juxtaposed it with 'Western' (or 'Judeo-Christian') civilisation, which is held responsible for widespread deforestation. Second, there are those who state that, despite the high percentage of forest cover in mountainous and rural areas, the postwar 'bubble' economy has actually given rise to widespread deforestation in urban and lowland areas. They have pleaded for (urban) reforestation, and, in some cases, set up reforestation projects that often combine an ecological with a social agenda.

Third, in recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on the fact that a large proportion of Japan's forest cover is made up of ecologically and economically unsustainable plantation forests. These *sugi* (*Cryptomeria japonica*; Japanese cedar) plantations are in fact monocultures that house little biodiversity, cause widespread health problems as many people are allergic to their pollen, and encroach upon the rural *satoyama* landscapes lauded by many ecologists today. At first sight, this third view seems to constitute a challenge to the first one, as it problematises the notion of forests as essentially benign, and of the Japanese nation as forest-loving. However, a differentiation is often made between 'natural' and 'man-made' forests, which allows the 'overforestation' argument to be incorporated into cultural-nationalist discourse: 'natural' forests are said to represent Japan's original civilisation, but to be in a state of serious decline, while 'artificial' forests are seen as modern aberrations that are symptomatic for this decline (e.g., A. Ueda 2004b, 155-156). Yet, in reality, the distinction between 'natural' and 'artificial' is not always as clear as some authors have suggested –

not only because there is hardly any real primeval forest left in Japan that is not somehow influenced by human actors, but also because plantation forests that are no longer maintained do actually constitute ecosystems, house various species, and turn into 'wilderness'. Thus, 'artificial' forests are every bit as natural as they are cultural, even though the shapes they take may not appeal to many people.

In the discourse on Shinto and its sacred forests, all of the aforementioned three themes are present. Even in one single narrative, elements of these three themes may be combined. In the following pages, I will predominantly focus upon the first theme, which has arguably been the most influential one, and look at the different ways in which it has contributed to and become part of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. As for the second and third theme, I will return to them in the next chapters, when I discuss the notion of *chinju no mori* and related practices.

8.2.2   *Civilisation and deforestation*

The notion of Japan as a 'forest civilisation' has been advocated by, among others, the environmental scientist and botanist Nakamura Yōichi (born 1957). In a paper presented at the Shinto Bunka Kai conference on 'trees and Shinto culture' (Nakamura 2009), he discussed the topic of 'civilisation' (*bunmei*) with regard to processes of de- and reforestation.[152] Following the cultural theorist Umehara Takeshi (1989; 1995) and the geographer Yasuda Yoshinori (1990; 2006), whom I will discuss shortly, Nakamura conceives of 'civilisation' in static and essentialist terms, placing different 'civilisations' in opposition to each other in a way reminiscent of the controversial yet influential work by Samuel Huntington (1997).[153] He starts his paper by asserting Japan's uniqueness: 'Japan is the only country where there has been a long connection between forests and civilisation. It is a fact that there are no other such countries in the history of the world; it seems like a miracle' (Nakamura 2009, 9). When looking at the world's history, he argues, we can say that 'the history of civilisation is surely the history of forest destruction' (ibid., 10).

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[152] For a critical discussion of ways in which the category 'civilisation' has been used in modern Japanese ideology, see Morris-Suzuki 1998, 140-160.

[153] Huntington's thesis is problematic, especially when applied to the Asian context. Puzzlingly, Huntington does not consider Japan to be part of the 'Sinic civilisation', unlike countries such as Korea and Vietnam. However, all three cultures – Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese – have been influenced by Chinese culture and ideology, yet all three have distinct national identities. There is no compelling reason why Japan should be considered to constitute a 'civilisation' of its own, and Korea and Vietnam not, other than global power structures. In any case, although Huntington's thesis has exercised considerable academic (and political) influence, it is practically useless for analysing modern Asian history. Few of the major conflicts in East Asia in the last decades can be explained by using the 'clash of civilisations' thesis: neither the cold war on the Korean peninsula nor China's various neo-imperial conflicts (with Taiwan, Tibet, and countries bordering the South China Sea) correspond to this theory. Arguably, state-sponsored nationalism is a more powerful marker of difference and cause of conflict in contemporary Asia than any 'civilisational' difference. Huntington's theory has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy elsewhere on the planet primarily because it influenced US foreign policy, but it rests on an essentialist, simplistic understanding of human cultural diversity.

Nakamura then proceeds to discuss the destruction of the ancient Lebanese cedar forests and the deforestation in ancient Egypt (ibid., 10-13), followed by the argument that 'Western civilisation' is built upon massive deforestation (ibid., 13-14). The nature-loving traditions of northern Europe (i.e., Germanic and Celtic tribes) were supposedly suppressed by the Christian missionaries, who brought with them the spirit of deforestation, destroyed animism, and felled trees (ibid., 15). Not until the end of the nineteenth century did a nearly-deforested Germany start its reforestation projects; at the time, there was hardly any primeval forest left in Europe. The deforestation was not limited to Europe and the Middle East, however. With imperialism, the argument goes, 'Western civilisation' spread to the rest of the world, causing dramatic forest loss almost everywhere in Asia and Africa (ibid., 16-17). Thus, 'civilisation' is described as the main actor responsible for deforestation worldwide. The question *what* it is that constitutes a civilisation, and whether or not a 'civilisation' can be an independent actor at all, is not addressed.

After an informative description of the complete deforestation of Easter Island in premodern times (ibid., 17-21) – which, incidentally, had nothing to do with 'Western civilisation' – Nakamura moves on to discuss Japan. Not surprisingly, he starts by reasserting Japan's uniqueness, and its essential otherness vis-à-vis the West – a claim 'evidenced' by Japan's comparatively high forest cover (ibid., 22). The reason for this, he emphasises, is *not* that the Japanese refrained from logging trees – on the contrary, they have always used a lot of wood for construction purposes. Nevertheless, Nakamura states, Japan has never experienced large-scale deforestation. For this, he gives several reasons, one of which is Shinto:

> The third reason is Japan's traditional religion Shinto, and its belief that gods live in nature. Forests were seen as places where gods reside, and have become the object of worship itself. In Japan's rural villages, there are shrines and shrine forests (*chinju no mori*) where the gods that protect those areas are worshipped, and these have come to be venerated as sacred places. To Japanese, the sight of a shrine forest with a shrine in its middle is very common, but in the rest of the world it is very uncommon to have a religious institution in the middle of a forest (ibid., 23; my translation).

However, as the environmental historian Conrad Totman has pointed out (1989), there have actually been periods of serious deforestation in Japanese history. He even goes so far as to describe 'Japan's forest history prior to the seventeenth area as a stereotypical era of exploitation forestry, in which woodland users generally showed little concern for preservation of site or restoration of yield' (Totman 1989, 4). Totman's argument is partly acknowledged by Nakamura, who distinguishes three periods of deforestation in Japanese history: the Nara and early Heian periods, when large wooden Buddhist temples were built; the late medieval and early Edo periods, when the population increased rapidly; and the modern period (2009, 24-25). However, Nakamura emphasises the Japanese capacity to overcome these challenges, even referring to the Shōwa emperor (Hirohito)'s practice of planting trees (ibid., 25) – a symbolic annual event that was established in the postwar period – as well as to Ise

Jingū's timber production, used for rebuilding its shrine buildings every twenty years and said to be sustainable (ibid., 26-29).

In contrast to Totman, then, Nakamura does not devote much attention to the question as to how it was possible that the 'forest-loving' Japanese people caused deforestation – not only in the modern period, when 'Western technology' had invaded the country, but also in two earlier periods. As Totman makes clear, periods of deforestation were followed by periods of reforestation (the most extensive of these was in the Edo period, when it was the result of an ambitious project designed by the authorities). However, the incentives for this reforestation were economical and pragmatic, rather than based on any kind of 'Shinto' appreciation of nature as sacred, as has been argued elsewhere (e.g., Tawara 2010). As Totman writes,

> Foreigners, and some Japanese as well, often speak fondly of a special Japanese 'love of nature' that can be credited with this early modern forest recovery. To so argue, however, invites the tart query: did they love nature so much less during the ancient and early modern predations? (…) The people who labored to salvage Japan's forests were not especially concerned with beauty or driven by any ideological sense of the aesthetics of nature. They had other matters on their mind. Just as we do not find woodland regulators and tree growers justifying their own actions, or urging action by others, in the name of 'nature', so we do not find any themes of Buddhist reverence for 'sentient beings' showing up as reason or rationale in forest policy. (…) Nor do other religious doctrines, such as Shintō or Shugendō, show up as motivators in the actions of forest preservers. Doubtless, a few gnarly old trees were left standing near shrines or other sacred places out of an aesthetic-religious sensibility, but such occurrences were local in application and severely limited in their environmental impact (1989, 179).

Thus, in contrast to Nakamura, Totman does not see Shinto as a factor of importance in Japan's history of de- and reforestation (nor, for that matter, Buddhism). Likewise, he challenges the notion that there is some sort of unique appreciation of nature intrinsic to Japanese culture – let alone the essentialist notion of Japan as a 'forest civilisation' diametrically opposed to a 'Western civilisation' supposedly built on continuous deforestation. Nevertheless, Nakamura's views are widespread, and can be considered representative for contemporary views on Shinto and the environment. Moreover, although those 'gnarly old trees' near shrines may historically have been 'severely limited in their environmental impact', in the past three decades or so they have become an important symbol of the intertwinement between ecology, nature conservation, sacred space, local communitarianism and the Japanese national heritage. Hence, their impact today may be very different from earlier times. Likewise, the relationship between Shinto and the natural environment seems to have undergone significant change, not only because of ongoing discursive associations but also because of the various grassroots organisations trying to give shape to this ideal.

8.2.3 Yasuda Yoshinori and the East-West dichotomy

Historically accurate or not, the 'forest civilisation' trope has exercised considerable influence on the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. Moreover, it has been employed as a rhetoric device for differentiating between Japan and its 'Western' Other, providing additional theoretical legitimation for *nihonjinron*-type assertions of Japan's uniqueness and superiority. I have already mentioned Yasuda Yoshinori, geographer and former president of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken). In a well-known essay (Yasuda 1990), he contrasted the 'Western' and the 'Japanese' forest history, then argued that a revival of the 'traditional' Japanese forest civilisation and corresponding religious worldview was needed in order to overcome the global environmental crisis – a process he referred to by the concept 'Animism Renaissance'.

In this essay, Yasuda distinguishes between two types of civilisation, the 'civilisation of deforestation' and the 'forest civilisation'. The former, he argues, spread from ancient Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean area, after which it was 'inherited by the people of Europe' and combined with Christianity:

> The philosophy of Christianity was also responsible for the expansion of the 'civilization of deforestation'. Man occupied a higher position than the forest in the doctrine of Christianity, and nature was created by God as a food producer for man. The gods of Animism (German and Celtic) were eliminated by the invasion of Christianity and the trees sacred to these gods were subsequently cut down by the Christians. Europe expanded after the 15th century into all parts of the globe, including Africa and Asia. The ideology of this 'civilization of deforestation' invaded primitive civilizations which were golden and peaceful and based on a system of harmony between man and nature. (…) Thus it can be said that the world of Animism was destroyed by the invasion and expansion of Christianity (1990, 2-3).

Several things are noteworthy about this quotation. First, the author's interpretation of Christianity is problematic: there is no specific Christian doctrine that addresses man's position vis-à-vis 'the forest', and few (if any) Christians would subscribe to the notion that the sole purpose of Creation is the production of food for mankind. Second, it is interesting that the author juxtaposes Christianity not with, say, 'polytheism', but with 'animism' – a nineteenth-century European term, used by evolutionary anthropologists to describe the worship of natural elements, considered to be a 'primitive' stage of religious development. Significantly, as I will discuss shortly, in recent decades 'animism' has come to be used as a marker of Japanese national identity. And third, the author idealises so-called 'primitive' civilisations in pre-Christian Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, calling them 'golden', 'peaceful' and based on 'harmony between man and nature'.[154] This is a clear

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[154] Significantly, in this and other discourse on the relationship between 'man' and 'nature', 'women' are conspicuously absent. The lack of gender-neutral speech is no mere coincidence. A few exceptions notwithstanding, the discourse on Shinto and the environment is almost entirely male-dominated. This reflects lingering gender patterns in the Japanese academic and shrine world, where very few women occupy influential

example of the previously discussed reappropriation of the 'noble savage' stereotype by representatives of the religious environmentalist paradigm (Kalland 2008): 'primitive' people are believed to live in harmony with nature, and, accordingly, to possess ancient ecological knowledge that has profound relevance for today's world.

However, as Yasuda argues, the 'civilization of deforestation' has 'destroyed the American Indian civilization and eventually laid waste to the seven continents of the world'; it 'destroyed nature and the spiritual richness of the people who lived in harmony with nature' (1990, 3). As their cultures and environments were destroyed, he suggests, the ecological knowledge of 'primitive' people has virtually disappeared. However, '[t]here is another genealogy of civilization which can be called the "forest civilization" and which still survives today in Japan' (ibid., 3). According to Yasuda,

> fortunately, due to the isolation policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan escaped the invasion of the 'civilization of deforestation'. Animism survived until recent decades, maintaining the traditions begun in Jomon culture. Shinto played an important role in preserving Animism as the trees sacred to the gods survived in the consecrated precincts of Shinto shrines. (…) Although we can no longer return to the primitive world of Jomon or other early civilizations, we need to remember and recognize the sacredness of the forests which bring forth and nurture all of mankind (ibid., 4).

Thus, Japan is presented as the sole country in the world that has not succumbed to the destructive 'civilisation of deforestation', and where, accordingly, the ancient spirit of 'animism' – here presented as the underlying foundation of Shinto – has been preserved. In addition, Yasuda suggests that the spirit of animism characteristic of the 'forest civilisation', which is said to have been preserved in Shinto, may serve to re-establish a global environmental awareness.

Yasuda Yoshinori's essay on the 'two civilisations' is a summary of the main arguments developed in his other works. His theories are based on environmental determinism: that is, combining archaeology and physical geography, he arrives at an environmental-geographical explanation (or reification) of the essential difference between the Western 'meadow' civilisation and the Japanese 'forest civilisation' (Yasuda 1995). His theory of religion follows from this environmental determinism: Japanese animism (which, he claims, is the essence of Japanese religion), is said to have emerged spontaneously out of the forest landscape and monsoon climate of the Japanese isles, whereas the Judeo-Christian, 'monotheistic' tradition stems from the inhospitable, dry climate of the Middle East – which explains the doctrine saying that nature is subordinate to, and must be conquered by, man

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positions. In contrast to the study of 'folk' or 'popular religion' (e.g., Schattschneider 2003) and Buddhism (e.g., Faure 2003), thus far gender issues in Shinto – for instance, the (generally inferior) position of female priests and *miko* (female shrine staff); discriminatory beliefs and practices, such as 'sacred places' where women are (or were) refused entry because they are supposedly 'polluting'; and Jinja Honchō's political organisation Shinseiren's opposition to gender equality in society – have received remarkably little scholarly attention. Cf. Kawahashi 2006.

– from where it spread to Europe (Yasuda 2006). The influence of Watsuji Tetsurō's *fūdo* theory (see chapter four) is evident.

As Yasuda's works provide a 'scientific' legitimation of claims concerning the unique features of the Japanese nation, as well as of the fundamental otherness of Japan and 'the West', they have been aptly categorised as 'academic nationalism' (Sleeboom 2001, 83-88). In other words, Yasuda has used geographical, archaeological and environmental research to naturalise myths of nationhood developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As is the case for most academic identity politics, he is not only concerned with tracing the origins of the Japanese nation back to primordial times, but also with 'proving' the fundamental alterity of the main Other – in this case, Christianity. His work thus operates within a discourse of differentiation between 'Japan' and 'the West', which essentialises both categories, denies any diversity within, and overlooks the sheer multiplicity of cultural expressions (elsewhere) in the world. It also denies people their individual agency, suggesting they are the mere product of millennia-old environmental and climatological circumstances.

Yasuda has received some serious criticism. As Ian Reader has pointed out, in the postwar period the alleged 'forest civilisation' Japan has in fact been responsible for the widespread destruction of forests in Southeast Asia (Reader 1990; cf. Dauvergne 1997; Tsing 2005). However, Yasuda's views are shared widely, and he is by no means the only scholar who has contrasted Japan's 'forest civilisation' with the alleged 'Western' spirit of deforestation. So has for instance Tomiyama Kazuko, a prolific author who has written books on a range of topics related to Japan, nature, and environmental issues (and, incidentally, one of the very few female voices contributing to this discourse). In the 1982 symposium on shrines and nature mentioned in the previous chapter, she stated that 'whenever I come home to Japan from Europe or America, I am struck most by the abundance and beauty of Japan's nature. Even the colour green is different here' (*Jinja shinpō* 1982c; my translation). Next, after repeating the familiar myth of the Japanese love of nature, she asserted the essential difference between Japan and Europe, based on their supposed attitude towards forests: 'European culture is built upon the destruction of forests. (…) Japan, however, grew a culture based on growing forests. We planted trees, received water, and grew rice. There is hardly any difference between the total forest cover in ancient times and now. (…) It is the *exact opposite* of Europe' (ibid., my emphasis).

Thus, both Yasuda and Tomiyama define Shinto and Japanese culture in opposition to Europe and/or 'the West', using environmental-historical arguments to justify this dichotomy. Significantly, this pseudo-scientific comparison of Japan and the West is a core feature of most nationalist *nihonjinron* discourse, which is incorporated into some contemporary environmentalist narratives. This type of 'comparison' usually comes down to the reproduction of established Orientalist and Occidentalist stereotypes, and the reification of an essentialist dichotomy between the two, rather than serious comparative research taking into consideration diversity *within* any of the two juxtaposed entities. In this narrative scheme, little serious attention is devoted to other cultures and civilisations –

from China, India, or Southeast Asia, to name but a few – and the world is *de facto* reduced to a single binary set.

8.2.4   Othering 'monotheism'

As Pedersen (1995) and Kalland (2008) have demonstrated, in this type of religious-environmentalist discourse, Whitean critique of Christianity's apparent contribution to environmental problems is often appropriated by people defining themselves in opposition the 'the West' and/or Christianity for purposes of (religious) identity politics – a contemporary variety, it may be argued, of what Bernard Faure has referred to as 'reverse Orientalism' (1995). In the case of Japan, Shinto is often compared to other ancient cultures of 'forest worship', such as Native Americans or Celts, which have been marginalised or disappeared altogether. As Yasuda's essay illustrates, these cultures are idealised (the deforestation brought about periodically by Native Americans before their lands were occupied by colonists [see Cronon 1983], for instance, is not a topic addressed by authors associating these cultures with Shinto). In any case, this discursive association provides Shinto ideologues and so-called 'spiritual intellectuals' with an opportunity to appropriate the 'noble savage' trope, redefine Shinto as the world's most prominent primordial ecological tradition that has survived until today, and assert Shinto's contemporary significance.

Thus, in the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, the Christian 'West' is often seen as Shinto (and Japan)'s main Other. The alleged destruction of the natural environment by 'Western' civilisations is often attributed to 'the' Judeo-Christian (and, by extension, 'monotheistic') worldview and tradition, which is presented as exploitative and intolerant. The underlying assumption seems to be that this tradition is singular and unequivocal, at least with regard to its attitude to nature; there is little or no recognition of diversity within (no reference is made, for instance, to Christian environmentalist organisations, which have been active at least since the 1970s). Perhaps most problematic, however, is the deterministic assertion that a dominant religious ideology directs (and, accordingly, can be held accountable for) all human behaviour, including the use of natural resources. Nevertheless, the notion that Shinto (defined as 'animistic', 'polytheistic' or even 'pantheistic') is diametrically opposed to Christianity (seen as 'monotheistic' and 'dogmatic') seems to be widespread, not in the least among shrine priests.[155] The title of one of Yasuda's best-known books is illustrative for this approach: called

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[155] I personally doubt the empirical validity of the commonly used dichotomy between 'monotheistic' and 'polytheistic' religions. While the concepts are relevant as normative, 'emic' categories employed by followers of religions themselves, their descriptive value is questionable, as concrete religious practices do not necessarily correspond to normative theological notions. That is, I am not convinced that there is a fundamental difference between, say, certain types of Catholic or Islamic saint worship, and the worship of deities and bodhisattvas in East-Asian cultures, other than on an abstract theological level. Moreover, I am sceptical of the popular assumption that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have something unique in common, which sets them apart as a group and makes them ontologically different from 'polytheistic' religions – a diffuse rest category, defined by nothing but its supposed otherness. In fact, it can be argued that the 'monotheism'-'polytheism' (or 'Abrahamic'-

Isshinkyō no yami ('the darkness of monotheism'), it elaborates upon the arguments made in his earlier work, rigidly opposing 'polytheism'/'animism' and 'monotheism' and arguing that the latter is responsible for environmental destruction (Yasuda 2006).

For instance, Fukushima Hiroyuki (former head priest of Tsurugaoka Hachimangū in Kamakura), has stated that there is a fundamental difference between the Japanese worldview, focused on a 'coexistence with nature', and the 'Western', 'monotheistic' view that conceives of nature as a resource that may be exploited for building a civilisation. To underline this point, he referred to an interfaith meeting in which he participated: 'Jewish people and so on (*Yudaya-kyō no hito nado*) believe that nature is given to humans by God, and that we can use it freely'. Japanese, on the other hand, are said to believe that they 'are one with nature' (*Jinja shinpō* 1982c; my translation). Likewise, Chichibu Jinja head priest Sonoda Minoru (who, as mentioned, is one of the most vocal and internationally-oriented representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm), has written that

> For Western European people raised in the Christian worldview, natural landscapes and forests could not themselves be considered sacred. Instead, they cleared the land, built churches and made artificial gardens, establishing order upon the world, the main point of which was to show God's glory. By contrast, since ancient times in Japan deep mountain valleys, forests, waterfalls, rocks and other such natural features, and even forests planted by people, were seen as sacred places guarded by gods and spirits (1998, 30; my translation).

Here Sonoda follows *nihonjinron* scholars such as Yasuda Yoshinori in his understanding of Christianity as a religion responsible for the control and exploitation of the natural environment. This is contrasted to Shinto, which Sonoda describes as the primordial ethnic religion (*minzoku shūkyō*) of the Japanese (ibid., 149). According to Sonoda the underlying essence of 'Shinto culture' emerged out of the prehistorical 'Japanese' people's spontaneous responses to the physical environments in which they lived. In this respect, Sonoda's ideas resemble those of Yasuda Yoshinori, Umehara Takeshi and Ueda Masaaki. Nevertheless, in their reconstructions of ancient history, there are some subtle yet important differences. In particular, they differ with regard to their vision of the 'original', ideal age in which 'Japanese' culture emerged, and their understanding of the essence of Japanese religion. I will describe these differences in more detail shortly. First, however, I will have a brief look at one of the core concepts in the discourse on Japan as 'forest civilisation': the notion of 'animism'.

'Asian') dichotomy is a variety of the classical West-East dichotomy, based on a similar set of binary oppositions: exclusivist versus syncretistic, particularistic versus holistic, and so on. Hence my sympathy for Lefebvre's and Soja's project to move beyond binary oppositions by always trying to introduce a 'third' option – 'trialectic thinking', as Soja called it – for 'there is always an-Other' (1996, 5-7).

8.3 The rediscovery of 'animism'

8.3.1 Notes on the concept

As we have seen, for Yasuda, the Jōmon period, in which Japan's forest civilisation emerged, constitutes a golden age. The mentality and worldview of this age continue to be of relevance, he suggests. Yasuda is not the only one who has referred to the Jōmon-period mentality and worldview by the term 'animism'. As this concept is central to notions of Shinto as a nature religion, a brief discussion of its meanings and uses is in order.

The term 'animism' is derived from the Latin *anima*, which means 'soul', 'spirit' or 'breath', and was coined by the British cultural anthropologist Edward Tylor. In his 1871 book *Primitive Culture*, Tylor defined animism as 'the belief in spiritual beings' that is the foundation of all religious systems. In his evolutionist model, 'animism' was considered to be the first, most primitive stage of religious and cultural development (Morris 1987, 100). As such, it served the same purpose as Frazer's stage of 'magic', and Durkheim's 'totemism'. Similarly, in his 1913 work *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud used the term 'animism' to refer to the first stage of mankind's cultural development. Unlike his British predecessor, however, for Freud the term did not merely refer to a particular period in history, but also to a psychological condition. According to him, 'animism' is characterised by the 'over-estimation of psychic processes', in which emotional impulses are followed directly (ibid., 158). Thus, in the work of Tylor as well as that of Freud, 'animism' is not merely a neutral category employed to describe a particular type of 'religious' belief; it is a pejorative term, associated with primitiveness, simplicity, impulsivity, emotionality and underdevelopment (socio-cultural as well as psychological).

Later generations of anthropologists explicitly distanced themselves from both the social-evolutionist and the Freudian interpretations of culture. In particular, the notion of 'primitive' cultures, and the identification of European prehistorical societies with contemporary 'isolated' communities (i.e., of temporal and spatial Others), was criticised. Accordingly, associated notions such as 'animism' and 'totemism' fell into disuse. Not until the turn of the twenty-first century was the concept rediscovered, and applied seriously, by European anthropologists. [156] Before that time,

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[156] The British environmental anthropologist Tim Ingold was one of the first to reapply the term, using it to refer to a particular mode of relating to the natural environment (Ingold 2000, 111-131). Around the same time, the French structuralist Philippe Descola developed his theory of the four ontologies: according to him, all belief systems can be categorised into four basic models based on the ways in which humans relate to, and imagine, non-human Others (2005). As the title of his work (*Par-delà nature et culture*) suggests, Descola is one of several scholars today who have problematised the nature-culture dichotomy; drawing on his field research in the Amazon region, he has argued that this dichotomy is not at all universally shared. In Descola's theory of the four ontologies, 'animism' is characterised by a 'resemblance of interiorities' and a 'difference of physicalities' (e.g., an animal has a different physical shape, yet its 'interiority', or spirit, constitutes a continuity with humans). This is contrasted with 'totemism' (resemblance of interiorities and resemblance of physicalities), 'naturalism' (difference of interiorities and resemblance of physicalities) and 'analogism' (difference of interiorities and difference of physicalities) (Descola 2005). As any categorisation with universal pretensions, Descola's theory has been criticised for its tendency to generalise and overlook alternative modes of relating to the world. Nevertheless, his reinterpretation of the classical categories 'animism', 'totemism' and 'naturalism' is original

however, the term was commonly used by Japanese scholars – along with other classical anthropological categories, such as 'totemism' (e.g., Nakazawa 2006) and 'shamanism' (e.g., Kamata 2008). As John Clammer has written,

> 'Animism' is a term that has almost entirely dropped out of anthropological discourse in the West. It has not, however, disappeared from the intellectual vocabulary of the East and is still evoked there in a number of guises. (…) It is in Japan, however, and possibly only in Japan, that the concept of animism is still widely used as a way of explaining the distinctiveness of the national culture and as a vehicle for constructing a model of Japanese society, which, unlike classical Western sociological theories, explicitly locates nature as part of the constitution of that society (2004, 83).

This statement is perhaps somewhat outdated – as we have seen, in recent years, the concept 'animism' has seen a resurgence in Europe as well (cf. Clammer 2010, 101) – but the basic argument, that in Japan the concept 'animism' features prominently in popular and academic discourse, still holds. Significantly, in today's Japan as well as in nineteenth-century Europe, it is not merely a social-scientific category used to denote a particular belief system. The term is also used for academic identity politics, to differentiate between nations or societies, and carries normative connotations. The crucial difference is that in Japan, the term has been reappropriated and reversed; the 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' have come to be perceived as positive features, as these are associated with the social and ecological harmony supposedly characteristic of primordial, Jōmon-period Japanese society. Hence, in Japanese literature as well as scholarship, 'animism' has come to constitute a marker of national identity, setting Japan apart from the West.[157]

Probably the most famous Japanese anthropologist who has developed a theory of animism is Iwata Keiji (1922-2013), partly based on his research in Southeast Asia (Iwata 1993). In contrast to the classical theories, Iwata does not primarily conceive of animism as an evolutionary stage, but rather as a particular mode of relating to the world. As he has stated, 'needless to say, in the religion called animism, there is no doctrine, no religious organisation, and there are no religious professionals. That is why, originally, this was a religion of individuals. It may be considered the most simple religion there is' (ibid., 16; my translation). However, he continues, animism cannot truly be grasped by words alone; it must be experienced in order to be truly understood. Thus, Iwata employs the same 'rhetoric of experience' as authors such as Rudolf Otto, D. T. Suzuki, Mircea Eliade, Kamata Tōji and Stuart Picken: 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-rational and pre-discursive, and must be experienced

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and thought-provoking, and may provide a possible new theoretical framework for the comparative study of cultures and religions that transcends the particularism and localism characteristic of much research today.

[157] For instance, in Hirakawa & Tsuruta (1994), 'animism' is presented as the defining feature of Japanese literature; i.e., that what makes it 'Japanese'. In a review article discussing this book, Lisette Gebhardt wrote that '"Animism" is here just one of the possible metaphors for a common model of West-East polarisation since the beginning of the twentieth century, according to which the East was considered "feminine", passive, intuitive, natural and "tropical", and the West as "masculine", aggressive, rational, artifical and "dry"' (1996, 441; my translation).

fully, not grasped intellectually. Those who disagree with or attempt to deconstruct it are dismissed as 'unenlightened' (cf. Sharf 1998). This rhetoric is then employed the assert the fundamental difference of 'West' and 'East'. As Clammer summarises,

> [Iwata's] view is ultimately a vitalist one: that animism is not just the theory that animals and plants have a spirit, but is the view that there is actually one spirit that embodies itself in form, but which itself exists infinitely beyond shape (…). This finally leads Iwata to the view that the universe is pervaded by the numinous and that intellectual discussion of animism ultimately misses the point – to be understood animism must actually be *encountered*. (…) This finally results in a critique of deep ecology as a movement that is still too materialistic because of its unwillingness or inability to penetrate to deep enough levels, and a theory of the formation of Japanese society in which he contrasts Western societies constructed on the ultimate basis of history with the culture of Japan as having emerged organically from an animistic view of the cosmos (2004, 98).

In addition to Yasuda and Iwata, the notion of 'animism' is commonly associated with Umehara Takeshi, one of Japan's leading postwar cultural theorists. Hence, I will now move on to discuss his theory of animism, the Jōmon period, and Japanese culture in more detail.

8.3.2   Umehara Takeshi's 'forest thought'

Schooled as a philosopher himself, Umehara was an admirer of the work of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), the founder of the Kyoto school who is well-known internationally for his efforts to develop a European-style philosophy partly based on Japanese Zen Buddhist thought. Disillusioned by Kyoto University's decision not to engage with Japanese-style philosophy anymore after Nishida's death, Umehara turned to the study of Buddhism, classical literature and ethnology, in order to better understand Japanese culture (1995, 11-13). He became one of the most prominent Japanese public intellectuals, has published on a wide range of topics, and is regarded as the most prominent of the so-called 'spiritual intellectuals' (Gebhardt 2001b; see chapter three). Like Yasuda Yoshinori and scholar of religion Yamaori Tetsuo, he was president of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies for several years. According to Umehara, the essence of Japanese culture can be found in the 'forest culture' developed in the Jōmon period, and in the 'animism' by which this culture was characterised. As he has repeatedly stated, in order to overcome today's challenges, humanity has to embrace the spirit of animism developed in the Jōmon period (Umehara 1989; 1995; 2009).

In order to understand the culture of a given region, Umehara has argued, one must first understand that region's religion, for religion is foundational for culture. However, he maintains that, unlike Christianity or Islam, Japanese religion is difficult to understand:

> In general, in order to understand the culture of a country, one has to understand that country's religion. This is self-evident. For example, if we want to understand European culture, we

have to understand Christianity, the religion of Europe. And if we want to understand Arab culture, we must understand the Arab religion, Islam. Similarly, in order to understand Japanese culture, naturally we first have to understand Japanese religion. However, Japanese religion is rather difficult to understand. (…) We can understand Christianity and Islam to a certain extent by reading their sacred scriptures, but Japanese religion is mostly the Shinto and Buddhism that the Japanese people have traditionally believed. (…) Rather than concepts, Japanese religion is made up of *customs* (*shūzoku*) (1995, 10-11; my translation, my emphasis).

Several problematic assumptions are made here regarding the relationship between 'religion' and 'culture', as well as the supposedly 'European' and 'Arab' character of, respectively, Christianity and Islam. But I will leave these aside for now, and focus on Umehara's understanding of 'Japanese religion'. Although a scholar of Buddhism himself, to Umehara Japanese Buddhism does not constitute the essence of Japanese religion. Nor, for that matter, does Shinto. Shinto, he argues, has in the course of history gone through two major transformations, and has become very different from its original shape. The second of these transformations took place in the Meiji period, when Shinto was appropriated and abused by the state for political purposes. Like other representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm (e.g., Sonoda 1998, 9; M. Ueda 2001b, 61-65), Umehara is critical of 'State Shinto' imperialism, arguing that it led to the distortion and even, partially, destruction of Shinto as it had existed previously. He does, however, suggest that this was the consequence of the import of destructive 'Western' ideas, rather than any intrinsic 'Japanese' causes (1995, 15-16).

The first transformation of Shinto, Umehara argues, took place at the time of the Ritsuryō system, the Chinese-style legislative and political system implemented in the seventh and eighth centuries. In fact, the ritual state cult and imperial mythology that were developed during this period have long been considered *the* original shape of Shinto, a view challenged by historians only in recent decades.[158] However, Umehara argues that the imperial cult of the Ritsuryō period does *not* constitute Shinto's original shape. He describes it as the first 'State Shinto' period, in which a previously existing 'Shinto' was appropriated and drastically reformed by the political authorities, and argues that well-known Shinto texts (the *Kojiki*, *norito* prayers and so on) and ritual purification practices (*misogi* and *harae*) were invented during this period, modelled after 'Taoism' (1995, 17-20). Unlike historical-constructivist scholars, however, he does subscribe to the view that Shinto has a unique, transhistorical essence. In order to recover this original essence, the 'underlying Japanese spirit', we have to disregard the 'inventions' made during the Ritsuryō and Meiji periods, and study the religious practices that existed prior to the introduction of continental culture and ideology – using archaeology, cultural and physical anthropology, ethnology and comparative religion (ibid., 20-22).

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[158] Kuroda Toshio argued that the ancient imperial cult and mythology were basically a Japanese adaptation of the Chinese system, whereas Shinto is largely a (pre)modern invention (Kuroda 1981). Somewhat differently, Mark Teeuwen has argued that modern Shinto has developed out of medieval Buddhist *shinbutsu* traditions, rather than the ancient imperial cult (2007).

This essence, according to Umehara, is animism. The animistic worldview goes back to the Jōmon period, when the hunter-gatherers dwelling in Japan's forests developed a sophisticated spiritual culture:

> In the Jōmon period, the wood culture was highly developed. Trees were not only used for making tools for daily life, but also for very spiritual objects, as Jōmon-period ruins and remains suggest. Especially if we look at objects used for ritual purposes, or the shape and design of Jōmon pottery, it becomes clear that these people had an advanced spiritual life (ibid., 28; my translation).

Animism, then, is defined as 'the thought that says animals, plants and even inorganic things have a spirit that is connected to humans; and that, through this spirit, all living things can live. (…) [It is] 'the thought that sees spirits living in places in nature' (Umehara 1989, 13). Thus, it is not only the belief that certain natural elements and non-human organisms are spirited, but also that their spirit constitutes a *continuity with* human spirits, despite differences in outward appearances. Interestingly, this combination of spiritual continuity and physical alterity (or discontinuity) is not unlike Descola's recent interpretation of animism (see footnote 156).

The initial shape of animism, Umehara suggests, is the worship of spirits in trees (ibid., 13-14). In prehistorical Japan, it is argued, trees came to be worshipped as divine bodies, symbols of fertility, and/or places where deities resided. Indeed, as Fabio Rambelli has pointed out, '[a]ncient Japanese texts contain many references to trees in a religious context. Trees (or at least, *some* trees) were described either as abodes of the kami or as deities themselves' (2007, 142). As archaeological findings suggest (Umehara 1995, 49), in the course of the centuries, the worship of trees came to be extended to logs and wooden pillars, which took centre stage in worship practices. According to Umehara, this worship of pillars constitutes the 'origins of Shinto' (ibid., 51).

He is not the only one who has made this point: for instance, in the documentary *Nihon wa mori no kuni* ('Japan is a/the country of forests'), co-produced by Shasō Gakkai, the association between trees, pillars and ancient Shinto beliefs is made explicitly (Sonoda & Mogi 2006). In particular, reference is made to the *onbashira matsuri* held every six years at Suwa Taisha in Nagano prefecture, where high trees are chopped down, carried or pushed down the hills, and raised during a shrine ceremony.[159] Likewise, Ueda Masaaki has advocated the notion that the worship of trees and pillars is a central to Shinto in its 'original', Jōmon-period shape (2001b, 43-45; 2004b, 6-8). In addition to Suwa Taisha's *onbashira matsuri*, traces of this tree-/pillar worship are said to have remained at the shrines of Ise, which are built above wooden pillars buried in the ground; and, of course, in the 'sacred trees' (*shinboku*) found at shrines throughout the country. However, some have

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[159] For a critical discussion of Suwa Taisha, and the 'animistic' elements said to have contributed to its *onbashira* festival, see Rambelli 2007, 153-155

expressed scepticism concerning the supposedly ancient character of *shinboku* worship. Rambelli, for instance, has argued that

> I believe it is essentially a modern phenomenon involving either trees planted by modern emperors (Meiji and Hirohito) or a rediscovery of certain trees that might serve the purpose to represent an 'ancestral' Shinto animism centering on tree cults. Fragments (real or imagined) of the past are thus used as symbols of unbroken Japanese natural and cultural continuity to downplay or deny the extent of actual changes that occurred in the Japanese archipelago over the centuries (2007, 140).

According to Umehara, 'animism' in its original, 'pure' shape has disappeared, but some animistic elements have remained. These, he suggests, have influenced later Japanese beliefs and ritual practices, such as the association of deities with particular animals often found at shrines (e.g., the god Inari is commonly associated with foxes) (1989, 16). It is also considered to have influenced some Japanese Buddhist doctrines. For instance, Umehara attributes the Tendai doctrine that grasses and trees possess Buddhahood to the ancient Japanese animistic worldview (ibid., 19).[160] According to Umehara, this traditional 'animistic' view has great salvific potential, and it must be revitalised in order for humankind to overcome its many problems – especially those pertaining to the environment (cf. Umehara 2009).

8.3.3   *Primordiality and the (post)colonial problem*

As asserted by both Umehara and Yasuda, Japan is one of the few places in the world where traces of the original 'animistic' worldview have remained, incorporated into later Buddhist and Shinto beliefs. As Yasuda has argued, one of the main reasons for this was that, in contrast to other parts of Asia, Africa and the Americas – whose original 'animism' is said to have been destroyed by the 'civilisation of deforestation' – Japan escaped colonisation by Western powers. Yet, given that it has been transformed and incorporated into other traditions, the question remains as to how the 'original shape' of Japanese religion can be reconstructed. As Umehara writes,

> How can we clarify what Shinto, the source of Japan, was like? I think the best way is by studying the religions of the Ainu and Okinawa. That is, Buddhism spread through the central

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[160] We have already seen how Zen has been framed as a nature-loving religion. In addition, as the religious environmentalist paradigm spread through the academic world, 'ecological insights' were found in the works of Saichō, Kūkai, Shinran and Dōgen – all influential Buddhist thinkers, and founders of major schools of Japanese Buddhism (respectively Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo Shinshū and Sōtō Zen). For instance, several chapters of the volume on *Buddhism and Ecology* in the 'religions of the world and ecology' series discuss ecological elements in Japanese Buddhist texts (e.g., Parkes 1997). Others have criticised this type of interpretation, suggesting that medieval doctrines about the sacredness of natural features were closely related to land claims, and therefore inherently political, rather than based on beliefs in the intrinsic sacredness of nature. As Rambelli argued, 'the role that doctrines on plants becoming buddhas played in medieval Japanese culture (…) cannot be reduced to mere environmental concerns resulting from animistic tendencies' (2001, 90). On Buddhism and environmental advocacy in contemporary Japan, see also Williams 2012.

part of Japan. (…) But the northern and southern borderlands did not become Buddhist until much later, and have therefore retained their traditional religions (1989, 15).

Thus, Umehara's suggestion is that in Japan's periphery, ancient (even prehistorical) traditions have been preserved best – an argument that was popularised by Yanagita Kunio, and has continued to influence Japanese ethnology and religious studies until today. As Blacker writes, '[b]oth Yanagita and Orikuchi were convinced that much had survived in [the Ryukyu] islands which could shed light on the beliefs and practices which had long disappeared in [mainland] Japan' (1986, 113), and these ideas continue to have paradigmatic status. Accordingly, Umehara devotes much space in his work to discussions of Ainu and Ryukyu beliefs and practices (ibid., 16-18; 1995, 36-43).

The association of Ainu and Ryukyu worship practices with 'ancient Shinto' is remarkably common, not only in contemporary Shinto discourse but also in Japanese academia. Many Japanese scholars consider worship practices and beliefs from Okinawa prefecture, as well as Ainu traditions, to be the remnants of a primordial nature religion that has not been preserved in mainland Japan, but only in the periphery (e.g., Okamoto 1996). Ueda Masaaki, for instance, has argued that *utaki* – Okinawan sacred groves – are similar in shape and purpose to Japan's primordial *chinju no mori* and, hence, represent the original shape of Shinto shrines (2004b, 13). Likewise, Miyake Hitoshi has identified *utaki* with Shinto shrines, saying that '*utaki* are the shrines of Okinawa, but they do not have a shrine building; the grove itself is the body of the deity' (ibid., 117).

Accordingly, *utaki* and *chinju no mori* are often grouped together under the common denominator *shasō*: another word denoting 'sacred forest' that has been popularised by the *chinju no mori* movement (hence the name of the organisation, Shasō Gakkai), and aims to include not only shrine forests but other forests as well (e.g., Suganuma 2004, 87-89; A. Ueda 2001, 8, 26; 2004a, 185; M. Ueda 2004b, 12-14; see chapter ten). However, the suggestion made by Umehara, Ueda and Miyake that Okinawa's *utaki* have remained unchanged since ancient times, and constitute the original shape of Japan's sacred shrine forests, is historically problematic. In fact, *utaki* were not conceptualised as Shinto until they were annexed by the imperial regime, and redefined as shrines in the national Shinto cult, in a process referred to as *utaki saihen* (reorganisation of the *utaki*) in 1940 (Prochaska 2011, 76-78).[161]

Likewise, the association of Ainu beliefs and practices with ancient proto-Shinto Japanese traditions, as suggested by Umehara, is questionable – as is his statement that 'Okinawan culture and Ainu culture are very similar' (1995, 37). The best-known worship practice historically conducted by Ainu is the *iomante* ceremony, a famous annual ceremony that includes the ritual sacrifice of a bear.

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[161] Prochaska writes that not all *utaki* were turned into shrines: from the more than 900 registered *utaki*, 60 were turned into village shrines, and 150 into smaller shrines. *Torii* gates were placed in front of them, Amaterasu was enshrined as the main deity (alongside the local deities), and new priests were ordained. Thus, the Okinawa *utaki*-turned-shrines were incorporated into the ideological state apparatus. In addition, some new shrines were constructed (or planned) – most notably, a shrine was built in the Shuri castle, the former centre of royal power. Meanwhile, however, *yuta* (mediums, 'shamans') were severely persecuted (2011, 76-78).

Indeed, much of Umehara's discussion concerns this particular ceremony, as well as some apparent similarities between certain Ainu and Japanese words. It remains unclear, however, why the *iomante* tradition should be seen as a remnant of 'ancient Japanese' worship traditions. Similarly, Miyake's inclusion of this ceremony into his list of Japanese mountain worship traditions (2009, 120) is questionable, as it implies that this is just another example of the local diversity existing within the generic category 'Shinto culture', rather than an altogether different cultural practice performed by a non-Japanese people. Significantly, most of Hokkaido, the area where the Ainu people live(d), was not occupied and colonised by Japan until the early modern period. Although Ainu and Japanese have engaged in trade for centuries (trading fur for lacquerware, for instance), there is little reason to assume that Ainu traditions are similar to ancient traditions developed in Kyushu and southern or central Honshu.

The tendency to perceive aspects of Ryukyu and Ainu traditions as remnants of ancient Shinto practices is not only problematic because it denies the many differences between these traditions and those of mainland Japan (as well as, significantly, the historical diversity among various Ainu and Ryukyuan communities [on the latter, see Røkkum 2006]), but also because of the ideological implications. Perhaps more than anything else does this approach illustrate the social-evolutionist assumptions underlying contemporary discourse on (the origins of) 'Japanese (popular) religion', and show that many Japanese scholars still have not overcome colonial models of cultural classification. As mentioned, according to nineteenth-century social-evolutionist worldviews, 'Western civilisation' had once passed through primitive stages of development (associated with 'animism' and 'totemism'), but made significant progress since. However, these 'primitive' stages of development were then associated with the various 'underdeveloped' cultures 'discovered' (and reified as 'tribes') by European scholars, who were thus denied any pre-colonial history of their own (cf. Wolf 2010). Significantly, they also became colonial subjects of the empires of which these social-evolutionist scholars were citizens, such as the UK and France. It has been argued, therefore, that the theories that constructed these 'tribes' as 'primitive' and 'undeveloped' served to legitimise colonial exploitation (e.g., Lewis 1973; cf. Thomas 1996).

Likewise, the Ainu and the Ryukyu people were subject to Japanese colonial oppression and exploitation, as well as attempts at cultural annihilation and/or appropriation by the state (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 9-34). Arguably, in some ways at least, they continue to be Japan's colonial subjects, framed as they are as Japan's very own primitive Others. Attitudes vis-à-vis cultural diversity within Japan may have changed in recent years, and Ainu cultural traditions have seen a bit of a revival (see Hudson, lewallen and Watson 2013). Nevertheless, generally speaking, the cultural practices of these minorities continue to be dehistoricised and conceptualised as remnants of Japan's ancient (Shinto) tradition. In fact, it may even be argued that the recent cultural revival contributes to the reclassification of originally non-Japanese practices as 'ancient Japanese' traditions – different from mainland culture, yet included within the parameters of a depoliticised cultural 'regional diversity'

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(expressed in food culture, traditional performing arts and local *matsuri*) that paradoxically serves to strengthen the single-nation narrative. The association with Shinto is all the more ironic, of course, considering Shinto's historical involvement (if only as ideological justification) with Japanese imperialism – after all, the annexation of the Ryukyu islands, and the near-complete annihilation of Ainu culture, were very much part of the imperial project.

8.4   Mount Miwa and Ōmiwa Jinja

Neither Yasuda nor Umehara is affiliated with a Shinto institution. Rather than writing about Shinto *per se*, they want to find the underlying 'religiosity' that they consider foundational for both Shinto and Japanese Buddhism, which they describe as 'animism'. The same, incidentally, applies to scholars of religion Yamaori Tetsuo and Nakazawa Yūichi, who have also turned to forests as prime loci of 'Japanese religion', and who have developed theories of Japaneseness based on what they consider the innate Japanese capacity to respond to the intrinsic sacredness of particular places (Nakazawa 2006; Yamaori 2001).

Although developed in a not-religiously affiliated Japanese academic context, the ideas of Umehara *cum suis* have also exercised considerable influence upon contemporary Shinto thought. The idealisation of Jōmon-period forest culture characteristic of the work of Umehara and Yasuda is particularly evident in the ideas of Ueda Atsushi and Ueda Masaaki, two of the leading scholars behind the establishment of Shasō Gakkai. The former, for instance, has argued that Jōmon people perceived of the forest as a divine mother, and worshipped the forest's 'mysterious power', which laid the foundation for later developments: 'This kind of forest-centred faith, and the belief in a return to the forest [after death], was not only strong among the "people of the forest" [i.e., Jōmon-period people], but has also remained strongly in the consciousness and behaviour of later Japanese people' (2004b, 135). Likewise, Ueda Masaaki conceives of *chinju no mori* as remnants of Jōmon-period worship places, and traces several elements of *kami* worship – the worship of sacred mountains (*shintaizan*), for instance, and the demarcation of certain areas as 'taboo' and 'forbidden forest' – to this period. He writes that

> Behind the shrine forest (*chinju no mori*), with which people are familiar, lies a sacred forbidden area (*kinsokuchi*) called 'the forest you do not enter' (*irazu no mori*). Originally, there were quite many of these, but as shrine forests have gradually given way to development, today there are not many old shrines where the *irazu no mori* has been preserved. However, among those forests where people are not allowed to enter without permission, there are still many remaining areas of primeval forest. Since the ancient Jōmon period, there has been a belief in sacred trees, and there certainly was a taboo on entering the sacred area, based on the belief that violating this taboo might lead to divine punishment (*tatari*), misfortune and so on. The tradition that says you are not allowed to enter the sacred mountain without permission

has clearly remained in the *kinsokuchi* of Ōmiwa Jinja in the city of Sakurai and Isonokami Jingū in the city of Tenri [both in Nara prefecture] (M. Ueda 2004a, 37).

It is no coincidence that Ueda mentions Ōmiwa Jinja (see figure one) in the context of a discussion of ancient nature worship practices. In works on Shinto and nature by him and others, repeated reference is made to this shrine, as well as to the 'sacred' mountain behind it, Mount Miwa. Thus, the shrine and its mountain constitute a recurring theme in Shinto environmentalist discourse. That is, the worship practices carried out at, and beliefs associated with, Mount Miwa and Ōmiwa Jinja are often defined as remnants of ancient nature worship. This is supposedly evidenced by the absence of a *honden* (central hall). In most shrines, the *honden* is considered the most sacred place; it is usually out of bounds to visitors, and houses the sacred object (e.g., a mirror) that is seen as the *shintai* (material symbol or body of the deity). In the case of Mount Miwa, however, the mountain itself is seen as the *shintai*; hence, it is also called *shintaizan* (*shintai* mountain). Accordingly, it is suggested, the mountain as a whole is worshipped as a deity. Miyake Hitoshi's summary of the main argument is clear: 'at Mount Miwa, behind the worship hall of the shrine is the Miwa *torii*; behind there is the sacred forbidden area (*kinsokuchi*). (…) Mount Miwa as a whole is seen as the place where the deity resides. (…) The mountain as such has become the object of worship' (2009, 121).

Figure 1: Ōmiwa Jinja

Redefined as the quintessential example of ancient Shinto nature worship, Mount Miwa has become one of the Shinto environmental paradigm's central symbols, and is often presented as a potential cultural and philosophical resource for the establishment of new environmental ethics. For instance, at a symposium held at the shrine in 2001 (Ōmiwa Jinja 2002, 1-65), Nomura Shigeo, one of the contributors, argued that

> Especially in recent years, environmental problems receive much attention, and the twenty-first century is called the age of the environment. Since ancient times, no *honden* has been constructed at the shrine, so the worship of the god Ōmononushi-no-ōkami residing on Mount Miwa has continued in its original shape uninterruptedly until the twenty-first century. And so in each and every tree and blade of grass the deity is believed to be present, and trees are treated with great care. I think that when it comes to the environmental problems that have become so prominent these days, only Shinto can instil reasonableness into people's minds (Ōmiwa Jinja 2002, 52; my translation).

Thus, Mount Miwa has come to be closely associated with notions of primordial nature worship in 'ancient Shinto', and has become a core symbol for the Shinto environmentalist movement. However, while the association is understandable, it does rest on some questionable assumptions. Even though the shrine is one of the oldest in the country, the interpretation of Mount Miwa as the place where ancient Shinto is preserved best is historically problematic. Rather than representing some sort of 'pure Shinto' going back to ancient times, worship practices on Mount Miwa have developed, and been transformed, in the context of medieval Buddhist and *shinbutsu shūgō* practices (at this shrine referred to as *ryōbu shintō*). In fact, it constituted one of the main centres for the development of 'Buddhist Shinto'; i.e., *kami* worship in a Buddhist institutional and theological context (Andreeva 2010). The separation of 'Buddhism' and 'Shinto' in the modern period was artificial, unprecedented, and the result of government coercion; it led to the dismantling of Buddhist buildings, and the reconstruction of the shrine as an important Shinto centre (see Antoni 1995). Thus, Nomura's claim that worship practices at Mount Miwa have continued 'uninterruptedly' in their 'original shape' since ancient times until today must be discarded, if only because of the significant transformations they have gone through in the course of history.

Furthermore, the often-made claims that the belief in Mount Miwa as a *shintaizan* – i.e., a mountain believed to be the deity's physical body – is a remnant of Jōmon-period mountain worship, and that the mountain has been set apart as a sacred forbidden area since ancient times, do not seem historically accurate. As historical research has shown, 'the earliest document of the shrine that calls Mount Miwa as a whole a *shintaizan* dates only from 1871. (…) From another document (…) we learn that "mountain" here means, in the technical sense, only a limited piece of reserved land' (Domenig 1997, 100; cf. Yamada 1993). Rather than setting part of the mountain apart as sacred and taboo out of reverence for nature, as many contemporary Shinto scholars claim, the reasons for doing so may have been more prosaic:

The reason was, in short, that the sacred mountain land of the shrine had come to be repeatedly misused by gatherers of firewood, stones, or mushrooms, and by people cutting trees or even making fields for agriculture [ironically, the very practices considered ecologically beneficial by today's *satoyama* conservationists – APR]. The sources quoted for this [in Yamada 1993, 60-73] indeed leave no doubt that it was this continued exploitation for economic reasons that eventually called for a new way of protecting the shrine's forest and its purity as a sacred ground. After the traditional means of declaring the shrine forest a forbidden zone had failed to improve the situation, was finally a more effective solution found by calling the whole mountain a *shintaizan*. This stratagem worked. The new term, which according to Yamada was forged at the Oomiwa Shrine and later diffused, is now widely used also with other shrines that have no main hall but a mountain of conspicuous form in the back (Domenig 1997, 101).

As the above quotation implies, the redefinition of Mount Miwa as a 'sacred' mountain, entrance to which was restricted, was not based on some sort of ancient 'animistic' reverence, at least not primarily. Rather, it was the result of considerations of a more economic nature: the shrine authorities wanted to restrict access to the mountain's natural resources. The very fact that the ban had to be reinforced by means of a theological invention shows that, to the foraging peasants at least, the 'sacred' character of the mountain was not a self-evident given; or, if it was, at least that did not prevent them from getting wood and other forest resources. Similar examples of forest and mountains that were sacralised and declared taboo – complete with promises of divine retributions that would cause misfortune among those violating the taboo – in order to prevent peasants from appropriating shrine and temple lands can be found elsewhere in Japan as well (e.g., Rambelli 2001, 75-80).

This brings me back to my one of my central theoretical concerns: processes by which sacred space is produced. The sacralisation of a place – in this case, the redefinition of a mountain as the physical body of a deity, which comes to be seen as the object of veneration and taboo – is not necessarily rooted in the experience of the 'numinous' character of a given place, as phenomenologists of religion would have us believe. Sacralisation processes are intimately intertwined with political and economical realities, and may be employed as a strategy to lay claim to particular land areas, while excluding other actors from the land (or even displacing them). Of course, the fact that a certain place has a particular economic value and political significance does not mean it is not experienced as 'divine' and 'sacred', and subject to devotion. Quite the contrary, I would suggest: attributions of sacredness add to the symbolic and ideological value of a place, and therefore to its political and economic importance, just as much as political and economic factors may serve as incentives for sacralisation. My point is simply that land sacralisation processes are both inherently political and economically embedded – irrespective of the 'truth' of the numinous qualities attributed to a given place. That does not mean those qualities are non-existent. It does mean, however, that the 'religious' value of a place cannot be solely explained by referring to its intrinsic sacredness, as Eliade and his followers used to do.

The fact that sacralisation processes are politically embedded does not make them inherently negative, nor positive. Those 'other actors' excluded as a result of sacralisation may be anyone ranging from local peasants forbidden to gather firewood in the forest near a Japanese village to Palestinian peasants displaced from their ancestral land, legitimised by Israeli attempts at resacralising the land through archaeological claims; but they may also be real estate agents frustrated in their attempts to turn forests into highways, apartment blocks or tourist resorts. In De Certeau's terminology, sacralisation may be employed as a strategy by powerful actors, but it may also be a subversive tactic employed by the relatively powerless, for example to prevent a mountain from being demolished – as with the Konpira shrine near Mount Takao, discussed in the previous chapter, where the tactic apparently worked.

Thus, sacralisation processes can serve any number of purposes, and are neither intrinsically positive nor negative. They are, however, intrinsically political and economical, for they concern the use of land and natural resources. As such, they are inevitably contingent upon power relations. Therefore, if a place is set apart as 'sacred', the questions scholars should ask are: who decides, for what purpose, and who is affected? This politics of sacralisation is not usually recognised by scholars of religion reifying the 'sacredness' of particular places as essential, transhistorical qualities, rather than as the outcome of politically embedded practices of categorisation and definition. Nevertheless, recognising the various political strategies (or, possibly, tactics) and economic interests involved in individual sacralisation processes is of crucial importance in order to achieve a better understanding of sacred places not only as 'spiritual' resources, but also as social and material products, subject to historical contingencies. Of course, it ultimately comes down to the question whether we think scholars should actively contribute to sacralisation, or analyse the processes by which other actors engage in sacralisation processes. The former approach is perhaps more compatible with phenomenological and theological accounts of 'sacred places', while the latter requires a more critical, constructivist perspective.

8.5   Jōmon and Yayoi

As we have seen, in the reconstructions of primordial Japanese religion made by Umehara Takeshi, Yasuda Yoshinori and, to a certain extent, Ueda Masaaki and Ueda Atsushi, the Jōmon period plays a central part. In their writings, archaeological and physical-anthropological theories are combined with popular etymologies, national primordialism, East-West binary thinking and an idealisation of a prehistorical equilibrium between humans and nature that is perhaps best described as ecological romanticism. The Jōmon period, for these authors, constitutes the foundational golden age of Japanese civilisation, elements of which have remained until today. Accordingly, the 'animistic' worship of trees, rocks and mountains is seen as the essence of Shinto and, by extension, of 'Japanese religion' as a whole.

Others, however, have criticised this idealisation of the Jōmon period, and disputed the view that the 'animistic' worship of natural elements constitutes the origin of Shinto. Rather than the Jōmon period, they consider the subsequent Yayoi period (300 BCE-250 CE) to have been foundational. During the Jōmon period, the islands that would later be called Japan were inhabited by hunter-gatherers, living nomadic lifestyles. Agriculture, including wet rice cultivation, is said to have been introduced by migrants from continental Asia during the Yayoi period. Ueda Atsushi describes this change as follows:

> Thousands of years ago, the mountains and valleys of the Japanese archipelago were covered with deep forests. The people living there caught small animals and fish, and collected nuts, fruit and shellfish. These were our ancestors, the Jōmon people. However, from the late Jōmon period onward and during the Yayoi period, rice cultivation spread through our country, and the appearance of the Japanese archipelago changed completely. The forests in the lowland areas were cut down one by one, or burned, and made way to fields and rice paddies. (…) Thus, we can call the Jōmon people 'the people of the forest', while the Yayoi people were 'the people of rice' (2001, 10; my translation).

Those who trace Shinto back to the Yayoi period typically point to the tradition's intimate connection with rice cultivation – which, significantly, is seen as an essential characteristic of the Japanese civilisation, and constitutes an important marker of national identity – and with the imperial institution. Not only local *matsuri*, but also imperial rituals are said to have been originally connected with rice cultivation, and are full of agricultural symbolism (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 44-62). Indeed, until today, there is a small rice paddy inside the walls of the imperial palace, where the emperor is said to grow his own rice.[162] The fact that one of the museums associated with Ise Jingū is devoted to the practice of rice cultivation is also illustrative of the association between rice, Shinto, the imperial institution and the Japanese nation state. Rice serves as a central symbol in shrine practices throughout the country, ranging from the ritual offer of various rice products to deities, to shrine priests engaging in ritualised rice-planting activities, to shrines setting up educational programs whereby children engage in the planting and/or harvesting of rice (seen as a means to cultivate them as good citizens). Interestingly, today, these programs are often organised by the same shrine-related non-profit organisations that have also set up tree-planting and other environment-oriented activities (Meiji Jingū's NPO Hibiki is one such example).

In sum, Shinto, rice and the imperial institution are associated through various ritual and discursive practices. Not surprisingly, then, this focus on rice is particularly pronounced among

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[162] However, as Breen and Teeuwen write with regard to the imperial accession ceremony *daijōsai*, references to rice in modern (State) Shinto are largely the outcome of late-Edo- and Meiji-period invented traditions, instead of being the remnants of ancient harvest rituals. Contrary to most modern interpretations of the ritual, they write that the *daijōsai* 'was not a rice harvest ritual' (2010, 187). The ideological associations between rice, 'Shinto' ritual and the modern imperial state, they argue, 'emerged for the first time in the writings of nativist [*kokugaku*] scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (ibid., 194-195). Likewise, the rice paddy in the imperial palace is said to be a Meiji-period invention (Mark Teeuwen, personal communication).

representatives of what I have referred to as the imperial and ethnic paradigms. Significantly, the production and consumption of rice is not only seen as a defining aspect of Japanese national identity; it is also closely associated with moral values. For instance, during an interview with a Jinja Honchō official (February 2011), I was told that the various problems characterising contemporary Japanese society – 'individualisation', an increasing crime rate, a lack of environmental awareness and so on – were related to the ongoing decrease in the consumption of (domestic) rice. Japanese people, I was told, eat too much bread and pasta. If they return to their 'traditional' food habits, other problems will also be solved, or so the argument went.

Considering the above discussion, it should come as no surprise that those stressing the fundamental intertwinement between Shinto, rice and the emperor tend to see the Yayoi period, rather than the Jōmon period, as the foundational period of Japanese culture and religion. Accordingly, the association with either the Jōmon or the Yayoi period seems to play a significant part in academic and religious-institutional identity politics. Some scholars accuse others of placing too much emphasis on one period, at the expense of the other. For instance, when I interviewed Sonoda Minoru (November 2011), I asked him whether he and Ueda Masaaki had similar opinions regarding Shinto and the environment. Sonoda replied by saying that, while he and Ueda agree on many points and have cooperated successfully when it comes to drawing attention to the issue of *chinju no mori* conservation, he did not completely agree with Ueda's emphasis on the Jōmon period as Shinto's foundational period. When I asked him whether he considered the Yayoi period more important, he denied, saying that both are equally important, and we must find a balance in order to really understand Shinto. However, when I asked Ueda (December 2011) whether it is true that he considers the Jōmon period more important than the Yayoi period, he replied by saying that this is not the case; he is neither in the Jōmon nor in the Yayoi 'camp', but considers himself to be one of the few scholars who take both into equal consideration. He did, however, suggest that Umehara Takeshi, despite his many good ideas, has made the mistake of overlooking the importance of the Yayoi period.

In fact, both Sonoda Minoru and Ueda Masaaki have tried to establish some sort of synthesis. Both have suggested that, while some of Shinto's basic elements emerged in the Jōmon period, it was not fully established as a religious system until the Yayoi period, when agriculture-related beliefs and practices complemented existing traditions of nature worship. In this dialectic scheme, Shinto is seen as the outcome of the integration of the animism of the forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers with the agricultural fertility cults of the migrant rice-growers living in the valleys. Likewise, in an introductory chapter to the topic of 'sacred forests' (*shasō*), Ueda Atsushi has argued that Shinto has developed out of the interaction between Jōmon-period and Yayoi-period culture. Shinto's sacred forests, he suggests, are remnants of Jōmon-period beliefs, but they have transformed significantly in the Yayoi period. It is not always easy, however, to determine which elements go back to the Jōmon period, and which to the Yayoi period. Further research on this topic is required, Ueda writes. This, he suggests, is one of the tasks of scholars studying sacred forests:

If we say that a sacred forest (*shasō*) is 'the forest where the god of the land resides', it must be rather close to the culture of the Jōmon people. After all, the forest was the foundation of the Jōmon people's culture. For the culture of the Yayoi people, however, because of their livelihood, the elements of nature that were fundamental were not 'forests', but rather 'rivers', 'springs', and 'rice'. (…) At the foot of the mountains (*yamaguchi*), in between the highlands where the Jōmon people lived and the lowlands where the Yayoi people lived, shrines (*yashiro*) were built. This is one of the explanations for the establishment of Shinto shrines (*jinja*).[163] (…) Let us say that it is very likely that in sacred forest-related beliefs Jōmon culture has remained. However, it is difficult to investigate what exactly goes back to Jōmon culture, and what were later cultural developments. But it is the task of 'sacred forest studies' (*shasōgaku*) to do research on this (2001, 11-12; my translation).

8.6   Shinto and *fūdo*: Sonoda Minoru

8.6.1   **Fūdo** *and religion*

As the above quotation illustrates, much of the literature on Shinto and nature is concerned with the question of origins. Accordingly, many texts addressing the topic of sacred shrine forests (either called *chinju no mori* or *shasō*) engage extensively with ancient Japanese history. Both Ueda Masaaki and Sonoda Minoru have done research on the topic, and both legitimise their claims concerning the intimate intertwinement of Shinto (and/or *kami* worship), Japanese culture, and the physical environment of the Japanese archipelago by referring to ancient texts and archaeological findings. Sonoda in particular has displayed a strong Watsujiesque environmental determinism. According to him, Shinto, the 'ethnic religion' (*minzoku shūkyō*) of the Japanese nation as a whole, has grown out of the particular *fūdo* (*milieu,* in Berque's translation) of the land. In one of his few articles translated into English, which contains a representative and concise summary of his Japanese works on this topic, he wrote that

> In an agricultural civilisation, the natural environment ceases to be purely 'natural'. Transformed by influences from human society, the environment becomes a 'cultured nature', infused with the spiritual culture of its inhabitants. It is to avoid this self-contradictory term that I will here adopt the concept of *fūdo* as developed by Watsuji Tetsurō, as a tool to point up the inherent relation between environment and religion. According to Watsuji, the given natural environment or 'climatic *fūdo*' becomes at some stage of its transformation by humans internalised as an 'historic *fūdo*', determined by the culture of the inhabitants who build their society in that environment. *Fūdo*, then, denotes not only the external, natural climatic and geographic features of a region, but also refers to an internalised nature, infused with a cosmological and spiritual *Lebenswelt* construed by the people living in the region. (…) Thus

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[163] While the meanings of *yashiro* and *jinja* have come to overlap, in ancient texts they apparently referred to different types of worship places. As Breen and Teeuwen explain, a '*yashiro* (a word that means "temporary shelter") was not a permanent "shrine" inhabited by kami; rather, it was a demarcated site where seasonal ceremonies took place' (2010, 25-26). By contrast, *jinja* refers to a permanent shrine, consisting of one (or several) building(s).

by cultivating nature and transforming it into a lived-in *fūdo*, societies at the same time construe a religious cosmos in which they can feel spiritually at ease (2000, 33).

Somewhat confusingly, then, in Sonoda's reading of Watsuji, the meaning of the term *fūdo* is twofold. First, it refers to that which is considered 'natural' and *a priori*, such as physical landscape, vegetation and climate, by which human culture and society are shaped and conditioned (here referred to as 'climatic *fūdo*'). Second, it refers to 'nature' as it is 'internalised' by a particular community or nation; i.e., the outcome of the appropriation and cultivation of the physical landscape, and of 'build[ing] a symbolical world inspired by that landscape' (ibid., 33).[164] One is reminded of Lefebvre's ideal-typical distinction between 'natural space' as it supposedly existed before the advent of capitalist production processes, and later 'cultivated space', which is seen as the outcome of (politically and economically imbedded) production processes. In particular, Lefebvre's insight that the latter is not limited to physical landscape construction but also encompasses mental constructions and symbolic representations (and, hence, cosmological and mythological accounts) is relevant: the same applies to the notion of *fūdo* in its second meaning (i.e., the 'historic *fūdo*'), which likewise rests on a holistic perception of space as simultaneously physical, mental and social.

The crucial difference, however, is that Lefebvre focused on the power dynamics inherent in the production of space, and the inherently oppressive and dehumanising character of modern spatial practices, employed as they are as political strategies by powerful classes. Sonoda, by contrast, adheres to an organicist view that sees the production of the Japanese 'historic *fūdo*' as a spontaneous bottom-up process, and the '*fūdo* cults' that emerged in and around local prehistoric communities as foundational for Japanese history and civilisation. He does not, however, discuss the various political factors involved in the production of these 'religious *fūdo*'. Nor, for that matter, does he address the problem of agency: *who* cultivated and internalised nature, and for what purpose? To what extent were cultural practices preconditioned and/or determined by geographical circumstances? If they were completely predetermined, can we still speak of human agency? Significantly, as Lefebvre has shown, productions of space – physical as well as mental – are neither politically neutral nor historically necessary. In Sonoda's account of the intimate connection between ancient Japanese culture and the natural environment, however, there seems to be little place for power relations, nor for historical contingencies.

As discussed previously, in classical social-evolutionist theories, 'primitive' or 'uncivilised' tribes were often identified with prehistorical 'Western' cultures – thus, colonial subjects were denied their own pre-colonial history. In the religious-environmentalist reappropriation of this scheme, such traditions are idealised as ancient ecological knowledge. Sonoda's work reflects this pattern: he explicitly associates the original Japanese nature religion with 'primitive' religions today, and asserts their contemporary environmental relevance. For instance, in his work, he repeatedly refers to an

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[164] Used thus, the term *fūdo* may be said to transcend the traditional nature-culture dichotomy (see introduction and chapter four), and refer to something akin to Haraway's notion of 'natureculture' (e.g., Haraway 2008).

article by the Welsh environmentalist C. W. Nicol on sacred forests (1991), which describes a numinous experience in a forest in Congo (Sonoda 1998, 29-30; 2000, 32).[165] As Sonoda writes, the lives of the Mbuti, the 'pygmy' forest-dwellers whose forest worship is discussed in Nicol's article, 'are completely attuned to the ecosystem of the forest. Their primitive religion of nature worship, too, can be described as an "ecological religion", in which the ecology of the forest is identical to their religious world' (2000, 32).

According to this interpretation, the natural environment and 'religious' cosmology of the Mbuti are intimately intertwined, constituting a single natural-cultural system. This, Sonoda suggests, is typical of primordial nature religion; and, accordingly, of ancient Shinto. But Shinto is unique, he argues, as it is the only religious tradition in the world that has preserved this ancient 'ecological' core essence, yet managed to adapt to changing circumstances and survive in a modern, technologically advanced society. Even today, Shinto is said to have 'strong characteristics of prehistoric religion' (1997, 45). Hence, he writes that

> The original folk religion of Japan, referred to by the generic term 'Shinto', is based on the religious culture of the prehistoric people, who lived their life in direct relation with the natural environment. This religious culture has been preserved uninterrupted throughout history, and constitutes the innate characteristic of Shinto. Put differently, Shinto is a unique religion, as it is *the only ancient religion in the world that has survived until today*; originally, it was a 'forest religion' or '*matsuri* religion' typical of ancient times. It is certainly true that classical Shinto took shape as a self-conscious organisation during the period that the Yamato royal power was established (…) [i.e., the sixth and seventh century CE]. However, the customs of folk Shinto that constituted the foundation for the entire country have existed in shrines and *matsuri* all over the country from the ancient period until today (1998, 41; my translation, my emphasis).

Thus, according to Sonoda, Shinto in its original shape far predates its institutionalisation and incorporation into the political system; its essence lies not in the (imperial) rituals and mythology that were constructed during the classical period, but in local worship traditions that are said to be much older, and emerged as spontaneous reactions to the natural environment. As such, he asserts, it is diametrically opposed to world religions such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, which have historical founders and are supposedly focused on individual salvation. Shinto, by contrast, is 'more than anything else, a religion that supports the community (*kyōdōtai*); the family and household, the local society and nation state' (1997, 47). According to Sonoda, it is exactly because Shinto has developed in close interaction with the physical environment (or *fūdo*) of the Japanese archipelago that it could become such a 'community religion', unlike those three 'world religions' (1998, 37, 167-170).

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[165] In Sonoda 2000, the name of the author is misspelled as 'Nicholl'. Clive William Nicol (born 1940) is a long-term resident of Japan, who now has Japanese citizenship. He regularly publishes on a variety of environmental and cultural topics, in Japanese as well as English, and has set up a reforestation project in Nagano prefecture.

8.6.2   Japan's original 'religioscape'

In a lecture given at the 2009 ISF symposium on Shinto and the environment (Sonoda 2010), Sonoda elaborated further upon his use of the term *fūdo* in connection to worship practices. Here, he used the term *shūkyō fūdo*. This term is difficult to translate, but we may opt for 'religioscape' as it is not unlike Anthony D. Smith's notion of 'ethnoscape', which also refers to an intimate symbolic connection between a particular (imagined) community and the physical landscape with which it identifies itself. As Smith has argued, nations (or their predecessors, *ethnies*) often identity themselves with a particular physical landscape, which is imbued with symbols, meanings and memories, and is central to the collective imagination (1999, 149-162). Although he does not refer to it, Sonoda's approach seems to be in accordance with this theory; hence my suggestion to translate *shūkyō fūdo* as 'religioscape'. There is one subtle difference, however. Sonoda's term does not refer to 'religious' notions that are projected onto a physical landscape, which subsequently carries symbolic meaning – a phenomenon that has been quite prominent in Japan, especially in the medieval period, when physical landscapes came to be seen as mandalas (e.g., Moerman 2005) – but, on the contrary, to beliefs and practices arising more or less naturally from the physical landscape. In other words, in his narrative, the landscape precedes and gives rise to 'religion'. Ultimately, as I have suggested above, this comes down to environmental determinism.

What, then, is the environment in which Shinto has developed? According to Sonoda, Japan is traditionally characterised by two types of religioscapes, each with their own physical characteristics and corresponding religious practices: the convex-shaped and the concave-shaped (or, using two of the most visually apt Chinese characters, whose shape equals their meaning: the 凸-shaped and the 凹-shaped). The former refers to conical mountains, such as Mount Fuji, Mount Iwaki and Mount Kōya, and corresponding traditions such as *shugendō*, shamanism and esoteric Buddhism. The latter, by contrast, refers to valleys and basins surrounded by mountains, such as the Yamato basin (*Yamato bonchi*, the area in Nara prefecture that is generally seen as the cradle of Japanese civilisation), where deities associated with forests and water were worshipped in so-called 'ancient Shinto' practices (2010, 10-19). Together, these two religioscapes, in their various local expressions, are said to constitute Japan's 'original' religious system.

In local communities, Sonoda argues, there were three different shrines, complementary and corresponding to the conditions of the landscape: the *yamamiya* (mountain shrine), the *satomiya* (village shrine) and the *tamiya* (rice paddy shrine) (1998, 44; cf. A. Ueda 2001, 28-29). This triadic structure was reflected in the cosmological system of the early Yamato state and conditioned by the geography of the Yamato basin in Nara. Here, three types of deities were worshipped at official shrines, corresponding to three landscape elements. There were four *mikumari no kami*, associated

with water sources and, hence, with the mountains; thirteen (or fourteen)[166] *yamaguchi no kami*, presiding over rivers at the foot of the mountains; and six *miagata no kami*, associated with the six provinces of the Yamato state, who were associated with agriculture. Each of these deities was linked to one particular shrine in the territory of the state (1998, 144-145; 2000, 36-38). As shrines and landscapes are believed to have constituted one single system (or religioscape), it is argued that people at the time were strongly aware of the interdependence of forests, mountains and rivers. Associated with (rice) cultivation and fertility, early 'Shinto' worship practices are thus said to have been strongly concerned with the water cycle (ibid., 209; Sonoda & Mogi 2006; cf. Motozawa 2010; Okamura 2009). Forests, it is argued, were of crucial importance because they were seen as places were rivers originated; hence, sacred qualities were attributed to them.

8.6.3   The case of Chichibu

As this chapter has illustrated, in recent 'emic' discourse on Shinto and the environment, the essence of Shinto – and, by extension, of 'Japanese religion' as a whole – is seen to lie in an intimate connection with the natural environment, in reaction to which it developed. The worship of and/or in forests is considered to be a core aspect of this tradition. The question remains, however, how these narrative reconstructions of 'ancient Shinto' relate to contemporary practices. Why, in a dissertation concerned with recent developments, did I devote the best part of this chapter to the prehistorical period, even though I am by no means an expert on ancient Japanese history? The main reason for this is that the ancient period features prominently in contemporary discourse on Shinto, nature and *chinju no mori*. Indeed, imaginations of this period function as 'myths' in the sense that they not only depoliticise, but also mobilise people – for example, to protect particular areas of (sacred) forest land. Hence, if we want to understand contemporary issues and practices, it is of great importance that we also study the historical narratives that are employed to legitimise (or challenge) them. As we shall see in the next chapter, the myths of the primordial ecological equilibrium, and of Japan as a unique 'forest civilisation', have played a significant part in shrine forest conservation, community activism, and (local) identity politics.

However, the theory is not always easily applicable. Shrine priests may express an interest in ecology and nature conservation, and subscribe to the notion that Shinto is an ancient tradition of nature worship, that does not mean they will act as environmental advocates. First and foremost, their responsibility is to maintain good relationships between the shrine, members of the local community (*ujiko*) (who are, after all, the shrine's main patrons), and its deities (by correctly performing rituals). If powerful community members are in favour of selling forest land to, say, project developers (because of economic incentives, for instance), few shrine priests would oppose – even if that leads to

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[166] In one text, Sonoda wrote that there were thirteen *yamaguchi* deities (1998, 145); later, he counted fourteen (2000, 36).

the demolition of ecologically valuable forest. This tension between environmental advocacy and economic incentives is well illustrated by the sad fate of the 'sacred' mountain of Chichibu (Saitama prefecture), the city where Sonoda Minoru works as a head priest.

Chichibu is a small city that is famous for his shrine, Chichibu Jinja, which has elaborate and colourful Edo-period wood carvings, and a large annual *matsuri* that attracts many visitors. In addition to the shrine, there is a number of well-known Buddhist temples, connected by a pilgrimage trail. Chichibu is located in a small river basin, located next to a mountain, Mount Bukō. This is said to be a 'sacred' mountain, historically associated with the shrine, and seen as the dwelling place of its main deity. It also has significant quantities of limestone, however, which is mined and used for the local cement industry. It is quite ironic that one of the main representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is head priest of a shrine whose sacred mountain is exploited for economic purposes, to the point that its natural environment has been partly destroyed (see figure two). Indeed, Sonoda has repeatedly expresses a concern for the nature of the mountain, and has been active in setting up an organisation with the purpose of reforesting the mountain. Yet, his opinion about the mining activities is characterised by ambiguity. As one interviewer has remarked, '[w]hat [Sonoda] seemed most concerned about when I interviewed him regarding the Bukōzan Mountain, was that the outer appearance and the damage done to the mountain did not look good. It was not so important if the cement company was there as long as the appearance of the mountain was not one of destruction' (Sandvik 2011, 74).

I am not convinced Sonoda's apparent concern for reforestation is indeed limited to the question of the mountain's appearance – in his theory, the symbolic value of forests transcends mere aesthetics, as they are considered to have profound intrinsic cultural, ethical and ecological significance. Indeed, when I last spoke to him, he did mention his regret concerning the destruction of the mountain, saying he wished it had never been allowed in the first place (interview, May 2013). Elsewhere, however, he has expressed himself in more apologetic terms, suggesting a more ambivalent position (Sonoda 2010). On the one hand, he believes the forest of the mountain should be protected, and its sacred character preserved. On the other, the mines apparently have great economic significance for the city. As Shinto is seen as a 'community religion', the wellbeing of the human community is considered at least as important as the natural environment. Paradoxically, he has justified this approach by referring to the notion of Gross National Happiness (GNH) – an alternative to the use of GNP as the main standard for development, taking into consideration non-economical factors as well as economical ones, said to have been developed in Bhutan. In Sonoda's interpretation, for a high GNH, four things are important: a rich natural environment, a rich 'traditional culture' (*dentō bunka*), good politics, and 'fair' economic development (2010, 22). Thus, in the case of Mount Bukō, a balance must be found between economic activities and a healthy green environment – all for the sake of the (human) community's happiness, rather than the natural environment *per se*. As this case illustrates, associations with 'deep ecology', 'holism' and 'human-nature symbiosis'

notwithstanding (e.g., Sonoda 2007; Sonoda & Tabuchi 2006), in its concrete applications shrine Shinto arguably is still primarily concerned with the human community. As such, it is ultimately anthropocentric.

Figure 2: Mount Bukō today

9. CHINJU NO MORI

9.1 *Chinju no mori*: different uses of the term

9.1.1 *Four meanings*

As suggested previously, *chinju no mori* is perhaps *the* core concept of the Shinto environmentalist movement. In general, the term refers to (sacred) shrine forests, but there is considerable variety as to how exactly it is used. Different actors in the shrine world and academia employ the term differently, according to personal preference, institutional politics and/or disciplinary orientation. In the discourse on *chinju no mori*, we can distinguish at least four different meanings. They overlap partially, but differ with regard to how broadly the term is used and what is included. All four meanings continue to coexist and be used alongside each other, which sometimes causes conceptual confusion. As this chapter addresses the topic of contemporary *chinju no mori*-related discursive practices, an initial examination of these different meanings is in order. The four meanings I distinguish can be summarised as follows:

1. *Chinju no mori* are the remnants of primeval forests, which have remained more or less untouched since prehistoric times, thus constituting ecological as well as historical continuity. Alternatively, they may be the remnants of secondary forests, which are not primeval as they have experienced some disruption at some point of history (e.g., fire or logging), but which have regrown and become self-sustaining (i.e., 'natural') in medieval or premodern times. They are usually small and clearly demarcated, surrounded by rice paddies or (especially in modern times, as a result of urbanisation) houses and other buildings. They are considered 'sacred', and have been the location of worship practices and *matsuri* since ancient times. Inside, there is a (small) shrine where people come to worship a protective deity, said to be intimately connected with that particular locality and its community. They are typically made up of indigenous trees; seen from a distance, they resemble a big head of broccoli. This understanding of *chinju no mori* may be called hybrid, as it allocates more or less equal importance to ecological and cultural-symbolical aspects of the forest. It has arguably come to constitute the ideal type, to the point that it may now be considered the 'classical' description. Scientists who have described *chinju no mori* in these terms include Suganuma Takayuki (2001; 2004) and Ueda Atsushi (2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2007).

2. In its second meaning, the term *chinju no mori* is still limited to remaining areas of primeval or secondary forest (as above), but not necessarily only those associated with shrines. While it is recognised that many of these remaining forests are indeed shrine forests, it is not their 'sacred' character that makes them significant, but rather their ecological composition. *Chinju*

no mori are often shrine-related, but this is not necessarily always the case: they may also surround Buddhist temples or private residences. What matters, therefore, is not the presence of a shrine, but biodiversity and ecological continuity. As such, this second meaning may be considered a 'desacralised' or even 'deshintoised' variant of the first. *Chinju no mori* are said to be among the few remaining areas of 'indigenous' forest, made up of various 'indigenous' tree species, in Japan. They are contrasted to plantation forests, which are said to be ecologically unsustainable and largely made up of 'foreign' trees. The main representative of this view is the ecologist Miyawaki Akira, well-known for his various reforestation projects in Japan and abroad. In his terminology, *chinju no mori* are '*furusato* forests' made up of '*furusato* trees'. According to this view, at places where the indigenous trees have been cut down or given way to invader species, forest maintenance and reforestation projects should be set up in order to re-establish forests in their 'original' shape (Miyawaki 1982; 2000; cf. Nanami 2010).

3. As the concept gained popularity, it came to be dissociated from biology and ecology proper, and was extended to other types of shrine forests. In the third meaning, then, *chinju no mori* becomes a generic term used for various shrine forests and groves. It includes the above-described ideal type, but is not limited to it: the term may refer to any type of 'forest' or woodland surrounding, and/or owned by, a shrine. In contrast to the second meaning, therefore, what matters here is the 'sacred' (and, indeed, 'Shinto') character of the forest, not its ecology. This may include modern planted forests, the most famous of which is the forest surrounding Meiji Jingū in Tokyo. Meiji Jingū's forest has now become the archetypal 'man-made *chinju no mori*' (cf. Aomame 2010) – a notion that would be considered a contradiction in terms by representatives of the first view, but not by those who use it in more generic terms. Furthermore, depending on the speaker, the term *chinju no mori* may also be used to refer to forested 'sacred' mountains associated with shrines, such as the *shintaizan* of Mount Miwa discussed in the previous chapter; to small patches of woodland that are so small they hardly qualify for the label 'forest', often consisting of little more than a few old *shinboku* trees adjacent to (urban) shrines; and even to large areas of plantation and/or mixed forest, such as those owned by Ise Jingū – as long as they are shrine-owned. Generally speaking, then, the term *chinju no mori* has come to be used in a broader meaning, and is no longer clearly defined; it can now be used to refer to any type of 'forest' as long as it is somehow associated with a shrine, and, hence, considered to have certain 'sacred' properties.

4. In recent years, the term *chinju no mori* is increasingly used to refer to shrines as a whole, not only their forests. That is, the term has come to include the entire precincts of a shrine: not only its forested area, but also the shrine buildings, the *sandō* (the path or road approaching

the main buildings), isolated *shinboku* trees and so on. In this use of the term, ecological or landscape characteristics are no longer relevant: *chinju no mori* is here used to distinguish shrine space from the outside world. Put in Durkheimian terms, *chinju no mori* may be said to equal a given 'sacred space' as a whole, set apart from the 'profane' outside. More prosaically, the term may simply correspond to shrine property: land owned by the shrine (possibly extending to such 'liminal' space as a parking area) is called *chinju no mori*, and the *chinju no mori* ends where the property ends. Accordingly, the term now seems to extend beyond the *physical space* of the shrine and shrine precincts to include the *imagined social space* of a 'local community' centred around, and regularly congregating at, the shrine and its forest. For instance, in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of times the term is used in *Jinja shinpō* articles; however, it no longer exclusively refers to actual forests, but is increasingly used as an abstract denominator encompassing the shrine's entire physical space and symbolising the 'community' to which it is said to belong.

9.1.2   *Three examples*

As the above list makes clear, the term *chinju no mori* is used for different purposes, ranging from environmental advocacy to community empowerment, and from landscape design to shrine politics. While the concept's vagueness may have contributed to its adaptability and popularity, the lack of conceptual clarity sometimes causes confusion. The following three examples, based on my fieldwork notes, will illustrate this.

1. Ise Jingū is generally regarded as Japan's most sacred and most important shrine complex. Its main shrine (since the Meiji period, that is), Naikū, is devoted to the sun goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami, the mythical ancestress of the Japanese imperial family who has come to be seen as the *prima inter pares* of Japan's myriad deities (*yaoyorozu no kamigami*). Ise Jingū is one of the most financially and politically powerful shrine complexes in the country, intimately connected with the imperial institution. As mentioned, every twenty years, the shrine buildings are completely rebuilt, in a ceremony (or, rather, series of ceremonies) called *shikinen sengū*. The shrine owns large areas of forest land, where trees are grown that are used for the construction of shrine buildings. A significant proportion of this forest land is made up of 'plantation' forests, primarily composed of *hinoki* (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*; Japanese cypress). The trees here are grown and harvested for the purpose of rebuilding the shrine every twenty years. Other areas of the forest are set apart as 'sacred', however, so the trees there are not used – although these areas may have been used for timber production in the past.

   For this dissertation, I have interviewed two people working for Ise Jingū. Significantly, both of them conceive of the shrine forests in very different terms. The first

interviewee, a shrine official working for the publicity department (interviewed twice, in February and December 2011), stressed the intimate historical relationship between the shrine, the river, the rice paddies and the forested mountains. The forests, the water cycle and the rice cultivation, he suggested, constitute a single symbiotic system going back to ancient times, of which the shrine and its lands have always constituted an integral part.[167] According to the shrine official, an intuitive appreciation of the intrinsic sacred qualities of the natural landscape is central to Shinto – as illustrated by his statement that Shinto is essentially an 'intuitive religion' (*chokkan shūkyō*).

Although used for growing timber, the shrine forests are believed to constitute an important aspect of the *shūkyō fūdo* of the Ise region. As the timber is produced sustainably and not for economic purposes, it is said to be in accordance with the local ecological equilibrium that was achieved in prehistoric times and that has been maintained for centuries. Constituting an essential part of this holistic ecological-religious system, Ise's forests are seen as inherently sacred. Hence, the shrine official argued, it is perfectly fine to refer to them as *chinju no mori*.

The second interviewee is also employed by Ise Jingū. A forest specialist, he works for the department responsible for the practical aspects of maintaining the forests, such as deciding which trees are to be harvested and used, and which are not. He was so kind as to show me around the shrine forests, and explain about the various aspects of forestry and timber production; during this visit, I had the opportunity to ask questions (December 2011). One of the things I asked was whether it would be possible to refer to these forests as *chinju no mori*. In contrast to his colleague at the publicity department, he answered that it was not. *Chinju no mori* are small, old shrine forests, where no logging takes place; hence, they are substantially different from the forest of Ise, which is called *kyūikirin* and made up of both a production forest and a 'natural' part (see chapter eleven). Thus, while he did not deny the sacred character of Ise Jingū's forests *per se* (in particular, the parts not used for the production of timber were seen to possess some sort of numinous quality), he objected to using the word *chinju no mori* in this context, as to him this term refers to a fundamentally different category of forests.

In sum, even at a single shrine, different actors may use the term *chinju no mori* differently. The first interviewee's use of the term corresponds to what I have distinguished as the third use of the term: *chinju no mori* has come to be used to refer to any kind of forest, as long as it is deemed 'sacred' and associated with (i.e., owned by) a Shinto shrine. By contrast, the second interviewee seems to have understood the term more narrowly, as referring to a

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[167] Thus, his argument was in accordance with Sonoda's notion of *shūkyō fūdo*, or 'religioscape', as discussed in the previous chapter.

small and 'natural' forest; his understanding of the term therefore corresponds to the first (or, possibly, second) meaning.

2. As mentioned in chapter seven, Meiji Jingū is one of several shrines where a non-profit organisation has been set up for the triple purpose of forest maintenance, raising environmental awareness, and education in 'traditional Japanese culture' (e.g., shrine etiquette and rice cultivation). This organisation is called NPO Hibiki. A non-profit organisation (*NPO hōjin*), NPO Hibiki is legally independent from the religious organisation (*shūkyō hōjin*) Meiji Jingū. In reality, however, the Hibiki office is located in one of the shrine buildings, the shrine forest constitutes its main work location, and the president of Hibiki, who is responsible for organising activities and teaching volunteers, is employed by the shrine. Thus, the two are obviously intertwined.

In November 2011, I conducted an interview with the current president of the organisation. One of the things I asked her was whether the forest of Meiji Jingū can be considered a *chinju no mori*. Today, Meiji Jingū's forest constitutes one of the most impressive areas of green space in metropolitan Tokyo, and its high trees may invoke feelings of mystery and sacrality. However, this forest was not planted until the Taishō period, as part of the state's project to establish Shinto as the national ritual cult. The deities enshrined here are the late Emperor Meiji (1852-1912) and his wife, Empress Shōken (1849-1914). The trees were shipped from various parts of the empire, including overseas occupied areas. As such, Meiji Jingū is historically associated with 'State Shinto', and its forest is an early-twentieth-century product that can hardly be considered an 'authentic' or 'original' Japanese shrine forest.

Moreover, the forest was planted in accordance with the latest German forestry techniques, rather than being based on the 'indigenous' Japanese ecological knowledge often lauded in contemporary literature (e.g., Brown 2009; Tawara 2010). Nevertheless, it is often mentioned as an example of a successful (re)forestation project that may serve as a template for other attempts at replanting or revitalising *chinju no mori* (e.g., Aomame 2010; *Jinja shinpō* 1982a). In addition, as we shall see in chapter eleven, sacred qualities are attributed to the shrine and its forests. In sum, whether or not somebody considers the forest of Meiji Jingū to be a *chinju no mori* conveys a lot about their understanding of the term – including, possibly, whether it is ecology or sacrality that is seen as the concept's defining characteristic.

Probably aware of the existence of different definitions and corresponding normative positions, at first the president of NPO Hibiki seemed somewhat reluctant to answer my question as to whether or not the forest of Meiji Jingū might be considered a *chinju no mori*. Instead, she wanted to know why I asked the question, and asked for my opinion on this matter. I responded by saying that the term is used differently by different people, and that I

am not particularly attached to one particular definition, but would like to find out how people working at shrines understand *chinju no mori*. She then replied by saying that, while she was obviously aware of Meiji Jingū's forest's comparatively young age, she thought it was fine to call it *chinju no mori*. After all, she explained, it is a sacred shrine forest. She did emphasise, however, that this was merely her personal opinion – thus indicating that she was aware of the fact that others use the term in a narrower sense.

3. A few weeks earlier, I had visited the island of Awaji, located between the island of Shikoku and the Kansai region. According to local mythology, it was here that Izanagi dipped his spear into the sea (as narrated in the *Kojiki*) and created the islands of Japan, of which this was the first. In 1995, the island was the epicentre of the great earthquake that killed thousands of people, here as well as in the nearby city of Kobe. Nevertheless, it is an island considered to be of considerable historical and ecological significance. According to a museum of natural history in Kobe I had visited previously, Awaji still contains some 'original' *chinju no mori* going back many centuries. Hence my decision to visit the island, together with a colleague also doing research on this topic.

The first forest we visited did look like the archetypal, 'broccoli-shaped' *chinju no mori* as described above; it consisted of different tree species, housed several birds (as well as, probably, other animals), and was surrounded by rice paddies. However, there was no shrine. Instead, there was a *torii*, a small pebbled square with a basic stone altar, a donation box, an information board, a hedge and a large fence (see figure three). This was one of the ancient imperial tombs that are scattered around the Kansai region. While they may be categorised as 'Shinto' depending on one's use of that term, they are not considered as shrines (*jinja* or *jingū*) as they are not religious institutions where people come together to worship *kami*, and have neither priests nor shrine buildings. It is usually forbidden to enter these small forests, so they may well have ecological value, but the forests do not necessarily go back to ancient times; many of these tombs were 'rediscovered', and their trees (re)planted, during the Meiji period. Thus, whether or not they are categorised as *chinju no mori* depends largely on what definition is used.

Next, we visited one of the island's best-known shrines, Izanagi Jingū. The shrine consists of a typical post-Meiji stone (or concrete) *torii*, a straight *sandō* lined with trees and stone lanterns, fairly large shrine grounds with a picturesque pond and garden, various shrine buildings, an impressive old *shinboku*, and a few other trees behind the shrine buildings. While aesthetically pleasing, it was not exactly what one would consider a 'forest'. Wondering whether there might be another forested area elsewhere, we approached one of the priests, asking where the *chinju no mori* was. He looked at us in a surprised way, apparently not understanding the question, so we asked again. He then responded by saying that, of course,

the *chinju no mori* was right where we were – at the open space in the middle of the shrine grounds, in front of the main building. The *chinju no mori* was everywhere around us, he said. Thus, according to him, the entire shrine precincts constituted the *chinju no mori*, and there was no difference between the 'forested' and the 'non-forested' parts. This response clearly corresponds to what I have distinguished as the fourth meaning of *chinju no mori*: in recent years, the term has no longer refers to physical forests only (i.e., an area of land, however small, with a number of trees standing in close proximity to each other). It has also come to be used for the space of the shrine as a whole: its entire physical territory, as well as, possibly, the community to which the shrine is said to belong. In the understanding of this priest, the entire shrine grounds constituted the *chinju no mori*.

Figure 3: A forested imperial tomb

9.2   *Chinju no mori*: concept and connotations

9.2.1   *Significance of the concept*

Chinju no mori may have been clearly defined thirty or forty years ago, when the conservation movement emerged, but the term soon came to be employed in a variety of ways and carry different meanings – especially in the past decade or so. Of course, *chinju no mori* is not the only key concept

that is somewhat vague and undefined. In fact, it may be argued that it is precisely this lack of clarity that allows a term to be used widely and gain popularity. That is, if the meaning of a concept is narrow and clearly defined, that concept is not easily negotiated and appropriated; accordingly, it does not lend itself to a variety of purposes. If, by contrast, a concept has unclear boundaries and no single authoritative definition, yet carries profound symbolic capital because of its commonly shared discursive connotations, it can be employed by different actors for different purposes. As such, it may even serve as a common denominator that allows different actors to meet and join forces. Arguably, then, it is exactly the combination of conceptual vagueness with generally positive connotations characteristic of *chinju no mori* that allows shrine priests, local activists and scientists to embrace the concept, and establish temporary coalitions focused on the conservation and revitalisation of these forests.

Thus, it may be argued that there is nothing particularly unique about the conceptual transformation and lack of clarity characteristic of the discourse on *chinju no mori* – that, indeed, this is an integral part of the process by which 'words' become abstract 'concepts'. Why, then, is it important to distinguish and analyse these different uses of the term? Why not take this conceptual fluidity for granted, and simply look at the actual practices without worrying about the meanings of concepts? These are legitimate questions, but my response would be that it *is* important to analyse different uses of the term *chinju no mori*, first of all because the term is so widely used – constituting, as I have argued, one of the foundational concepts of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm – and because the lack of a commonly shared definition generates quite a bit of conceptual confusion, as the above anecdotes illustrate. More important, however, is the fact that *chinju no mori* is not merely a descriptive term, used to distinguish between various types of forests. The term carries a number of connotations and associations that are highly normative, and have profound ideological significance. As such, different uses of the concept do not merely represent different approaches to forest classification; as this chapter will hopefully make clear, they also correspond to different normative understandings of national history, nature, and 'the sacred', extending far beyond the physical space of actual forests.

Applying Lefebvre's model, we might say that *chinju no mori* are not merely physical spaces: they are also, simultaneously, *mental* and *social*. The ways in which they are imagined influence the ways in which they take shape physically, and vice versa. Meanwhile, the meanings attributed to their physical characteristics are discursively embedded, drawing upon existing symbols and norms. As they acquire meanings in this discursive context, *chinju no mori* clearly constitute mental space as much as they are physical. And as these various norms inevitably concern relationships – between humans and nature, between various organisms in an ecosystem, between people today and their

ancestors (and, possibly, their descendants), between priests and their parishes (*ujiko*),[168] and between different members of an (imagined) community (be it the village, the neighbourhood or the nation) – they also constitute a social space. This social space is discursively constructed and mediated – i.e., it is through language (as well as, of course, institutional and ritual practices, but these are also discursively embedded), that relationships take shape and are negotiated. In the previous sections, I have outlined the different ways in which the concept is employed, and the different meanings attributed to it in Japan today. In order to better understand the various connotations carried by the concept, however, it is necessary to have a closer look at its history. Therefore, in the following section, I will examine the history of the concept, as well as some common etymological arguments found in recent discourse. I will then move on to show how these arguments are played out, and discuss some of their ideological implications.

9.2.2 Chinju(gami) *and* chinju no mori

The term *chinju no mori* is made up of three words: *chinju*, which refers to a local protective deity (also called *chinjugami*); the genitive particle *no*; and *mori*, which is commonly translated as forest. The term *chinju* is made up of two Chinese characters, meaning 'to pacify' (*shizumeru*) and 'to protect' (*mamoru*). In classical Chinese, the term was used to refer to military checkpoints and border defence; likewise, in Nara-period Japan, it was used in a military context (M. Ueda 2004a, 20). The term was then incorporated into medieval Buddhist discourse, where it came to signify guardian deities protecting the Dharma.[169] Accordingly, in premodern Japanese Buddhism, the term *chinjugami* was typically used to refer to the local, place-based deities believed to dwell around and protect temples; they were (and are) worshipped by Buddhist monks at small shrines belonging to temple complexes. Over time, the term also came to be used for local deities, associated with a particular village community, and came to overlap with *ujigami* – a concept historically used for ancestral spirits believed to have become protective *kami*, which later was used for local deities in general (M. Ueda 2004a, 21). As Sonoda writes,

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[168] The term *ujiko* refers to a local community considered to belong to a particular shrine. In contrast to Christian churches, *shūha shintō* organisations or (other) 'new religious movements', this belonging is not usually based on membership. Rather, it refers to the neighbourhood(s) associated with the shrine by its clergy. Ideally, the people living there are all part of the shrine community and take part in collective rituals such as *matsuri*. In reality, however, not all members of an *ujiko* identify themselves as such, and a certain proportion of a local population does not in any way feel affiliated with a shrine (for instance, because they belong to another religious organisation). Although the term 'parish' is typically associated with Christian churches, it conveys the same sense of a local community centred around a place of worship; therefore, in my opinion, it is an adequate translation of *ujiko*.

[169] I owe this point to Mark Teeuwen, who has looked up the term in the Taishō Canon (a twentieth-century canon of Chinese Buddhist scriptures and their Japanese commentaries). As he pointed out, in Chinese Buddhist texts, the term is often used to refer to the task of Dharma protectors. The term was incorporated into Japan, where it came to be used for guardian deities protecting temples – a meaning which Japanese writers in turn projected onto China (Mark Teeuwen, personal communication, January 2012).

Until the mediaeval period, in fact, *chinju* meant the *kami* protecting the precincts of a Buddhist temple, but from the late Heian period onwards, as influential temples expanded their provincial landholdings and enshrined their ancestral clan *kami* and the guardian *kami* of their temples, *chinju* shrines came to be widely distributed throughout the provinces, and these became the tutelary shrines of the local agricultural communities (2006b, 9).

In Meiji- and Taishō-period Japan, the term *chinju* was typically associated with village deities, as in the expression *mura no chinju* ('the god of the village') (ibid.; cf. Azegami 2009). They were usually worshipped at local shrines, constituting a focal point of village communities. In post-*shinbutsu-bunri* Japan, they came to be dissociated from Buddhism altogether, and were reclassified as Shinto. In contrast to newly established imperial shrines, however, they were not usually associated with the national ritual-ideological system that would later become known as 'State Shinto'. On the contrary, they were often the subject of state-imposed limitations, such as the prohibition on shrine priests to engage in so-called 'religious' activities and the shrine merger movement (Azegami 2009; Azegami & Teeuwen 2012; Breen 2000). Nevertheless, *chinju* had been established as a term primarily associated with Shinto rather than Buddhism, and this continues to be the case today.

Although the term *chinju* go back to the medieval period, the combination *chinju no mori* is of more recent date. While the shrine forests to which the term refers are often said – either justifiably or not – to go back to ancient times, the concept itself was not introduced until the late nineteenth century. According to Ono Ryōhei, it was coined by novelist Tayama Katai in 1892, and used to describe the defining features of Japanese countryside landscapes (Ono 2010). It subsequently appeared in dictionaries published in 1894 and '98, but at the turn of the century it was not yet widely used (as illustrated by the fact that the famous shrine forest activist Minakata Kumagusu never used it, using the word *shinrin* [the *hayashi* of the *kami*] instead) (Kanasaka 2001, 108-109).[170] In the late Meiji, Taishō and early Shōwa periods, however, the term gradually spread, and came to be used for shrine forests in general, acquiring the meaning of 'sacred place' (Ono 2010). The term was also popularised through a well-known children's song, *Mura matsuri* ('village *matsuri*'), which includes the lines 'Today is the happy day of the *matsuri* | Of the village protector god' (*Mura no chinju no kamigami no | Kyō wa medetai o-matsuri no hi*) (A. Ueda 2007, 7). Today, this song seems to evoke nostalgia for Shōwa-period rural traditions; it is often mentioned by authors writing about the cultural significance of *chinju no mori* (e.g., Miyawaki 2000, 17; Sonoda 1998, 40; M. Ueda 2004a, 21).

However, in the early postwar period, the term *chinju no mori* fell into disuse – as did, perhaps, associated notions of protective deities, sacred space and ancestral villages. Between 1946 and 1978, it was not used much, as illustrated by the fact that in *Jinja shinpō* articles from this period it only shows up sporadically. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when people such as Miyawaki Akira

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[170] Sonoda states that the combination *chinju no mori* first appeared in 1908 (2006b, 9). This is not in accordance with Ono's suggestion (2010) that it was first used by Tayama in 1892, however, and probably incorrect.

and Ueda Atsushi started doing research on the topic, that the term came to be used more regularly. Likewise, the association of *chinju no mori* with ecology and nature conservation dates from this period. Since the 1990s, the concept has been used increasingly regularly, often appearing in the titles of books and articles on various topics – including but not limited to shrines, forest management, landscape conservation, spirituality and Japanese national identity (e.g., Makino 1994; Miyawaki 2000; Sōyō 2001; A. Ueda 2003; 2007; M. Ueda 2004c; M. Ueda & A. Ueda 2001; Yamada 1995; Yamaori 2001).

9.2.3 Mori *and* hayashi

As we have seen, the meanings attributed to the term *chinju* have changed significantly in the course of history, ranging from military uses to Buddhist theology to contemporary Shinto practices. The term *mori*, it seems, is no less ambiguous. Several scholars have stated that there is an essential difference between *hayashi*, which supposedly originally referred to man-made (i.e., planted) forests, and *mori*, said to refer to natural forests. Ueda Masaaki in particular has repeatedly asserted the fundamental difference between *mori* and *hayashi*. For instance,

> In English, *mori* is called 'forest', and *hayashi* 'wood'. Similarly, in the ancient Japanese language (*Nihon no yamatokotoba*), the word *mori* refers to things in their natural state (*shizen no mama no mono*), whereas *hayashi* refers to nature that has been changed by human action. (...) In the ancient Japanese language, *mori* and *hayashi* were clearly distinguished, but afterwards the terms were mixed up in daily life (2011, 4; my translation. Cf. 2004b, 11).[171]

Ueda Atsushi has expressed himself in similar terms, saying there is a fundamental difference between *mori* on the one hand, and *hayashi* and parks (*kōen*) on the other – in terms of physical shape, as well as atmosphere and history (2004a, 165-166; 2007, 16-17). Likewise, well-known forest ecologist Shidei Tsunahide has written that

> in Japanese forestry books, these two kinds of forests [i.e., *mori* and *hayashi*] are not clearly defined. Depending on the person, *mori* are said to be natural forests, whereas *hayashi* are seen as artificial forests. (…) I have [previously] written that *mori* is written with the Chinese character 森, and *hayashi* with the character 林, and that in the Chinese language these two are distinguished as well, but that was a mistake. Only in Japanese is the character 森 read as *mori*; in China, when the character is used as an adjective, it apparently means 'deep'. That is why *shinrin* 森林 does not mean '*mori* and *hayashi*', but 'deep forest' (1993, 7; my translation).

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[171] As Ueda points out elsewhere, the verb *hayasu* ('to grow') is etymologically related to *hayashi* (2004b, 11). This points to the same difference between *mori* as something that has grown naturally and spontaneously (*shizen ni*), and *hayashi* as something that has been cultivated.

As *mori* has the connotation of 'deep' and 'mysterious', it is fundamentally different from *hayashi*:

> In my understanding, the reason that deep forests have remained for such a long time is because these forests were cherished as dwelling places of gods. (…) I do not think I am wrong in saying that *mori* was a mountain covered with a deep forest, a forest rising up; a natural forest thought of as important, as it was seen as the home of the gods. By contrast, *hayashi* refers to the forests stretching from the foot of the mountain to the plains of the *satoyama*, which have been considerably changed by human activity. Forests made up of *sugi*, *hinoki* or *kunugi* [*Quercus acutissima*; sawtooth oak] are *hayashi*, not *mori*. But the sacred forests (*chinju no mori* and *miya no mori*) surrounding shrines are *mori*, not *hayashi* (ibid., 9-10; my translation).

Ueda Masaaki, Ueda Atsushi and Shidei Tsunahide all assert that sacred forests are *mori* (i.e., 'deep' and 'natural') rather than *hayashi* (i.e., 'artificial'). There is an obvious problem with Shidei's distinction, however. *Sugi* and *hinoki*, trees that are usually planted (and, historically, have been used widely for timber production) rather than autochthonous, are said to be typical of *hayashi*, and not of *mori*. Yet, they can often be found in shrine forests, despite the fact that the latter are classified as *mori*. Clearly, most shrine forests were planted at some point in (pre)modern history, rather than being fully 'natural' or primeval (cf. Komatsu 2012, 288-290); it should come as no surprise, therefore, that many of them are largely made up of non-autochthonous species. *Hinoki* and *sugi* in particular are high, coniferous trees, and forests made up of these trees tend to have a somewhat dark, mysterious atmosphere (ironically, precisely those qualities that Shidei attributed to *mori*). Accordingly, these trees were often used for newly (re)planted shrine forests. Significantly, many *shinboku* (sacred trees) are also *sugi* or *hinoki* – although this is most certainly not always the case. Only in the last few decades, influenced by Miyawaki's mantra '*furusato* trees for a *furusato* forest', has replanting 'original' tree species and returning forests to their 'original' shape become the standard. This is clearly visible in the forestry practices of Tadasu no mori at Shimogamo Jinja, which I will discuss in the next chapter. It is, however, a fairly recent development; previously, sacred qualities were more commonly attributed to coniferous than to deciduous trees, judging from the fact that the former were often turned into *shinboku* and planted along shrine *sandō*.

Moreover, Ueda Masaaki's claim that in classical Japanese a clear conceptual distinction existed between man-made forests, referred to as *hayashi*, and natural forests, referred to as *mori*, is questionable. Arguably, such a distinction is a product of modernity, in which the realm of 'nature' is discursively differentiated from the realm of human constructs. Interestingly, Ueda's conceptualisation of ideal forests as 'untouched' by humans, and his association of 'untouched' with 'natural', is in accordance with modern European and American notions of 'wilderness' as constituting 'pure nature' (Cronon 1996; Tsing 2005, 95-101), rather than 'traditional Japanese' notions of nature best preserved when cultivated (Kalland 1995). In fact, the discussion about whether *chinju no mori* should be maintained carefully by humans or, on the contrary, are better left untouched, has been going on since

the early 1980s.[172] The dispute continues to be unresolved. As we shall see, however, most *chinju no mori*-related organisations today undertake activities that, if we were to apply Ueda's dichotomy strictly, would come down to the transformation of *mori* into *hayashi* (or even, in some cases at least, into parks): collecting acorns, tree-planting, weeding, pruning and so on. Nevertheless, the shrine forests where these activities take place are never defined as *hayashi*, but usually as *chinju no mori* (or, alternatively, as *shasō* – a concept I will discuss in the next chapter).

In reality, then, the distinction between *mori* and *hayashi* has probably never been as clear-cut as Ueda suggests. As other members of the *chinju no mori* movement have rightly pointed out, it is often impossible to distinguish between the two, as most forests are both natural *and* partly shaped by human activities (Watanabe Hiroyuki, personal communication, June 2013).[173] Arguably, then, the difference between *mori* and *hayashi* primarily lies in the symbolic connotations and cultural meanings attributed to the forests, rather than their physical properties. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the term *mori* carries profound symbolic capital: it is discursively associated with notions of a spirited, non-human 'other world', ancestral traditions and memories, and an idealised 'original' Japanese society, as well as corresponding constructions of national identity. Hence, the term *mori* seems to have a certain numinous, transcendent quality, which also applies to *chinju no mori*. Through the ideal typical distinction between *mori* – human society's Other – and *hayashi* – human-made, hence profane – certain types of forests are discursively sacralised, while others are left to the realm of human culture and society.

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[172] For instance, at the 1982 symposium on sacred forests, one of the participants argued: 'There is the idea that it is good not to touch nature; that this is exactly what constitutes nature protection. I think that this is a prejudice that has entered Japan and taken root from the period of rapid economic growth [i.e., the postwar decades] onwards, but this is destroying the Japanese mind. Forests grow exactly *because* people take care of them, cherish them and raise them. But now the ignorance has gone so far already…' (*Jinja shinpō* 1982b; my translation). The implicit suggestion made here is that the notion that nature is best preserved when left 'wild' and 'untouched' is another unfortunate Western import, along with modern technology and 'individualisation'. This is arguably too simplistic, as human involvement (e.g., forest management) is seen as an important prerequisite for sustainable nature conservation not only in Japan, but also in most European countries. Nevertheless, the comment is relevant, as the question whether nature should be maintained by humans or left untouched continues to be debated fiercely by environmental organisations, policy makers, scientists and 'nature consumers' worldwide – a debate that is by no means limited to Japan. In Japan, however, these arguments have gained significant ground in recent years. 'Wild forests' are typically associated with former *Cryptomeria* (*sugi*) plantations: ecologically unbalanced monocultures that in many cases are no longer maintained, encroach upon rural communities and areas formerly used for agricultural purposes, and cause erosion as well as health problems, as many people are allergic to the pollen of these trees. The currently predominant nature conservation ideal is the exact opposite: the hybrid nature-culture landscapes called *satoyama*, which are preserved by humans active in (sustainable?) agriculture and foraging practices (wood and mushrooms, for instance). Indeed, all over Japan, local volunteer movements are now active in preserving (or creating!) these so-called 'traditional' landscapes.

[173] Significantly, the term often used for forests in scientific discourse is *shinrin* (e.g., *shinrin seitaigaku* means forest ecology), which is made up of both the characters for *hayashi* and *mori* – thus suggesting that the two are intertwined, and that their meanings overlap.

9.2.4 **Mori** *and society*

To Ueda *cum suis*, worship in forests – *mori*, that is, not *hayashi* – constitutes the original shape of Shinto. As they often point out, before there were any shrine buildings, people would come together and conduct ceremonies in sacred groves, referred to as *yashiro*. A widely employed popular-etymological argument for the identification of forests with primordial shrine worship is the fact that the character that would later come to be used for writing *yashiro* (社) is pronounced as *mori* in some classical texts, such as the *Man'yōshū* (Sonoda 1998, 42-43; Ueda 2004b, 11-12). This is presented as etymological evidence for the theory that, originally, forests and worship places were one and the same thing, and there was no conceptual distinction between the two. These sacred groves, it is argued, represent the origin of shrine worship; accordingly, *jinja* 神社 (usually translated as 'shrine') literally means the *yashiro/mori* 社 (dwelling place/forest) of the *kami* 神 (deity). As Sonoda concludes: 'In sum, Japanese *jinja* were originally nothing but the sacred forest (*shinsei na mori*) where the *kami* resided [literally: 'was appeased/pacified'] (1998, 43).'

Furthermore, Ueda and Sonoda have argued, these sacred groves not only constitute the origins of Shinto, but also of Japanese society as a whole: the first communities took shape around these worship places, which became the sacred centres near which towns (*machi*) were established. Thus, Sonoda has argued, since ancient times the sacred forest has been at the centre of what is now called 'town-making' (*machi-zukuri*) or 'community-making' (*komyunitii-zukuri*) (Sonoda 1997, 22-25); the establishment of social and economical bonds between residents of a given locality. Hence, it is here that society originated, as evidenced by the make-up of the Japanese word for society, *shakai*: composed of the characters *mori/yashiro* 社 and 'meeting' or 'congregation' 会, it literally means 'meeting in the forest' or 'meeting at the shrine' (M. Ueda 2004b, 15).[174] Another concept often used in this context is *kyōdōtai*, which literally means 'collective body'. In sum, Shinto is seen as a 'community religion' or as 'religious culture'; in contrast to so-called 'world religions' like Buddhism or Christianity, it is intimately connected with the landscape or *fūdo* of a particular place, and co-constitutive of its culture and local society (Sonoda 1998, 10-13).

As the character for shrine can be read as *mori*, the term *chinju no mori* is sometimes written with this character, instead of the common character meaning 'forest' (i.e., 鎮守の社 instead of 鎮守

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[174] The word *shakai* goes back to medieval Chinese texts to refer to groups or organisations; in Japan, it apparently was not used until the Edo period, when it was employed to translate the Dutch term *klooster* ('monastery'). As a common translation of the French concept '*société*' (of which 'society' is the English equivalent), however, it was not introduced until the Meiji period (Doak 2007a, 129-130). Thus, it was introduced around the same time as the neologisms *shūkyō* ('religion'), *tetsugaku* ('philosophy') and *bungaku* ('literature') – categories that did not exist in Japan previously (even though some of the cultural phenomena to which they refer arguably did). Therefore, when used as etymological evidence, the argument that *shakai* points to the sacred forest as the origins of society does not hold. But then, perhaps this statement should be read more metaphorically. Ueda is of course aware of the fact that *shakai* is a modern neologism (interview, December 2011); he argues that his point is not that the term goes back to ancient times, but rather that the modern term reflects the ancient essence.

の森). When written in this way, the emphasis is on the sacred character of the place, rather than the physical shape. Accordingly, I have never come across any texts by forest scientists in which *chinju no mori* was written with this character; it is mainly used by Shinto actors. In recent years, however, a third, slightly different way of writing the concept has gained significant popularity. Instead of the common character for 'shrine', *chinju no mori* is now often written with an old character that means 'forest' or 'grove', yet is similar in shape to 'shrine' (杜 versus 社). This character is now used widely in Jinja Honchō publications, such as the *Jinja shinpō* newspaper, and is favoured by its president (Tanaka 2011, 9). As a result, it has spread rapidly throughout the shrine world.

By adopting this little-used yet ancient character (found in classical sources such as the *Man'yōshū*), the shrine establishment appears to be doing three things. First, it discursively establishes *chinju no mori* as something going back to the ancient period, giving it a 'classical' status (whereas in fact, as we have seen, the term is a late nineteenth-century invention that has little to do with ancient *kami* worship). Second, it suggests that shrine forests resemble, yet are ultimately different from 'ordinary' forests, as indicated by the fact that it is written differently. And third, by using a character that is very similar in shape to the character meaning 'shrine', the suggestion is made that these forests constitute sacred space, and are closely connected to Shinto as a whole. Significantly, those using this character tend to use the term *chinju no mori* in the last of the four meanings outlined in the beginning of this chapter (or, alternatively, the third). To them, it is not the ecological composition of the forest that defines the *chinju no mori*, and perhaps not even the existence of a forest *per se*. The main significance of *chinju no mori* lies in the fact that they symbolise a connection between the present and the ancient past, and between the shrine grounds and the community to which they are said to belong, not in their physical and biological features.[175]

9.2.5   Summary: five basic assumptions

Despite their somewhat different views regarding the origins of Shinto (see previous chapter), Sonoda and Ueda are very much in agreement when it comes to the historical significance of *chinju no mori*, often using the same arguments. Their theory now seems to have acquired paradigmatic status, at least in Shinto circles, and their arguments are often repeated by others – including priests, journalists and shrine forest volunteers. To conclude this section, we may summarise their main points as follows:

1. There is a fundamental difference between *mori* and *hayashi* (said to correspond to the difference between 'forests' and 'woods' in English). The former are discursively

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[175] Not everybody agrees with the use of this character for writing *chinju no mori*, though. Ueda Masaaki has pointed out that the character not only means 'forest', but also has the connotation 'to close' or 'to shut' (e.g., 'closed gate'). Hence, he argues, it does not adequately convey one of *chinju no mori*'s core meanings: a place where humans and nature meet and interact. As such, it can not be closed off, but must have an 'open' (i.e., public) character (2001b, 42; cf. Sonoda 1998, 33-34).

sacralised, and allocated to the realm of 'nature'. Believed to be inhabited by deities and ancestral spirits, they are set apart as 'sacred', and placed outside the human-controlled realms of culture, economics and politics. In contrast to *hayashi*, then, *mori* are not seen as natural resources that may be exploited.

2. In prehistorical Japan, *kami* worship is said to have taken place at sacred forests. The construction of permanent shrine buildings (*jinja*) did not take place until much later, due to continental influences. In ancient Japan, it is suggested, the sacred forest (*mori*) and the shrine (*yashiro*) were one and the same thing – as illustrated by the fact that in some classical texts the character for shrine (*yashiro*) was pronounced as *mori*.

3. The belief in sacred forests, and the performance of ceremonies (*matsuri*) in these forests, is said to have been the original shape of Shinto. In *chinju no mori*, elements of these original worship practices and beliefs have been preserved. Therefore, *chinju no mori* are seen as crucial for the conservation of, and return to, Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship, harmony and gratitude. As such, they have great symbolic significance.

4. Reflecting Durkheim's classical theory of the significance of sacred places for establishing and maintaining social cohesion and harmony, *chinju no mori* are conceptualised as sacred community centres. That is, as places where humans could communicate with deities (and the living with the dead), sacred forests are said to have been of crucial importance for the establishment of social relations and, hence, communities. This is illustrated by the fact that the Japanese concept for society, *shakai*, is a combination of the characters *yashiro/mori* and 'meeting'.

5. Shrine forests are thus conceptualised as constitutive of shrine worship, Shinto, and Japanese society as a whole. Consequently, great historical and symbolic significance is attributed to them. This significance far transcends the realm of 'religion' proper. Contrary to membership-based, soteriologically-oriented 'world' religions such as Buddhism or Christianity, Shinto is seen as intimately intertwined with the Japanese nation as a whole – not because of its connection to powerful institutions, but because shrine worship (i.e., sacred forest worship) is seen as shaped by local environmental, climatological and (agri)cultural conditions (i.e., *fūdo*), and constitutive of local communities (*komyunitii* or *kyōdōtai*). The postwar separation of state and religion does not do justice to this fundamental intertwinement of the shrine and its *chinju no mori* with local society and culture.

9.3 Core themes

9.3.1 A definition

Let us now consider the following definition of *chinju no mori*, published in a popular-scientific magazine devoted to the topic of shrine forests. It addresses some of the main topics often associated with *chinju no mori*: old age, ecological balance, biodiversity, *matsuri*, sacred qualities, and ancestors. Therefore, this definition may be considered fairly representative for the *chinju no mori* discourse as a whole. I will analyse the definition step-by-step, and discuss the topics it addresses. The definition is as follows:

> [*Chinju no mori* are] forests that have remained from the ancient age of myths until the present time. These are forests where old trees grow in abundance; where high trees, brushwood and plants growing under the trees are in balance. Many birds, insects and micro-organisms have the space to live here. These are forests with rich ecosystems. Inside, one can find pure gardens, where annual festivals (*matsuri*) are organised. These are places that remind one of distant, ancient times. This is where the voices of the gods (*kamigami*) sound in your ears. This is where our ancestors lived, humbly and diligently, in harmony with nature (Motegi 2010, 111; my translation).

In this definition, five core themes are addressed, which often reoccur in the discourse on *chinju no mori*: primordiality and old age; ecological balance and biodiversity; ritual purity and the importance of *matsuri*; sacred qualities and divine presence; and continuity with the ancestral past. Using the definition as point of departure, in this section I will discuss these five themes one by one.

9.3.2 Primordiality and old age

First, Motegi's definition asserts the popular myth that *chinju no mori* are primeval forests going back to the 'ancient age of myths' – i.e., prehistory. Indeed, in written and spoken discourse on *chinju no mori*, the suggestion is often made (either implicitly or explicitly) that they constitute some sort of ecological continuity with the ancient past (*inishie*), and represent the last remaining areas of original, indigenous forest. In reality, though, very few shrine forests – or, for that matter, very few Japanese forests in general – correspond to scientific definitions of 'primeval forest', even when they are referred to as such. For example, the so-called 'primeval forest' of Kasugayama, located behind Kasuga Taisha in Nara, is said to have been protected from hunters and loggers since the year 841 (Suganuma 2004, 85-86), and is therefore often quoted as a great example of Shinto-inspired ancient 'nature conservation' (e.g., Sasaki, Sasaki & Fox 2010, 475; cf. Maesako 2010). Having remained relatively untouched (by humans, that is) for such a long period of time, this forest is undoubtedly of ecological significance. It is questionable, however, whether it should be referred to as 'primeval forest', as it was affected by human activity earlier in history, and therefore has not retained the shape

it had prior to human settlement.[176] The same applies to other famous 'sacred' forests, such as Mount Miwa, which may have been preserved in recent centuries, but which was affected by logging and gathering practices previously and therefore cannot be said to have remained in its 'original state' (Domenig 1997; cf. Rambelli 2007, 156-167).

In fact, in recent years, as the discipline 'shrine forest studies' is coming of age, scholars and priests seem to have become more aware of the various historical transformations forests have undergone, and are consequently less inclined to use the term 'primeval forest', instead opting for alternatives such as 'climax forest'.[177] This is no doubt due to the fact that some of the scientists involved with the movement have challenged notions of uninterrupted ecological continuity held previously, by studying the (environmental) history of shrine forests and the physical and biological transformations they have undergone.[178] Nevertheless, in popular articles such as the one quoted above, as well as in common parlance, the notion that *chinju no mori* somehow constitute remnants of the Jōmon period (both ecologically and culturally) lingers on.

9.3.3   *Ecological balance and biodiversity*

Second, Motegi attributes two qualities to *chinju no mori* that are central to the 'love of nature' myth discussed in chapter four: *abundance* and *harmony*. The notion that nature in Japan is 'abundant' (*yutaka*), generously providing aesthetic pleasure as well as a great variety of agricultural and other products, was already articulated by Anesaki Masaharu and his contemporaries, and has been a standard trope in representations of the Japanese nation ever since. So is, as we have seen, the notion that humans live in harmony with nature, and that nature as a whole constitutes a single symbiotic system of mutually dependent organisms and landscape features existing in a state of equilibrium – at least under normal circumstances.

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[176] Leaving aside, for the time being, the question as to whether in the Anthropocene such a thing would be possible at all. Arguably, any landscape in the world today is somehow affected by human action, if only because of climate change; as such, no forest today is equal in shape and species composition as it was before, say, the advent of agriculture. But then, the notion of forests having existed in some sort of 'original state' at some point in history (e.g., Miyawaki 2000, 29) is problematic anyway, as ecosystems are never static, but constantly evolve.

[177] Like 'primeval forest', the notion of 'climax forest' refers to forests that are self-sustaining and (by and large) untouched by human beings. The main difference is that whereas 'primeval' refers to some sort of 'original' state that precedes human civilisation, 'climax' forests may at some point in history have been influenced by human action, yet have since regained their 'natural' shape. Hence, the forest of Kasugayama, while not a 'primeval' forest proper, may well qualify as a 'climax forest'. According to Sonoda Minoru, many *chinju no mori* have these properties: 'having not been subject to the forest planting and forest management conducted elsewhere, many of these preserve the state of what ecologists call climax forest, forest formed by the natural vegetation suited to the local climate, thanks to which shrine groves can provide the potential natural vegetation most suitable for use in afforestation' (2007b, 12).

[178] For instance, using maps and other historical sources, Suganuma Takayuki has demonstrated how the forest of Fushimi Inari Taisha in Kyoto has been subject to various transformations in the course of history (Suganuma 2011).

Motegi's claim that in *chinju no mori* different species are 'in balance' arguably reflects these notions of harmony and equilibrium. Significantly, this is also perfectly compatible with classical ecological notions, which conceive of communities of organisms as bounded *systems* characterised by internal balance and interdependence. Environmental problems are attributed to external influences (e.g., human waste and pollution, 'invader' species, climate change) which are said to distort the system's original balance. This notion of *ecosystem* – an originally balanced, organic whole that is vulnerable to distortion – has long held paradigmatic status, but has been challenged by ecologists since the mid-1990s (e.g., O'Neill 2001). Around the same time, the systems approach was also criticised in other (social) scientific disciplines –influenced by developments in environmental studies as well as transdisciplinary explorations (Scoones 1999).

The following paragraph by Miyawaki Akira, one of Japan's best-known post-war ecologists (who, perhaps significantly, was trained in the German ecological tradition), is illustrative of this notion of a balanced ecosystem as an *a priori* given. In all likelihood, it has also influenced Motegi's description of the ecology of *chinju no mori*, either directly or indirectly. Explaining what he thinks constitutes an ideal forest, Miyawaki writes that

> We have to look at it as a *total system*, where the people, plants, animals, microorganisms and so on are all interrelated (…). For this 'plant society' (*shokubutsu shakai*), the best condition is to have as much diversity as possible, and, moreover, the whole [ecosystem] should be in balance with external factors (= the environment). In such a [balanced] environment, a forest can exist. A forest is not just three trees put together. High trees, medium-sized trees, shrubs, moulds in the soil, bacteria, mites: while these different living creatures are quarrelling with each other in *this limited space*, they hang on to life with all their might, according to the capacity of their species (2000, 33; my translation, my emphasis).

It is clear that Miyawaki conceives of forests as clearly demarcated spaces, and as balanced systems, housing a wide variety of organisms that struggle with each other yet are mutually dependent. Thus, Motegi's description of *chinju no mori* as characterised by perfect ecological balance is in accordance with Miyawaki's understanding of ideal typical ecosystems.

What is relatively new about Motegi's definition, however, is the emphasis on biodiversity, as illustrated by his statements that '[m]any birds, insects and micro-organisms have the space to live here' and that, accordingly, '[t]hese are forests with rich ecosystems'. This reflects the global trend to focus on biodiversity as a core priority. That is, the loss of species diversity is now seen as an urgent problem that needs to be tackled immediately, by means of conservation practices as well as policy change. In recent years, it has become one of the core concerns of environmentalists in Japan, and the 'traditional' Japanese hybrid nature-culture landscapes referred to as *satoyama* (see Berglund 2008; Takeuchi et al. 2003) have been promoted as great resources for the protection of biodiversity

(Williams 2010).[179] Significantly, the notion of *satoyama* figured prominently on COP10, the UN's 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Nagoya in November 2010, and is mentioned explicitly as a valuable template for future conservation initiatives in one of the decisions made at this conference.[180] Given this association of 'traditional' Japanese landscapes with biodiversity and conservation, it comes as no surprise that these claims are extended to *chinju no mori*, which after all are seen as integral features of these traditional landscapes (e.g., Iwatsuki 2008). Hence, in a recent article, Ueda Masaaki explicitly made the link between *chinju no mori* conservation and the 2010 Convention on Biological Diversity (2011, 3).

In reality, however, few shrine forests are as ecologically diverse as some authors suggest. For instance, a study conducted by biologists in Kyoto on the weed *ōbako* (*Plantago asiatica*; Chinese plantain) suggests that shrine forests tend to have *less* ecological diversity than other urban green areas, such as river banks (Nakayama et al. 1996). They are characterised by 'relatively nutrient-poor soil, poor light conditions, low species diversity index and daily sweeping of the ground' (ibid., 338). The latter, sweeping the ground, is a common practice in shrines and temples, which is said to have a negative impact on soil ecology. In addition, there are two other important reasons for the (generally speaking) comparatively low biodiversity of shrine forests. First, urban shrine forests tend to be ecologically isolated; all-too-often, they are small green islands surrounded by concrete landscapes. These small forests may be neglected and dilapidated, or they may be carefully maintained by enthusiastic volunteers – in either case, if they are not connected with other green areas such as parks, green river banks, temple or castle gardens, suburban fields and mountains, their biodiversity is not likely to be high. As one prominent environmentally-oriented shrine priest told me, most non-profit groups focusing on shrine forest conservation make the mistake of solely looking at their small shrine forest, while ignoring the surrounding environment (Sakurai Takashi, personal interview, May 2013). In order for a local ecosystem to be diverse and sustainable, it needs to be part of a larger ecosystem; i.e., it has to be connected with other areas of green space. In contemporary Japanese urban environments, this is not usually the case.

A second reason why shrine forests tend to have limited biodiversity has to do with the tree species found there. According to the contemporary ideal, these forests consist of indigenous, mainly deciduous trees – the trees of the *furusato*, in Miyawaki's terminology. Roughly speaking, Japan is divided into two ecological zones: the northern zone stretches from the Japan Alps to Hokkaido, is

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[179] See the special issue of the *Kyoto Journal* (a Kyoto-based magazine on Asian art, culture and environmental issues) entitled *Biodiversity: Japan's Satoyama and Our Shared Future* (2010).

[180] The UN now officially supports the so-called Satoyama Initiative, which 'promotes and supports socio-ecological production landscapes, which have been shaped over the years by the interaction between people with nature. The Initiative aims to realise societies in harmony with nature where both biodiversity and human well-being are maintained harmoniously' (from http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/; last accessed: May 7, 2013). In COP 10 Decision X/32, 'The sustainable use of biodiversity' (§5-9), it is written that 'the *Satoyama* Initiative [is recognised] as a potentially useful tool to better understand and support human-influenced natural environments for the benefit of biodiversity and human well-being'. On http://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12298 (last accessed: May 7, 2013).

characterised by comparatively cold winters, and has summergreen (deciduous) broad-leaved forests; common tree species include *buna* (beech; *Fugus*), *kaede* (maple; *Acer*) and *nara* (oak; some species of *Quercus*). The southern zone is warmer, and has evergreen broad-leaved forests (or laurel forests); common tree species here include *kusunoki* (camphor tree; *Cinnamomum camphora*), *yabutsubaki* (Japanese camellia; *Camellia japonica*) and various types of *shii* (chinkapin; *Castanopsis*) and *kashi* (evergreen oak; i.e., some species of *Quercus* that are not deciduous) (Miyawaki 2000, 67-72; Shidei 1993, 18-24). As mentioned previously, however, many shrine forests today are made up of coniferous trees such as *sugi*, *hinoki* and various kinds of *matsu* (pine; *Pinus*) (Miyawaki 2000, 62). Many of these were planted in the premodern or modern period. Trees planted in the late Edo, Meiji or Taishō period are now fairly old and have grown high, constituting dark coniferous forests that may evoke feelings of mystery; to many people, visitors and priests alike, these constitute the archetypal shrine forests. However, these coniferous forests let through little sunlight. As a result, they do not usually have many shrubs, weeds and other plants, and have comparatively little species diversity. Hence, ecologists often argue for replacing these coniferous trees by indigenous broad-leaved trees.

However, this is not always appreciated by shrine priests and parishioners, who often associate coniferous trees with shrine worship, mystery and sacredness. For instance, these different priorities and expectations became clear at a project organised by Miyawaki Akira to replant a shrine forest destroyed by the 2011 tsunami in Miyagi prefecture. Miyawaki insisted that broad-leaved trees indigenous to the Tohoku region be planted, after which some formerly active members of the *ujiko* decided to withdraw from the project, as they wanted to replant the pine trees and cypresses they had associated with the shrine from the time they were young (interview with a local shrine priest, May 2013).[181] Likewise, the expectations of shrine priests are not always compatible with those of environmental activists and volunteers. The former may be more interested in appearance, aesthetics, tidiness and so on, whereas the latter tend to be more interested in preserving trees or other species (e.g., birds), and increasing biodiversity (cf. Hasegawa, Okamura and Kōsaka 2010). This may lead to friction, for example when shrine priests decide to chop down high trees considered to be untidy or annoying for other reasons (falling leaves, insects, too much shade, *et cetera*). I will discuss some of these cases in more detail in the following chapters.

9.3.4 *Ritual purity and the importance of matsuri*

Third, Motegi refers to the clearings inside the forests, which are said to be characterised by 'purity'. Here, he says, ritual ceremonies (*matsuri*) have been conducted since ancient times. This is in accordance with the theory proposed by Ueda Masaaki, Umehara Takeshi and Sonoda Minoru that Shinto originated in the (essentially animistic) worship of nature deities taking place at sacred groves.

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[181] I will discuss this shrine in more detail in chapter eleven.

It is interesting that Motegi refers to these places as 'gardens'. As we have seen, Ueda Masaaki and Shidei have made the distinction between 'natural' *mori* and 'cultural' *hayashi*, associating the former with shrine forests. As they are not cultivated, ideally at least, shrine forests are said to be different from human-made gardens. For instance, as claimed in a Shimogamo Jinja tourist brochure, '[u]nlike the carefully pruned Buddhist gardens, the Shinto forest is left to grow large and develop its own habitat' (Shimogamo Jinja not dated b; see chapter ten). However, this conceptual distinction does not seem to be very old, as illustrated by the fact that in the Meiji period the 'forest' of Shimogamo Jinja was referred to by the term *shin'en* (shrine garden), not by (*chinju no*) *mori*. Gotō and Ching suggest that '[i]n the seventh century the Japanese word for garden, *niwa*, was used to indicate the purified place in which are enshrined the gods of nature' (1998, 279). This is in accordance with Motegi's definition. Likewise, Ueda Atsushi writes that ancient *chinju no mori* often had a small garden in their centre. The distinction between 'natural' Shinto *mori* and 'cultivated' Buddhist gardens, therefore, seems to be largely a modern invention.

The reference to purity in this context is not surprising, considering the fact that pollution and ritual purification have been core concerns of shrine practices and related ideologies for centuries (e.g., Teeuwen & Van der Veere 1998). These notions are said to have exercised considerable influence on Japanese culture and society, including the justification of the social exclusion and deprivation of certain groups throughout history, and may also have influenced contemporary notions of (toxic) waste, environmental pollution and public health (Kirby 2011, 102-132). Accordingly, the notion that polluting human activities can provoke the wrath of deities (*tatari*) is by no means new; in fact, it is said to constitute one of the core aspects of traditional shrine worship (Havens 2006, 19). What is new in contemporary Shinto discourse is the extension of these notions to contemporary environmental problems, and the reinterpretation of 'purity' and 'purification' in environmental terms. [182] Significantly, some priests I have talked to suggested that the 2011 tsunami was somehow caused by human action, as environmental pollution may have disturbed the balance between humans, nature and gods, thus giving way to disaster (see chapter eleven). I would therefore argue that Motegi's reference to sacred groves as 'pure gardens' is no coincidence, and concerns not only ritual but also environmental purity. Ueda Atsushi, for instance, has described *chinju no mori* as places that 'purify the air' (*chinju no mori wa kūki o kiyomeru*): as they have many high trees, they produce much oxygen and compensate for CO2 emissions (2007, 18-19). Likewise, shrine forests are historically associated

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[182] The Ōmoto-derived religious movement Sekai Kyūseikyō (see chapters five and seven) apparently takes this association between ritual and environmental purification very seriously. It cooperates with an organisation named 'Effective Microorganisms Laboratory', which has developed products said to purify water, used for cleaning dirty rivers and pools as well as for growing fruit and vegetables. See http://www.izunome.jp/en/action/envi/ (last accessed: July 4, 2013).

with clean water, and often located near water sources (often used for the *temizuya*: the place where shrine visitors wash their hands and rinse their mouth) (ibid., 19-20).[183]

Matsuri constitute another central aspect of shrine traditions. In the broadest sense, the term can be used for any type of ritual ceremony conducted at a shrine. In common parlance, however, it usually refers to shrine festivals. These festivals are conducted periodically (annually, in most cases) at shrines, and typically consist of members of the *ujiko* carrying a portable shrine (*mikoshi*) around the neighbourhood – although they may include all sorts of other practices, including but not limited to various performances of traditional arts (e.g., *kyōgen* or *nō* theatre, or *kagura* ritual dance), parades of old carriages and volunteers dressed in medieval clothes (e.g., the Aoi Matsuri and Jidai Matsuri in Kyoto), fireworks and so on. *Matsuri* are historically connected with particular shrines and neighbourhood communities, and are traditionally conceptualised by scholars as, essentially, devotional practices that not only serve to enhance social cohesion but also provide participants with the opportunity to be spiritually revitalised. As collective, local traditions that are often said to go back many centuries, it is perhaps not surprising that they have captured the attention of many anthropologists, ethnologists and scholars of religion (e.g., Ashkenazi 1993; Bestor 1989; Kawano 2005; Schnell 1999; Sonoda 1975; 1990).

As has often been pointed out, however, in contemporary Japan *matsuri* have become increasingly detached from devotion and worship, at least for most participants and spectators. Indeed, several 'new' *matsuri* have been created by local authorities that are not related to shrines and *kami*, but are largely secular (i.e., independent of any religious institution) affairs (Reader 1991, 72-73). In recent decades, some cities have set up non-shrine-related '*matsuri*' or similar cultural events for the triple purpose of conserving (or, in some cases, inventing) local 'traditional culture', contributing to social cohesion within the city, and attracting paying visitors from elsewhere. For instance, the recently established *Tōhoku rokkonsai* ('Tohoku Six-Soul Festival'), which brings together elements of famous *matsuri* and other cultural traditions from all six provinces of Tohoku, is intended as a translocal and transreligious event concerned with the reconstruction and revitalisation of Tohoku after the 2011 disasters (perhaps significantly, in 2013 the festival was held at the city of Fukushima).[184] Few people in Japan today would classify these events as 'religious'.

Despite these trends, which some might consider as evidence of the 'secularisation' of Japanese society, it has also been suggested that, on the contrary, in post-disaster Japan the devotional aspects of *matsuri* have been rediscovered and reemphasised (Porcu 2012, 102-103). Likewise, Shinto scholars such as Sonoda Minoru and Ueda Masaaki often stress the central importance of *matsuri* for Shinto, in the past as well as today. According to them, the significance of *matsuri* is not limited to the conservation of cultural traditions or the cultivation of a sense of community – although these are

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[183] Cf. Ueda Atsushi's statement that 'originally, a *chinju no mori* was the water source of its village' (2004b, 153). On the historical connection between shrines, sacred forests, water sources and rivers, see also Motozawa 2010; Okamura 2009; Sonoda 1998, 208-210; A. Ueda 2004a, 166-168.

[184] For details, see http://www.rokkon.jp/ (last accessed: June 26, 2013).

certainly important aspects – but also lies in the establishment of good relations between humans and gods, and in spiritual regeneration or even rebirth. Through *matsuri*, it is argued, social bonds between members of a local community are established and strengthened; moreover, by conducting the same rituals as their ancestors, people establish a continuity between the present and the past. *Chinju no mori* are said to constitute the focal point of these local *matsuri* – and, hence, of the community as a whole (M. Ueda 2004a, 31-37; Sonoda 1998, 91-138).

Not surprisingly, then, in recent years *matsuri* are often associated with *chinju no mori*, and reconceptualised as expressions of the ancient intertwinement of Shinto practices, agriculture, and the natural environment. For instance, the documentary series *Nihon wa mori no kuni* (Japan is the land of forests) (Sonoda & Mogi 2006), produced by Shasō Gakkai for the 2005 World Expo in Aichi, begins with an overview of various *matsuri* somehow associated with forests, rivers and rice cultivation. The suggestion made in this documentary series is that *matsuri* constitute ancient expressions of the intimate connection between rural Japanese communities and their natural surroundings – as illustrated by references to fertility, harvests, trees and forests – and, as such, evidence of the claim that Shinto is a tradition of nature worship and ancient ecological knowledge. Likewise, the association between *matsuri* and nature conservation is made by some shrine actors, who have established projects devoted to forest maintenance and education in 'traditional culture' (*dentō bunka*). At Kamigamo Jinja in Kyoto, for example, the organisers of the educational program Afuhi (=Aoi) Project deliberately use the symbols and mythology associated with Aoi Matsuri, one of Japan's most famous festivals (see chapter eleven).

9.3.5   Sacred forests, sacred nation

Fourth, what is interesting about Motegi's definition is that he makes explicit reference to deities, *kamigami* (i.e., the plural of *kami*). He describes *chinju no mori* as places with a particular divine presence, and, accordingly, attributes sacred qualities to them. This is especially significant, as it points to a development I refer to as *the discursive sacralisation of shrine forests*. That is, the shrine forests are not only seen as important because of their ecological properties, nor because of the cultural continuity they represent. By many Shinto scholars and priests, these forests are also seen as *sacred places*, encompassing and complementing the shrine buildings. As such, they are intertwined not only with notions of cultural identity and nature conservation but also with deities and their power. Scholars such as Sonoda, Ueda Masaaki, Ueda Atsushi, Motegi and Kamata have actively contributed to this discursive sacralisation not just of shrines, but also of their forests. As 'sacred places' (*seichi*), they are set apart, both discursively and physically, as something 'other' from ordinary society; transcending the ordinary, they have come to represent important values and virtues, such as harmony, gratitude and

reverence; and their significance – cultural, ecological, and moral – has come to be perceived as non-negotiable.

Moreover, whether categorised as 'religious' or not, a number of spiritual qualities – sacred power, mystical experiences, divine presence and so on – is attributed to them. Rather than as a recent invention, this acknowledgement of the sacred qualities of shrine forests is seen as a return to the original shape of Japanese belief and worship practices (Sonoda 1998, 28-39). Arguably, it is precisely the sacred connotations of *chinju no mori* that give the concept such ideological potential. Although the term is employed and interpreted in various ways, the positive connotations – *matsuri*, natural beauty, mystery, ancient traditions and spirituality – are widely shared. Consequently, the term has been appropriated by a variety of actors, ranging from environmental activists to Jinja Honchō. Few of these would explicitly deny the sacred qualities attributed to *chinju no mori*. Therefore, I believe the popularity of *chinju no mori* is about more than environmental advocacy or cultural nationalism. As discussed in chapter three, Japanese society is characterised by several concurrent sacralisation processes. The popularity of shrine forests arguably is related to some of these processes.

Thus, in recent years, the *chinju no mori* trope has spread in Shinto circles, gaining widespread popularity. We have already seen that the concept is employed differently by different actors: Miyawaki Akira sees them as remaining areas of primeval or climax forest that need to be preserved for ecological reasons; Ueda Atsushi stresses their ecological as well as their cultural relevance, and sees them as an integral part of traditional Japanese landscapes; Ueda Masaaki and Sonoda Minoru are active in the preservation movement and recognise the ecological significance of shrine forests, yet also conceive of them as ancient sacred places that are central to local community building and social cohesion. Recently, however, the concept has also been increasingly employed by scholars and institutions that adhere to what I have distinguished at the 'ethnic' or 'imperial' paradigms – notions of Shinto as the singular, primordial, underlying substratum of Japanese culture, intimately intertwined with the spirit of the nation. Thus, the term now appears regularly in publications by Jinja Honchō (for instance, its weekly newspaper *Jinja shinpō*), as well as scholars directly related to this organisation. Its president, for instance, follows Sonoda in writing that *chinju no mori* constitute the origins of Japanese society, as these were the places where people sensed the presence of the sacred and came together to perform worship ceremonies (*matsuri*) (Tanaka 2011, 10-13).

As mentioned, *chinju no mori* are conceptualised as the dwelling places of deities. Representing a symbolic connection between this world and 'the other world', they are often presented as places capable of evoking numinous experiences. Representatives of the 'spiritual paradigm' (see chapter five) in particular have described sacred forests as mystical, other-worldly places, allowing visitors to directly experience the divine (e.g., Nakazawa 2006; Kamata 2008). Not surprisingly, then, in popular-scientific magazines and books, the association between *chinju no mori* and spiritual power is made regularly (e.g., Ōmori 2010). This discursive sacralisation of *chinju no mori* is not limited to the genre of 'spiritual' books and magazines, however; similar arguments can be found in the writings

of more 'mainstream' Shinto scholars, as well as authors associated with the *chinju no mori* movement. Ueda Masaaki, for instance, has written that

> We know that since ancient times, there has been the belief that *kami* reside in mountains and forests. That is, *mori* were believed to be the sacred mountains (*sei naru yama*) where the *kami* dwell; the sacred forests (*sei naru jurin*) where the *kami* dwell. That is why in *chinju no mori* it was forbidden to cut trees without permission. Because of this fear and humility vis-à-vis the nature in which the *kami* reside, *chinju no mori* have been preserved all over Japan, until today (2011, 4-5; my translation).

In contemporary discourse, *chinju no mori* are conceptualised as primordial sacred places, representing a connection not only between humans, nature and gods, but also between contemporary society and the ancestral past. To most authors using the term in this way, environmental issues are arguably of secondary importance; the main significance of *chinju no mori* lays in the continuity they represent. That does not mean, however, that they merely function as mental or imaginary space; i.e., that they are symbols devoid of physical shape. Quite the contrary: the symbolic significance of *chinju no mori* partly lies in the fact that they exist as *actual physical localities*, that can be visited and experienced, and to which various sacred, cultural and moral qualities can be attributed. As forests, *chinju no mori* are 'real' physical places. More precisely, they are part of the physical landscape of Japan; they belong to the *country*, physically as well as symbolically. They are simultaneously physical *and* mental space, thus constituting what Edward Soja has referred to as 'thirdspace' (1996): they are both real *and* imagined, and as such open to various interpretations and appropriations.

Sacred forests, then, have become intertwined with notions of the country Japan as sacred. We have already seen that scholars such as Umehara Takeshi (1989; 1995; 2009) and Yasuda Yoshinori (1990; 1995) have defined Japan as a 'forest civilisation'. Similarly, shrine priest and Jinja Honchō official Gotō Toshihiko has described *chinju no mori* as the original essence of Shinto worship, referring to them as 'the hometown (i.e., roots) of civilisation' (*bunmei no furusato*) (1993, 11). Given this interpretation of *chinju no mori* as the origins of Japanese society (or even civilisation), it is perhaps not surprising that they have also been incorporated into contemporary discourse on Japan as *shinkoku* or *kami-no-kuni*: the land of the gods. This is a concept that goes back to the medieval period, when it was embedded in Buddhist cosmology (Kuroda 1996). In the modern period, however, it was identified with Shinto, and became part of nationalist discourse on Japan as a unique, divinely elected nation. In the postwar period, the term has been controversial, as it is often associated with conservative and neo-imperialist ideology. Hence, when former prime minister Mori Yoshirō declared that 'this land of Japan is the land of the *kami* (*kami no kuni*), with the imperial constitution at its core' in a speech in 2000, this caused such an uproar that he was eventually forced to resign (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 201-202).

Nevertheless, the term can be used in various ways, not all of which are explicitly political. It continues to be used in discourse on Shinto, also in connection with *chinju no mori*.[185] For instance, the aforementioned Gotō, who has written about sacred forests in relation to Shinto, referred to Japan as *shinkoku* (1993, 202). More recently, the popular-scientific magazine *Voice Style Plus* – which has articles on shrines, spiritual issues, and (the history of) sacred forests – had an entire issue devoted to the topic of 'Japan, land of the gods' (*kamigami no kuni, Nihon*) (Ōmori 2009). Thus, whether politicised or not, the notion that the country Japan is somehow divine, as it is the sole dwelling place of the myriad deities (*yaoyorozu no kami*), lingers on.

In all these works, the sacredness of forests does not merely concern the presence of deities: forests are sacred because they are seen as vestiges of an imaginary golden age, characterised by purity and harmony, and as the original essence of the nation. This original essence, however, is nearly forgotten as a result of 'modernisation' and 'technological progress', which are said to have brought about moral decline, environmental problems, and the decline of traditional faith. Such, at least, is the historical narrative often presented in works on sacred forests – as well as, in my experience, in ordinary conversation with shrine priests and other officials. Hence, calls for the preservation of *chinju no mori* often go together with nostalgic deplorations of the state of Japanese society and culture. Yamaori Tetsuo, for instance, has used the metaphor of the 'crying *chinju no mori*' to describe today's Japanese' loss of 'their' traditional faith (2001). Likewise, Sonoda Minoru has explicitly associated the degradation of the environment with individualisation, the erosion of family life, and increasing crime rates, writing that

> The period of rapid economic growth from the 1960s to the 1980s has done particularly severe damage to the country's natural environment through overdevelopment and frequent pollution. The price of consumerism and material wealth has been paid in the form of the disintegration of 'hometown communities' and spiritual confusion, and in the 1990s this has undoubtedly been one of the reasons for the frequent occurrence throughout Japanese society of events that border on the pathological [e.g., violent murders] (Sonoda 2000, 44; cf. Sonoda & Tabuchi 2006).

Thus, the decline in the number of *chinju no mori*, and the overall deterioration of the natural environment, are seen as symptomatic for the current state of Japanese society as a whole. Technological and economical 'progress' are criticised for bringing about both environmental destruction and moral decline (Sonoda 1998, 166-167, 191-192).

Similar to Sonoda, Ueda Masaaki and Umehara Takeshi have repeatedly condemned the materialism and egoism supposedly characteristic of the post-war bubble economy, and advocated a return to 'traditional' values – i.e., those associated with the 'religion of the forest' – as a prerequisite for overcoming the contemporary crisis. The solution, it is suggested, lies in the revitalisation of Japan's 'original' civilisation, which is built on the notion of forests as sacred – and, subsequently, its

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[185] For a historical discussion of the concept *shinkoku*, see Satō 2006.

spread internationally (e.g., M. Ueda 2004b, 16-17; Umehara 2009, 53-54; cf. Yasuda 1990). Thus, in the narratives of Sonoda, Ueda, Umehara and similar thinkers, the mythical ancient history is presented as an ecological golden age, and juxtaposed with the current age of decay and destruction. The only solution for overcoming the present crisis and (re)establishing an ecologically and ethically sustainable society is a return to (or, at least, a revitalisation of) ancient values and practices pertaining to sacred forests. Indeed, it may be argued that this is the basic historical narrative underlying most expressions of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm – ranging from individual shrine priests' visions of their shrines' future role in society, to the writings of well-known philosophers and religious studies scholars, to contemporary Shinto converts abroad.

As the above paragraphs make clear, the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is embedded within wider nationalist discourse, taking the shape of moral and cultural pessimism and even, in some cases, millenarianism. That does not mean that the environmental concerns expressed by its advocates are not sincere, nor does it tell us anything about the ecological importance of shrine forest preservation *per se*. Indeed, environmental advocacy may very well be compatible with moral conservatism and cultural nationalism. It does mean, however, that Shinto-related environmental ideas and practices are influenced by, and take shape in the context of, ongoing discourse on Japanese national identity and society.

Levinger and Lytle (2001) have demonstrated that myths of a past golden age (whether ecological, cultural, social, linguistic, racial, moral or spiritual) can have significant mobilising potential. If one accepts the preposition that once upon a time the situation was much better than today, it also follows that, provided that the causes of decline are known and removed, this situation can be recovered. Such beliefs, of course, can give way to violence – say, if the presence of a different ethnic or religious community is seen as the cause of decline – but this is not necessarily always the case, for they can also motivate people to become active in more constructive ways. As for *chinju no mori*: if the generally deplorable state of sacred forests is seen as symptomatic of the state of Japanese society as a whole, so the preservation of *chinju no mori* symbolises the preservation of traditional Japanese culture and morality. Thus, Sonoda applauds the fact that

> local groups throughout Japan are making persistent efforts to construct, restore or maintain old and new 'hometown communities'. (…) The shrine groves that more than eighty thousand shrines in Japan have preserved from the countless pressures of centuries, and the religious symbolism of shrine fields and kami mountains are being rediscovered and revalued as expressions of Japan's ancient animistic view of life. This suggests new possibilities for shrine life in the future (2000, 45).

The efforts referred to by Sonoda include various local projects designed to revitalise local communities by organising social and cultural events, restoring traditional village- or cityscapes, planting trees and so on. Called *komyunitii-zukuri* (community-making), in the past two decades or so these projects have been set up all over the country, usually run by volunteers (Marmignon 2012;

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Sorensen & Funck 2007). They also include projects set up for the restoration and maintenance of both *chinju no mori* and *satoyama* – again, usually run by local volunteers, although shrines and shrine priests may be involved in the organisation. In the next two chapters, I will discuss some of these projects in more detail.

Finally, there are various educational projects, designed to teach people (in particular children) about both nature and 'traditional culture' (*dentō bunka*) – usually seen as fully compatible, since 'love of nature' is widely considered to be an integral part of traditional Japanese culture (whether such a culturally mediated 'love of nature' also leads to environmental knowledge is a question that is not commonly addressed). Children, after all, are the next generation, so they have to be taught the significance of *chinju no mori*. Hence, many shrine-based projects today involve educational events, ranging from scouting groups to tree-planting, and from guided shrine forest walks to courses in making 'traditional' Japanese food. Again, we see that the significance of *chinju no mori* extends well beyond environmental education proper. Shrine forests, it is often argued, should play a central part in teaching children not only the importance of protecting nature, but also of preserving traditional culture, and of maintaining good relations with neighbours. As vestiges of Japanese tradition, they are seen as places where children can be socialised as members of their community – and, ultimately, as patriotic and morally responsible citizens (*Jinja shinpō* 1982b; Jinja Honchō 1999; Tamura 1999; cf. Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 209). *Chinju no mori* constitute social space indeed.

9.3.6 The ancestral past

Last but not least, Motegi describes *chinju no mori* as the places where the ancestors lived and joined in worship. It is no coincidence that he mentions the ancestors in this context. As we have seen, *chinju no mori* possess significant symbolic capital. They have come to represent aspects of the (ancient) past, as it is memorised and idealised by contemporary Japanese scholars, priests and writers. Using Lefebvre's triadic model, we could say that the sacralisation of *chinju no mori* – i.e., the configuration (or production) of *chinju no mori* as 'sacred space' – takes place on three levels: physical, mental, and social. On all these three levels, shrine forests are discursively associated with the past. First, continuity between present and past is seen to lie in the physical shape of the forests: their 'natural' (as opposed to artificial) character, their species composition, the continuous presence of a shrine in the forest, the location and shape of the *torii* and shrine buildings, and so on. Hence, most sources stress historical continuity, while downplaying physical, architectural and ecological change. Paradoxically, in recent years, some shrine forests have been 'restored' to what was supposedly their 'original' shape; these place-making processes, however, may consist of significant changes to the existing landscape and species composition. Tadasu no Mori, the forest of Shimogamo Jinja, is one such example, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Second, continuity lies in the symbolic practices carried out in the forest, and the traditional culture they are said to represent. *Chinju no mori* are conceptualised as remnants of an idealised ancient society, characterised by social and ecological harmony, gratitude and reverence. Accordingly, the preservation of practices carried out at these shrines is often implicitly equated with the conservation of 'traditional' or 'original' Japanese culture. This culture consists of rituals performed for deities (food offerings, *norito* recitations, purification rituals), as well as annual or seasonal *matsuri* festivals. The mental space of *chinju no mori*, it may be argued, is the space of these symbolic practices, which are generally perceived as very old, if not primordial and transhistorical.[186]

Third, *chinju no mori* constitute social space. That is, they are places where social relations are established, enacted and negotiated. First of all, these social relations concern various people participating in shrine rituals (or in other ways associated with the shrine forest), such as shrine priests (of various ranks),[187] financial sponsors, (local) authorities, members of the *ujiko*, volunteers doing forest maintenance work and so on. But they also concern the vertical relationships between humans and deities. And finally, they concern the relations between people of different generations. As elsewhere in Asia, communication with, commemoration of, and the offering of ritual gifts to ancestral spirits plays a central part in many Japanese devotional and ritual practices. Even though in modern Japan such rituals are more commonly associated with Buddhism than with Shinto, ancestors are by no means absent from shrine-related practices and beliefs.

In fact, Motegi's reference to ancestral practices is very much in accordance with contemporary Shinto ideology, which stresses the importance of reverence for, and continuity with, the ancestors. This is perhaps not surprising, considering the fact that the *kami* themselves are often conceptualised as the nation's primordial ancestors. As Ueda Kenji has written,

> [F]or the Shinto faith, ancestors do not simply die. A parent is not seen directly as a *kami* but only becomes an object of worship as an ancestral spirit. This fosters the idea that our life is a life as children of the *kami* and that as such we can eventually detect it in the will of the gods. The ancestral *kami* who gave birth to the land and shaped it have blessed it, so that the life of all those who live in it flourish in peace. (…) The idea of what a human being should be, therefore, has to be formed with feelings of respect for and gratefulness towards the *kami*, ancestors, and parents, in a spirit that takes pleasure in work and considers it a matter of basic participation in history to hand down the way of life to one's descendants. (…) All beings, and above all humans, receive their life in historical and social relatedness. (…) Responsibility and service to the community may be said to be rooted in our humanity as children of the *kami* (2011, 545).

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[186] In reality, however, just like all other practices, ritual practices are subject to historical change – in terms of shape as well as meaning. Cf. Breen and Teeuwen's discussion of the various historical transformations of one particular ritual ceremony (2010, 168-198).

[187] For an illustration of the social dynamics at work among the clergy of one particular Shinto shrine (Kamigamo Jinja in Kyoto), see Nelson 2000, 123-163.

In accordance with the famous doctrine that Shinto is a tradition devoid of doctrine, there is no single authoritative theological narrative concerning the nature of the relationship between *kami* and ancestors. In modern Shinto, however, there appears to be at least some overlap between the two categories. It has been argued that the reinterpretation of Shinto as some sort of Confucian-style (yet indigenous Japanese) ancestor worship, and the equation of *kami* with ancestral spirits, was largely a Meiji-period invention rather than an integral aspect of 'ancient' Japanese beliefs. These ideas were developed by scholars such as Hirata Atsutane and, later, Yanagita Kunio, and they served the modern imperial system, in which Shinto was configured as a non-religious ancestral cult in accordance with Confucian and nativist ideology (see Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 8-9, 63; cf. H. Satō 2008). But the understanding of *kami* as, ultimately, ancestral spirits – or, put differently, the belief that ancestral spirits move on to become (part of) *kami* – has become naturalised, and is now often presented as an integral part of ancient 'Shinto' and popular beliefs. Most famously, at Yasukuni Jinja, the spirits of soldiers, war victims and aggressors are collectively enshrined as a single *kami* that, according to the currently dominant interpretation, cannot be divided. Less controversially, some of today's most popular deities are said to have been humans, who were enshrined after their death.[188] Similarly, it is argued that local deities called *oyagami*, *ubusunanokami* or *ujigami* (who, in many cases, were later associated or equated with *chinjugami*) were once ancestral spirits promoted to the status of protective deities (M. Ueda 2004a, 21, 25-28). Drawing on the works of Norinaga and Yanagita, Sonoda has argued that ancient 'Shinto' was much more concerned with death and the afterlife than modern Shinto: rather than being ontologically separate, there was a certain continuity between the living, the dead, and the world of deities; accordingly, he writes, ancestral spirits could move on to become *kami* (1997, 55-71; 1998, 46-51). To what extent this interpretation is historically accurate may be subject to debate, however.

In any case, although not necessarily the direct object of shrine worship, ancestors continue to feature prominently in contemporary discourse on Shinto and *chinju no mori*. As I said, *chinju no mori* constitute social space. In addition to being a space where relationships between living people take shape, however, they are also places where people establish a symbolic continuity with their ancestors through ritual practices, which are said to have been transmitted since ancient times. Perhaps unsurprisingly, authors stressing the importance of respect for the ancestors, and of preserving continuity with the past as a prerequisite for community cohesion, often lament the present age, which they associate with individualisation and a nationwide lack of morality and cultural knowhow. Thus, the celebration of ancestral practices and beliefs – either real or imagined – often goes together with the notions of cultural and moral decline discussed above.

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[188] For instance, Tenjin, the god of education worshipped at Tenmangū shrines, was the scholar and politician Sugawara no Michizane (845-903); Hachiman, the god of war worshipped at Hachimangū shrines, is often identified with the legendary Emperor Ōjin (third century); and the deities enshrined at Meiji Jingū are Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shōken.

PART IV   SHRINE FOREST STORIES

10.   SHRINE FORESTS AND NATURE CONVERSATION

10.1   Shimogamo Jinja and Tadasu no Mori

10.1.1   The shrine and its forest

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the core themes and concepts characteristic of contemporary discourse on Shinto, nature and the environment. In the last part of this study, I will examine different ways in which this discourse has been enacted, negotiated, challenged and influenced by shrine practices. In other words, I will look at actual shrine forests, and the projects that have been developed there. My discussion is based on eight case studies, all of which share a certain family resemblance. There are several similarities between (some of) these shrine forests and projects, but also some noteworthy differences. I have divided these cases into two categories. First, in this chapter, I will examine projects whose primary focus is on nature conservation and related spatial practices. In the next chapter, I will move on to discuss some projects that are also related to nature conservation, but where the focus is arguably more on the revitalisation of cultural practices and/or the nation as a whole. I will begin by looking at one of the most famous *chinju no mori*, Tadasu no Mori in Kyoto, and the forest reconstruction project carried out there. This is followed by discussions of, respectively, Shasō Gakkai (which was founded based on the example of Tadasu no Mori, hence my discussion to discuss them in this order), Gosho Komataki Jinja in Ibaraki prefecture (another early example of a shrine forest preservation project), and a recent nature conservation project taking place at Shiroyama Hachimangū in Nagoya. In the following chapter, I will discuss projects at Meiji Jingū and Kamigamo Jinja, followed by an examination of spatial and discursive practices related to the forests of Ise. Finally, I will look at shrine- and shrine forest-related responses to the natural disasters of 2011.

One of the first systematic attempts at shrine forest conservation took place at Shimogamo Jinja. Located in Kyoto, at the place where the Kamogawa and Takanogawa rivers converge, Shimogamo Jinja is one of Japan's most famous shrines. It is officially known as Kamo Mioya Jinja, and it is regarded as one of Kyoto's oldest shrines. According to shrine mythology, it was founded in the first century BCE, but in reality it probably dates from the sixth or seventh century CE. In any case, the first shrine buildings are said to have been constructed during the reign of Emperor Tenmu (675-686); whether or not worship practices were conducted at the location of the shrine during the prehistorical period is subject to speculation. Both Shimogamo Jinja and its sister shrine Kamigamo Jinja (Kamo Wakeikazuchi Jinja) are historically connected with the Kamo lineage, one of the most powerful lineages in Kyoto; their deities are related, and may have originally been Kamo ancestral deities (*ujigami*) that later came to be associated with episodes and deities from the official imperial

mythology.[189] In the Heian period, the Kamo shrines were among the most powerful shrines in the country, intimately connected with the imperial cult (see Grapard 2000, 74-75).

Shimogamo Jinja's main festival, Aoi Matsuri (co-organised with Kamigamo Jinja) is also said to go back to the Heian period, or even predate it; references to the shrine and its *matsuri* can be found in eighth-century texts (M. Ueda 2003, 12). The festival continues to be conducted annually, and is now considered one of Kyoto's three great *matsuri* (together with the Gion Matsuri and Jidai Matsuri). Shimogamo Jinja is also associated with medieval Japanese literature: Aoi Matsuri is mentioned in *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, 11th century), and a replica of the ten-foot-square hut where Kamo no Chōmei (1155-1216) wrote his classic meditation on disaster and suffering, the *Hōjōki* (1212), is built at the site of the auxiliary shrine Kawai Jinja. Because of its long history and the various cultural traditions it has preserved, Shimogamo Jinja was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994. Today, it attracts significant numbers of tourists, both domestic and foreign. Recently, Shimogamo Jinja has also become a popular *powerspot*: in particular, two romantically intertwined *shinboku* trees (located on the left side of the *sandō*, right before the gate to the main shrine buildings) are often visited by young people praying for *en-musubi* (i.e., love relationships).

In addition to its shrine history, *matsuri* and spiritual power, Shimogamo Jinja is well known for its forest, Tadasu no Mori (see figures four and five). The following text from a tourist pamphlet illustrates the various qualities attributed to this small forest:

> In the middle of Japan's ancient capital, Kyoto, at the convergence of the Takano and Kamo rivers, lies a plot of old forest. A World Heritage [Site], this forest – Tadasu no Mori – harbors a vivid wild life. Chinese nettle trees, zelkova trees, cherries, maples, willows, some over 600 years old, provide sanctuary for many rare species of birds, bugs and butterflies. Artists pause by the shaded river bed to sketch a rare mushroom just unfurling, or paint the autumn colors. Young mothers stroll their toddlers through the quiet woods. (…) The visitor walking along the [shrine] approach (*sandō*) through the trees is invited to sense the mystic depth of nature, filled with a myriad *kami* (gods, or life spirits) (Shimogamo Jinja not dated b).

Written with the character meaning 'to investigate' or 'to verify', the origins and original meaning of the forest name are unclear. 'Tadasu no mori' is said to mean 'forest of truth', 'forest of justice', or 'forest of the delta'; alternatively, the term may refer to the 'clear water' flowing through the forest, or it may be derived from the *tade* (water pepper) growing there in the past (Cali & Dougill 2013, 119-122; Kyōjō 2010, 3; M. Ueda 2003, 22). Thus, nobody knows for sure what the name originally meant, and how it was assigned. Today, the forest has a size of approximately 12.4 ha (described as 'three times the size of [baseball stadium] Tokyo Dome' in most Japanese sources [e.g.,

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[189] The deities enshrined at Shimogamo Jinja are Kamo Taketsunumi no mikoto – the Kamo lineage's *ujigami*, he is also identified with the *yatagarasu* (three-legged crow) that guided the mythical first emperor Jinmu from Kumano to Yamato (as narrated in the *Kojiki*) – and his daughter, Tamayorihime no mikoto. The latter is believed to be the mother of the god of thunder, Kamo Wakeikazuchi, who is enshrined at Kamigamo Jinja.

M. Ueda 2003, 20]), which is much smaller than it was in the past. According to Ueda, in ancient times, the forest had a size of 4.95 km² (2003, 20).[190] Whether or not that number is correct, it is clear that even in the early Shōwa period the forest was much bigger than today: the area south of Mikage Street, for instance, used to belong to Tadasu no Mori, but is now the location of the Kyoto Family Court (Shidei 1993, 16-18).

In any case, Tadasu no Mori is undoubtedly one of Japan's most famous shrine forests. It is said to have been preserved since ancient times, mentioned in Heian-period sources, and drawn on medieval maps (Araki 2003, 44-47). Representing such historical continuity, it is perhaps not surprising that Tadasu no Mori is often referred to as a 'primeval forest' (*genseirin*). For instance, it has been described as a place that has retained aspects of Kyoto's *genfūkei* ('primeval landscape' or 'primal scene'),[191] which 'has remained as a primeval forest in the middle of Kyoto until the present age' (Inamori 2003, 6-7). Likewise, Ueda Masaaki has referred to Tadasu no Mori as 'a primeval forest', and stated that 'this is truly a forest in the original meaning of the word *mori*' (M. Ueda 2003, 20) – i.e., 'natural', deep, mysterious, and *not* human-made (cf. Shidei 1993).

It comes as no surprise, then, that Tadasu no Mori is often seen as the prototype of a *chinju no mori*: it has been at its current location for many centuries, representing ecological as well as cultural continuity with the (ancient) past; it is a 'sacred' place, intimately connected with the shrine, where worship practices are said to have been conducted incessantly since early history; and it is a *mori*, composed of autochthonous broad-leaved trees, rather than an artificial *hayashi* or a Meiji-period shrine forest largely made up of 'foreign' coniferous trees. Moreover, the forest is seen as a reminder of the 'traditional Japanese gratitude to nature', which 'people today have forgotten', causing widespread environmental destruction; the return to this spirit of gratitude (as symbolised by the continuous presence of Tadasu no Mori, and the sacred qualities attributed to it) is seen as 'the first step towards environmental conservation' (Sen 2003).

Be that as it may, the often-heard claim that Tadasu no Mori is a primeval forest is incorrect. As any visitor can see, the forest is full of recently-planted, young trees, neatly provided with a sign mentioning the species and sometimes the name of its sponsor. The forest is not 'kept wild', but maintained by trained foresters; as in other shrines, the main path is swept, and some trees are covered with plastic to protect them against parasites. In addition to recent tree-planting activities and maintenance work, it is clear that the forest has experienced major disturbances at different periods in history, and has been influenced profoundly by human activities. There is some historical evidence of

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[190] I.e., 495 ha: more than 40 times its current size. I am not sure to what Ueda's source is. This may have been the total size of the lands belonging to the shrine at some point in history, but in all likelihood that included fields and rice paddies as well as woodland. Incidentally, Ueda speaks of '4,950,000 km²', but that must be a mistake; I assume he means 4,950,000 m², which equals 4.95 km².

[191] The term *genfūkei* may be translated as 'original landscape'. It does not only apply to the physical landscape, but also to mental notions of primordial space. As such, it is similar to the German concept *Urlandschaft* (of which it may have been a translation), which not only has physical connotations but is also associated with early memories, as well as notions of nationhood.

typhoons and battles in the medieval period, which have caused the destruction of parts of the forest (Kyōjō 2010, 3-4). Most noteworthy, during the Ōnin War (1467-1477), the forest was almost completely burnt down, together with the shrine itself (ibid., 4). The newly replanted forest seems to have been made up of coniferous trees, at least partly, as evidenced by late-medieval and pre-modern illustrations of the shrine forest showing pine trees (Shidei 1993, 25-26). Thus, Tadasu no Mori has not always been the broad-leaved forest it is today: it has been a pine forest for at least some periods in history (Katō 2003, 125).

Figure 4: Tadasu no Mori

Figure 5: Forest maintenance work at Tadasu no Mori

Today, there are few coniferous trees left; the broad-leaved *keyaki* (*Zelkova serrata*), *mukunoki* (*Aphanante aspera*) and *enoki* (*Celtis sinensis*) that make up most of the forest now are said to be part of the natural vegetation of the area. As such, today's forest is similar to what Shidei has called 'the shape of the original natural forest' (*honrai no shizenrin no sugata*) (1993, 27). However, the *kusunoki* that make up more than 25% of all trees in the forest – compared to approximately 20% *enoki*, 19% *mukunoki* and 11.5% *keyaki* (Morimoto 2003, 146) – were planted after the Muroto typhoon and subsequent floods of 1934, which caused serious damage to the forest, uprooting 70% of all trees (Araki 2003, 47-48; Morimoto 2003, 143-147). As Morimoto points out, *kusunoki* are allochthonous to the region, coming from warmer regions further south, and they have changed the forest ecology significantly. In addition, there have been changes in plant composition in recent decades due to desiccation, global warming and ecological isolation (ibid., 147-149). One particularly notable ecological change is the fact that the shrine's core symbol, *futaba aoi* (*Asarum caulescens*; see the section on Kamigamo Jinja and Afuhi Project in the next chapter) has almost completely disappeared from the forest (ibid., 147).

In sum, Tadasu no Mori is not a primeval forest, but a 'semi-natural forest' (*hanshizenteki na mori*) (ibid., 144). Or, as Yoshida writes, it is 'a shrine forest (*shasōrin*), *in between* a park and a natural forest'; i.e., an 'urban forest (*toshirin*)' (2003, 136; my translation, my emphasis). Rather than a *mori* in Ueda and Shidei's use of the term (i.e., deep, untouched and mysterious), then, Tadasu no Mori constitutes a city forest, and as such it is intimately intertwined with – and influenced by – the human communities living around it.

10.1.2 The Tadasu no Mori Foundation

Although the label 'primeval forest' is inaccurate, and although the extent to which it constitutes a 'natural forest' is debatable, it is an undeniable fact that Tadasu no Mori occupies a prominent position in the (historical) geography of Kyoto. Mentioned in the *Tale of Genji* and classical poems, the forest figures prominently in collective memories, in particular in imaginations of the Heian period. As the site of one of Kyoto's most-visited shrines and one of its best-known *matsuri*, Tadasu no Mori carries profound symbolic capital. As such, the forest has long been the focal point of various cultural and social activities. Accordingly, forest conservation and maintenance activities have been carried out at Tadasu no Mori for a long time, and several other shrines have tried to follow the example set by Shimogamo Jinja. It is no coincidence that, in addition to theoretical contributions by 'the usual suspects' (Miyawaki, Sonoda, Ueda Masaaki and Ueda Atsushi), the inaugural conference of Shasō Gakkai included a paper on the history and current situation of Tadasu no Mori (Araki 2003): the projects carried out here were an important source of inspiration for the emerging *chinju no mori* movement.

Forest preservation activities at Shimogamo Jinja are said to go back as far as 1887, when an organisation was founded for forest maintenance, conducted by ordinary citizens: the Shimogamo Jinja Shin'en Hozonkai ('Shimogamo Jinja shrine garden preservation association') (Araki 2003, 48; Shimogamo Jinja not dated a, 8).[192] In the Meiji and Taishō periods, planting and replanting shrine forests came to be seen as ways to express patriotism and to engage citizens with shrines. Paradoxically, this was around the same period that the *jinja gōshi* policy was implemented, and many local shrine forests disappeared. This policy, however, primarily affected small rural shrines, whereas tree-planting activities mainly took place at (large) imperial shrines, such as Kashihara Jingū and Meiji Jingū (Araki 2003, 49). In all likelihood, the forest-related activities taking place at Shimogamo Jinja at the time should be interpreted in the context of this development – that is, tree-planting in forests had become a symbolic practice through which citizens could engage with the newly established imperial Shinto – rather than as some sort of early environmentalist project.

In 1952, the shrine forest organisation was restructured, and renamed 'Tadasu no Mori Hoshōkai' ('Tadasu no Mori conservation association'); it continued its forest maintenance activities. In 1980, it was reorganised again. It was officially registered as a foundation, reportedly in order to make it more solid economically (Shimogamo Jinja not dated a, 8), and received the new name 'Tadasu no Mori Kenshōkai' ('association for honouring Tadasu no Mori'). Kyōjō summarises the original purpose of this foundation as follows: 'conducting scientific research, and doing repair work on the streams that have dried up; organising activities in which citizens participate proactively, such as planting trees and cleaning the forest; conducting preservation and maintenance work by means of the voluntary contributions of ordinary people' (2010, 4; my translation). Recently, the organisation was restructured once again: in 2009, it became a 'public interest incorporated foundation' (*kōeki zaidan hōjin*) and was renamed Sekai Isan Kamo Mioya Jinja Keidai Tadasu no Mori Hozonkai ('Association for the conservation of Tadasu no Mori on the precincts of World Heritage Site Kamo Mioya Jinja'), usually abbreviated as Tadasu no Mori Hozonkai ('Tadasu no Mori conservation association') or simply Tadasu no Mori Zaidan ('Tadasu no Mori foundation'). This has been described as a 'new start': the foundation's legal status changed, new fundraising activities were employed, and new brochures and magazines were published.

Today, the Tadasu no Mori Zaidan employs various activities. First of all, it is active in forest conservation. This is not limited to maintenance activities such as pruning, weeding and taking measures to protect trees against insects and diseases, as is common in shrines throughout the country (at least those that can afford to spend money on these things). Forest conservation also concerns measures to preserve animal and plant species, and protect the forest environment in general (e.g., keep it clean from litter). Second, the organisation actively promotes the conservation of traditional

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[192] Interestingly, Tadasu no Mori was here referred to as a *shin'en*: a shrine garden. The association of shrines with 'natural' forests – as opposed to 'artificial' parks and gardens – typical of contemporary discourse apparently was not yet common.

culture; in particular, shrine architecture and *matsuri*. Third, it supports archaeological research in the forest. Fourth, informed by this research, it is active in landscape design. That is, the forest is 'preserved' by 'restoring' it to the shape it supposedly had in ancient times. And fifth, the foundation organises all sorts of educational and cultural activities, ranging from public lectures and scouting groups to flea markets and open-air concerts.

As a foundation, Tadasu no Mori is institutionally independent from the shrine, which is a *shūkyō hōjin* ('religious juridical person'). This makes it possible to receive support from local authorities, conservation funds and the like, which would not be possible if the activities were employed by the shrine directly, as in that case it would violate the constitutional separation of religion and state (cf. Sagai 2013, 95). In reality, however, the two organisations cooperate closely: unlike some other shrine forest projects, which are completely run by non-clergy volunteers (e.g., Mori-zukuri Kaigi in Nagoya, discussed later in this chapter), some of Shimogamo Jinja's shrine priests are actively involved in the foundation's work. These include Sagai Tatsuru and Kyōjō Hiroki, both of whom are priests spending a significant proportion of their working time on activities related to the forest, such as research and dissemination (e.g., Kyōjō 2010; Sagai 2013). In fact, both are among the most environmentally-oriented Shinto priests I have talked to. For instance, Sagai explicitly stated that, in his opinion, environmental issues are one of today's most urgent concerns; hence, in the twenty-first century, they should constitute one of shrine Shinto's top priorities (interview, March 2011). According to him, Shinto is a 'primal religion' (*genshi shūkyō*) intimately intertwined with the natural environment; the 'original shape' of this religion has been preserved at Tadasu no Mori, he suggests (Sagai 2013, 90, 97). As 'Shinto is an ethnic religion that was born in the middle of the abundant natural environment' (*yutaka na shizen kankyō no naka kara tanjō shita minzoku shūkyō*) (ibid., 97), it is said to have an important responsibility in teaching people today how to relate to the environment.

As we have seen, these notions are commonly shared by representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. Reappropriating classical social-evolutionist classification models, scholars such as Umehara Takeshi, Kamata Tōji and Sonoda Minoru have identified Shinto with other 'primal', 'primitive' or 'indigenous' religions worldwide – e.g., Celtic, Native American and Ainu traditions. As we have seen, this is typical of the 'religious environmentalist paradigm', and not limited to Japan. Likewise, the notion that this tradition has important ecological knowledge containing solutions for today's environmental problems is widely shared. What is interesting about priests like Sagai is that they do not merely express their concern for environmental issues, but also try to make concrete attempts to act on it. After all, very few people in the shrine world today would deny the statement that Shinto is a tradition stressing gratitude and reverence for nature, which provides an antidote to social as well as environmental problems. That does not mean, however, that many actually consider this a priority, let alone actively implement policies for this purpose or organise environmental conservation activities. Arguably, then, notions of Shinto as an 'environmental religion'

are primarily substantiated and materialised by (some) local actors, who tend to focus on local environmental issues rather than complicated large-scale problems. Yet, as local conservation projects, they may have a significant (if small-scale) environmental impact.

Today, Tadasu no Mori faces some serious environmental challenges, which the Tadasu no Mori Zaidan is trying to tackle. One of these problems is the high number of trees that have died in recent years. Sagai lists four causes for this: the old age of many of the trees, and the lack of young trees; the dominance of *kusunoki*, at the expense of other broad-leaved trees; the soil getting harder (i.e., less porous) as a result of people and cars treading on it; and the low level of the groundwater. Possible measures to solve these problems are, respectively, tree-planting activities (which take place regularly, and are usually carried out be volunteers);[193] felling *kusunoki* (that, at least, was the opinion of Shidei and his research group; Sagai does not make clear whether or not this has actually been done); demarcating 'human space' and 'sacred space' (i.e., restricting access to certain 'sacred' parts of the forest), and improving the quality of the soil; and reconstructing ancient streams, so as to have more water (2013, 95). Another problem he could have mentioned is the death of various oak-related trees (*Quercus*, *Castanopsis* etc.), which have been eaten by *kashi-no-naga-kikuimushi* (*Platypus quercivorus*; a type of ambrosia beetle). Reportedly, these beetles have caused serious damage in forests in and around Kyoto, and approximately 100 trees in Tadasu no Mori are affected by them; in order to prevent further damage, many trees are now wrapped in plastic (*Tadasu no Mori* 2010a). Other problems are related to waste, pollution, and the ecological impact of climate change (Shimogamo Jinja not dated a, 8-9). Needless to say, not all of these problems are easily solved: while litter may be cleaned by helpful volunteers, understanding and dealing with the effects of climate change is significantly more complicated and challenging.

10.1.3 Recreating the landscape of the past

Although the shrine buildings of Shimogamo Jinja were not constructed until the sixth or seventh century, shrine publications assert that its history as a sacred place goes back much further. The argument is that 'nature deities' were already worshipped at this location in the Jōmon period. Strategically located at the confluence of two rivers in the middle of a valley, and crisscrossed by small streams providing clear drinking water, it seems likely that this area was already inhabited in

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[193] On April 29, 2010, the 'Tadasu no Mori citizens tree-planting ceremony' (*Tadasu no Mori shimin shokujusai*) took place for the twentieth time. The trees planted by the volunteers (among whom were many young children and their parents) were *mukunoki*, *enoki* and *keyaki* (which, as we have seen, are common in Tadasu no Mori), as well as the less common *momiji* (*Acer palmatum* or Japanese maple; well-known for its red leaves in autumn) and *katsura* (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*); *kusunoki* and coniferous trees were absent (*Tadasu no Mori* 2010b). It is no coincidence that the tree-planting day takes place on April 29, as this is the national holiday commemorating the late emperor Hirohito *(Shōwa no hi)*. In the late Shōwa period, the emperor regularly engaged in tree-planting activities. Indeed, it may be argued that tree-planting is a practice that is conducted not merely for the purpose of nature conservation; it is also a symbolic educational practice, signifying the cultivation of personalities and patriotic virtues such as 'love of nature'.

prehistorical times. As Sagai argues, given the crucial importance of clean drinking water for survival, places providing such water – streams, sources and waterfalls – were often set apart as sacred, and turned into objects of worship (2013, 97). The same, it is argued, applies to Tadasu no Mori, whose sacredness is said to have been related to the abundance of clear water. Ueda Masaaki also suggests that 'water sources or rivers were important in *chinju no mori*, as sacred sites where ceremonies (*matsuri*) took place', and that forests with 'sacred water' became worship sites (M. Ueda 2010, 1; cf. Motozawa 2010).

Claims concerning the sacred status of Tadasu no Mori in the Jōmon period are legitimised by archaeological findings. Since 1990, archaeological excavations have taken place at various locations in the forest. Among the findings were objects from the Jōmon, Yayoi and Kofun periods. These include jars, remnants of statues, and pebbles, which are said to have been used in worship ceremonies (perhaps significantly, white pebbles are still used in some other shrines claiming to go back to ancient times, such as Ise Jingū and Atsuta Jingū). There is also the remnant of a structure that looks like a well. Today, some of the archaeological findings – pebbles, in particular – are exhibited at clearly demarcated open parts of the forest, together with information panels stating that these were the sites of prehistorical places of worship. However, while constituting evidence of prehistoric habitation (and perhaps even of worship practices, in whatever shape), the archaeological findings do not tell us much about the actual ritual practices that were conducted here, let alone about the beliefs held at the time. Those continue to be the subject of speculation.[194]

The significance of these archaeological findings is not limited to claims of historical continuity. Researchers have tried to establish the historical location of streams, sources and worship locations, and the Tadasu no Mori foundation has redesigned the forest accordingly, so as to recreate the landscape of the past. One of the reasons for this is nature conservation: as mentioned previously, the forest has suffered seriously from a lack of (ground)water, and it was presumed that rearranging the streams in accordance with the prehistoric layout of the forest would improve the water circulation. Tadasu no Mori has four streams: the Nara-no-ogawa, Semi-no-ogawa, Izumigawa and Mitarashigawa. The former two in particular have been subject to reconstruction work. In 1990, the shrine and its foundation embarked on an ambitious landscape design project, which consisted of the complete re-digging of these streams. Working from south to north, they started with the Semi-no-ogawa, which was completed around 1998. Next, the Nara-no-ogawa was re-dug, in accordance with its presumed former position. This process took place in various stages, and was finished in 2009 (Kamo Mioya Jinja 2010, 22-38).

It may well be true that rearranging the water circulation in the forest has positive effects on its ecology. However, I would argue that this is not the only reason why the shrine has embarked on this ambitious landscape design project. The streams flowing through Tadasu no Mori feature prominently

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[194] For a short summary of the archaeological research done in Tadasu no Mori, see Suzuki 2010.

in Heian-period literature and poetry (M. Ueda 2003, 21) and, as such, are part of the collective memory of both the city and the nation. Arguably, in trying to re-establish the 'historical environment' (Sagai 2013, 96) of the forest and its waterways, notions of historical continuity and national heritage are materialised. As Lefebvre has demonstrated, the production of space (i.e., landscape design and architecture) is never politically neutral, nor is it merely 'physical': gardens, monuments and worship places – places with significant symbolic capital – can be employed to convey ideological messages or legitimate particular power configurations. As such, physical space is always also mental and social. The same applies to landscape design in Tadasu no Mori.

However, although they are the outcome of historical production processes, these places tend to be discursively naturalised. A garden is framed as the expression of the 'aesthetic spirit' or 'love of nature' of a nation, rather than, say, an expression of a particular ideology. Likewise, a worship place is associated with particular intrinsic 'sacred' properties of a place, and/or mythical events involving gods, saints or prophets, while the political aspects involved in its construction, sacralisation and current uses are not commonly recognised. They are, to use Lefebvre's terminology, 'representations of space' (or 'conceived space'); they carry great symbolic significance, but this is employed to legitimise and naturalise particular power configurations. Yet, there is always the possibility that they are reappropriated by those challenging a particular regime or dominant narrative, either deliberately or not, and that their symbolic capital is reemployed for alternative purposes – in which case they become 'spaces of representation'. In fact, as meanings attributed to places are never singular or unequivocal, a place may simultaneously be a 'representation of space' employed by a particular elite to maintain and justify its power, and a 'space of representation' reinterpreted by others in creative and subversive ways.

To what extent the landscape production that has taken place at Tadasu no Mori in recent history should be conceived of as a 'representation of space' serving the interest of a particular elite may be subject to debate. In any case, it is clear that the current physical shape of the forest, in particular its streams, is largely the result of human planning and construction work. It is also clear that Tadasu no Mori is discursively naturalised, as illustrated by the various references describing it at a 'natural' or even 'primeval' forest. The claim made in the English-language tourist brochure that '[u]nlike the carefully pruned Buddhist gardens, the Shinto forest is left to grow large and develop its own habitat' (Shimogamo Jinja not dated b) is a clear example of this discourse. Contrary to this assertion, as we have seen, the forest is carefully monitored and managed; for better or worse, its contemporary shape and tree composition are largely the result of human planning, not of a forest left to grow wild. Both as a mental and as a physical space, then, Tadasu no Mori is *produced*, not something that has emerged spontaneously. Indeed, as a physical space, the forest in its contemporary shape is the product of spatial practices such as planting trees, digging streams, and keeping pathways free from leaves and weeds. As a mental space, however, it is conceived of as 'natural', and intimately connected with notions of traditional Japanese culture and aesthetics – e.g., the beauty of the 'four

seasons', and their symbolic significance (e.g., Kamo Mioya Jinja 2003, 113-124; cf. Shirane 2012). But this discrepancy is not commonly recognised.

Perhaps significantly, among the people involved in the Tadasu no Mori foundation are not only shrine priests, but also prominent members of Kyoto civil society, CEOs of multinationals and so on. Shimogamo Jinja is one of the wealthiest Shinto shrines in the country, visited by millions of tourists every year, and its leading priests have a high status in the shrine world as a whole. Historically, the shrine has been closely associated with the imperial institution, as illustrated by the fact that in the Heian period imperial princesses served here as *saiin* (high priestess). In sum, there may well be various political and economic agendas involved in the reconfiguration (both discursive and physical) of Tadasu no Mori as a paradigmatic *chinju no mori*, associated with 'traditional culture' and national collective memory as well as with biodiversity and nature conservation. How exactly the forest's status and preservation are embedded in wider political and economic contexts remains to be studied. In any case, what is clear at this point is that environmental advocacy is not necessarily incompatible with other motives, such as cultural nationalism and institutional politics.

In particular, it may be argued that the symbolic reproduction of an idealised past is an integral part of place-making activities at Tadasu no Mori; i.e., that the forest constitutes an integral of part of Kyoto's 'landscape of nostalgia' (Robertson 1988, 503-508). As Robertson has demonstrated, in postwar Japan, nostalgic notions of ancestral landscapes are of profound political and economic significance (ibid.). Today, that does not only apply to the rural imaginary (Schnell 2005), but also to the numerous local cityscape-reconstruction (*machi-zukuri*) and (sub)urban forest-making (*mori-zukuri*) activities taking place in Heisei-period Japan (Sorensen & Funck 2007). As Lefebvre has written, such nostalgia is 'a manifestation of a major contradiction of modernity': it is an expression of anti-modern sentiments, and a longing for an idealised non-modern space (which has both temporal and spatial aspects), yet at the same time the shapes this nostalgia takes – mass tourism, the commodification of rural lifestyles and crafts, the conservation of 'traditional' landscapes – are highly modern, leading to 'space being consumed in both the economic and literal senses of the word' (1991, 122). Considering the appropriation of Tadasu no Mori as a tourist, heritage and recreation site, and the ways in which ritual and other practices are marketed and commodified, we must conclude that this is exactly the case here.

As we have seen, because the work at Tadasu no Mori is carried out by a foundation, the organisers can apply for financial support from various sources, including those related with heritage conservation. The foundation also has some wealthy individual patrons, and is sponsored by a number of enterprises.[195] But forest conservation and landscape design are expensive, so fundraising events and membership recruitment continue to constitute a prominent part of the foundation's work. Hence, various social activities are organised for the purpose of involving Kyotoites in Tadasu no Mori and its

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[195] For instance, Inamori Kazuo, founder of Kyocera and current chairman of Japan Airlines, is one of its prominent patrons (see Inamori 2003).

conservation work. In 2011, I attended two of these events: an open-air concert, involving a small student brass band performing at the *kagura* stage of Kawai Jinja (aptly, their repertoire included music from *My Neighbor Totoro*; perhaps less aptly, it also included *West Side Story*) (see figure six); and a flea market in the forest, where people from the neighbourhood could sell their second-hand things (see figure seven).[196] Other social activities organised here include tea ceremonies, firefly-watching, guided forest walks, scouting activities, and of course the tree-planting ceremonies I have mentioned before.

I have had the opportunity to talk to different people involved with the Tadasu no Mori, and it is worth noting the difference in their ways of explaining the value of this type of events. The (non-clergy) PR manager of the foundation told me that the main purpose of these activities is to get people involved with the projects; according to him, community participation is necessary for fundraising, as well as for creating public interest and goodwill. Sagai, on the other hand, saw community involvement as an integral aspect of traditional Shinto worldviews, based on the notion of the existential interdependence of nature, deities, and human communities. Reflecting the ideas of scholars such as Sonoda Minoru and Ueda Masaaki, he stated that the (re)establishment of a strong local community is one of the objectives of the Tadasu no Mori Zaidan (interview, March 2011). After all, *chinju no mori* are conceptualised as sacred places where, in ancient times, people gathered, establishing the first local communities that would become the cornerstone of later Japanese society. Indeed, many people involved with shrine forest conservation and education projects state that community building (*komyunitii-zukuri*) is one of their core priorities, so this is no exception. Music, dance and theatre performances are seen as an integral part of traditional Japanese culture, so today's open-air concerts are seen as a continuation of this tradition – even though the musical repertoire may have changed somewhat.

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[196] For a 2000 yen fee (approximately 20 euros, at the time). Organising a flea market is more than just a fundraising activity, however. Significantly, some Shinto scholars have argued that the first markets were established around *matsuri* sites (i.e., *chinju no mori*), and that this constitutes the origins of the first towns. Sonoda, for instance, suggests that the term *matsuri* is etymologically related to the words for 'town' (*machi*) and 'market' (*ichi*), which according to him shows that the sites of *matsuri* were the focal point around which communities developed – not only through ritual practices, but also because it was here that trade took place, and, consequently, social relations were established (1998, 93-95, 205-206). The organisation of a flea market inside Tadasu no Mori, however small, is thus in accordance with theories concerning the social functions of *chinju no mori* in ancient times, and therefore not devoid of symbolism. But then, very few of the spatial and social practices carried out in this forest are.

Figure 6: A forest concert at Kawai Jinja

Figure 7: Tadasu no Mori flea market

10.2   Shasō Gakkai

10.2.1 The organisation

In previous chapters, I have already mentioned Shasō Gakkai. I will now discuss the activities of this organisation in more detail. Founded in 2002, Shasō Gakkai may be credited for achieving a number of things. First, it has actively contributed to the spread the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, to the point that the notion of Shinto as an ancient tradition of nature worship, and of *chinju no mori* as one of Shinto's core symbols, have become mainstream in shrine circles. Second, it has drawn attention to the topics of nature conservation and environmental issues (in relation to shrines), and established these as legitimate concerns both from an academic and a shrine-institutional perspective. Third, it has been fairly successful in establishing 'sacred forest studies' as a legitimate field of study, inherently interdisciplinary; perhaps more importantly, it has facilitated interaction between scientists, scholars, Shinto priests and laypeople interested in the topic. Fourth, it has organised academic conferences, and published various books and journals that have contributed to an increasing knowledge of shrines and shrine forests – individual cases as well as general theory. Fifth, it has been responsible for spreading information about existing projects (such as the Tadasu no Mori Zaidan), which has been used by others to set up new projects; in addition, it has provided opportunities for people active in different projects to share their experiences. And sixth, it has organised forest 'instructor courses' for the purpose of educating shrine priests and volunteers in the practicalities of forest ecology and preservation.

The main purpose of Shasō Gakkai, then, is to facilitate the study of sacred forests, and to contribute to forest conservation. On its website, the organisation is described as follows:

> Shasō Gakkai is a non-profit organisation doing interdisciplinary research on sacred forests (*chinju no mori*). The word *shasō* refers to the forests of shrines (*jinja no mori*), i.e., 'the forests of the gods' (*kamigami no mori*); to begin with, these 'forests of the gods' include *chinju no mori*, as well as shrine-temple forests (*shajirin*), groves on tombs (*tsuka no kodachi*), *utaki* (sacred sites from Okinawa) and so on. Shasō Gakkai is a non-profit organisation founded on May 26, 2002, devoted to removing the fences between different scientific disciplines related to these 'forests of the gods' in order to promote research [on this topic]; it is aiming at the creation of new scholarship with a strong local focus, as well as the conservation and development (*kaihatsu*) of sacred forests (*shasō*).[197]

As this description makes clear, Shasō Gakkai is a research organisation with an academic character, but it also wants to contribute to the application of scientific knowledge to actual forest conservation practices. The organisation has an explicitly interdisciplinary orientation, combining insights from and bringing together representatives of various academic disciplines. Elsewhere, the relevant academic

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[197] From http://www.shasou.org/ (last accessed: July 13, 2013); my translation. As this description illustrates, there is a bewildering variety of concepts and categories that may all be translated as 'sacred forest', the meanings of which are partially yet not completely overlapping.

fields are listed as follows: 'botany, zoology, ecology, archaeology, architecture, landscape gardening, aesthetics/art history, history, ethnology, religious studies, agriculture, forestry, fisheries science, law, sociology, geography, urban planning, civil engineering, environmental science, cultural anthropology etc.' (Shasō Gakkai not dated) – truly a wide variety. But as they take centre stage in contemporary notions of traditional Japanese land- and cityscapes, it is perhaps not surprising that the topic of sacred forest conservation brings together people from such a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Moreover, as I wrote previously (drawing on the insights of Anna Tsing [2005] and Arne Kalland [2009]), 'nature' and 'the environment' tend to bring together actors with diverse agendas and allow for unusual coalitions, precisely because they carry significant symbolic capital yet allow for multiple interpretations and appropriations. The same, I would argue, applies to shrine forests.

As a non-profit organisation (*NPO hōjin*), Shasō Gakkai has a limited budget. The organisation is based in Kyoto, where it has a small office. Most of its academic events (symposia, seminars and so on) take place at shrine buildings or, occasionally, universities, throughout the country but mostly in the Kansai and Kantō regions. As far as I have understood, it only has one employee, who is responsible for all administrative duties; all other work is done by volunteers. In contrast to Tadasu no Mori Zaidan, Shasō Gakkai is not connected to one particular shrine. Nor, for that matter, is it affiliated with a university or another research institute. Yet, many well-known scholars and scientists are involved with its activities. Ueda Masaaki is the president of the organisation; other board members include the Shinto scholars Sonoda Minoru, Sakurai Haruo and Mogi Sakae, as well as forest scientists Suganuma Takayuki and Watanabe Hiroyuki. The advisory committee, meanwhile, includes the famous *chinju-no-mori* scientists Miyawaki Akira and Ueda Atsushi; Tanaka Tsunekiyo, president of Jinja Honchō; the influential scholar of religion Yamaori Tetsuo; literary theorist Donald Keene; environmental activist and writer C. W. Nicol; the *gūji* (head priests) of Ise Jingū, Shimogamo Jinja, Meiji Jingū, Atsuta Jingū, Fushimi Inari Taisha and Ikuta Jinja; and, perhaps remarkably, the abbot of Kiyomizu-dera (a famous Buddhist temple in Kyoto). Most members, meanwhile, are individual citizens; but there are also many shrines affiliated with Shasō Gakkai, as well as a few Buddhist temples.[198] In sum, modest though its budget and organisation may be, the activities of Shasō Gakkai are supported by a wide range of prominent intellectuals and shrine officials.

10.2.2 The name and the logo

The name Shasō Gakkai has been translated as 'shrine forest society' (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 209), but in my opinion 'sacred forest research association' would be more accurate. The main reason for this is that the organisation explicitly states that it is concerned with all types of sacred forests, not

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[198] In 2011, I was told that the organisation has a total of 555 members, including approximately 150 shrines and 10 Buddhist temples (interview, September 2011).

only those belonging to shrines. As illustrated by the involvement of the abbot of Kiyomizu-dera and the membership of several Buddhist temples, Shasō Gakkai is not solely concerned with shrine forests; it does not define itself as a 'Shinto' organisation, but wants to have a transdenominational character. That is also the main reason why, when the organisation was founded, it was not called 'Chinju no Mori Gakkai' – which would have been more logical, perhaps, considering the fact that *chinju no mori* had become the core concept employed by scholars and priests arguing for the preservation of shrine forests, while *shasō* was a fairly unknown term used by hardly anyone – for the term *chinju no mori* was generally associated with Shinto shrines only.

'*Shasō*', therefore, is a more inclusive term than '*chinju no mori*'. Ueda Atsushi has described it as follows:

> The term *shasō* is made up of two characters. *Sha* 社 refers to 'the god of the land (*tsuchi no kami*)' or 'the gathering of people with the god of land as its centre = community'.[199] *Sō* 叢 means 'gathering of plants and trees (*sōmoku no atsumari*)', so the compound word '*shasō*' may be understood as 'the forest of the god of the land' or 'the forest of the community' (2004a, 189).

He then proceeds by saying that there are four types of *shasō*. The first of these are shrine forests, or *chinju no mori*; Ueda's description of these corresponds to the first of the four meanings I have distinguished in the previous chapter. The second are the sacred groves of Okinawa, *utaki*, which he defines as 'similar to the *chinju no mori* of mainland Japan, or perhaps it would be good to call them their original shape' (ibid.; cf. M. Ueda 2004b, 12-15).[200] The third are 'other shrine and temple forests' that are not considered as *chinju no mori*, for instance because they have been planted and used for wood production. And the fourth are the ancient mounds containing (imperial) tombs (*kofun*, *go-ryō* or *tsuka*), which today are often covered by trees (A. Ueda 2004a, 189) – and which were not conceived of as 'Shinto' until they were reconfigured as symbols of Meiji-period imperial ideology.

In theory, therefore, *shasō* relates to *chinju no mori* as 'furniture' relates to 'chair': all *chinju no mori* are *shasō*, but not all *shasō* are *chinju no mori* as the category also includes other types of forests deemed sacred. In reality, however, the terms are used interchangeably, even by the scholars who have come up with this distinction. For instance, in an article entitled 'What is a *shasō*?' (A. Ueda 2001), Ueda Atsushi describes all aspects of an ideal typical shrine forest – including *torii* (gate), *sandō* (main road leading to the shrine), *shinboku* (sacred trees), shrine buildings (such as *shinden* and *haiden*), shrine office, *matsuri* and so on. By contrast, the above definition of '*shasō*' is given in an article entitled 'What is a *chinju no mori*?' (A. Ueda 2004a). In actual discourse, therefore, both terms by and large mean the same thing – the only difference is perhaps that, thanks to the activities of Shasō

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[199] For clarity's sake: this is the same character as the one used for 'shrine' (*jinja*) and 'society' (*shakai*), also said to have been pronounced as *mori* ('forest') in the past.

[200] On the appropriation of Ryukyu worship traditions as 'original Shinto' or 'the primordial shape of Japanese religions', see chapter eight.

Gakkai, the term '*shasō*' today has slightly more 'scientific' connotations (i.e., associated with forest ecology and landscape design) than '*chinju no mori*', which may have more cultural and literary associations. But both usually refer to shrine forests.

If not a Shinto organisation *de jure*, it is clear that Shasō Gakkai's activities are almost completely limited to shrine forests. I would say that more than ninety percent of all articles, conference presentations and research activities related to the organisation address shrine forests, if not more. Likewise, its seminars and symposia usually take place at Shinto shrines. Perhaps attempts to involve Buddhist priests have not been very successful yet, or perhaps there have not been any serious attempts to do so. In any case, Shasō Gakkai's 'Shinto' identity is fairly obvious. That does not mean, however, that all those involved in the organisation are personally affiliated with Shinto institutions. Among the active participants are many scientists and other people interested in forest conservation, for whom 'Shinto' beliefs and ritual practices may not be relevant. But the forests that constitute the objects of research are shrine forests, a few exceptions notwithstanding.
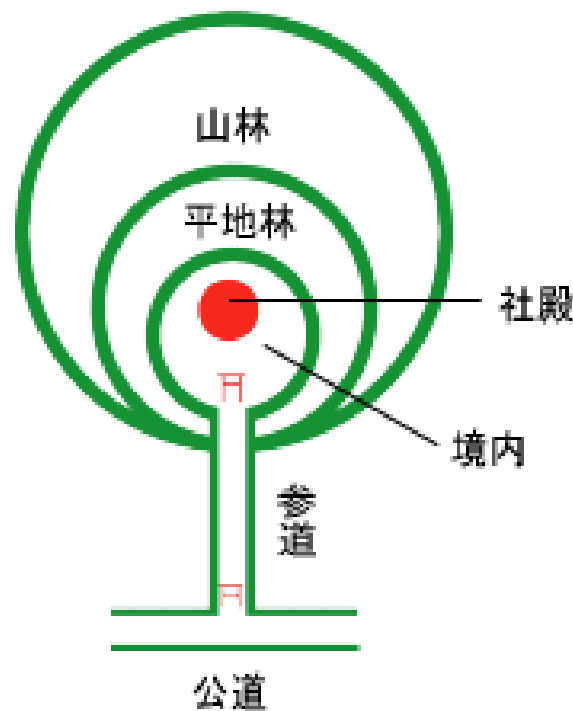
Figure 8: Logo Shasō Gakkai (source: http://www.shasou.org/logo.htm)

The association of Shasō Gakkai with Shinto shrines and *chinju no mori*, rather than sacred sites *per se*, is also expressed by its logo (see figure eight). Simultaneously a logo, a model and a map, it gives a clear indication of the ideal-typical shape of *shasō* as they are perceived by Shasō Gakkai's founders and leading scholars – i.e., it shows us a representation in 'mental space'. The logo can be read in three different ways. First, it has the shape of a tree, referring to one of the core concerns of shrine forest conservation: the preservation (and planting) of trees, and the significance attributed to 'sacred trees' (*shinboku*). Second, it is a map of a shrine and its forest. The horizontal lane below is the

kōdō, or public road, from where one approaches the shrine. The vertical lane is the *sandō*, the tree-lined boulevard that leads from the main road to the shrine buildings. The red dot in the middle of the logo is the *shaden*, or shrine buildings. These are located in the shrine precincts (*keidai*; the first circle), which may have some *shinboku* trees and/or a small garden. The surrounding lowland forest (*heichirin*; the second circle) is defined as a 'primeval forest' or 'climax forest', and often set apart as a *kinsokuchi* (forbidden area). Finally, behind this area is the mountain forest (*sanrin*; the third circle), described as a 'secondary forest' or 'mixed forest' (A. Ueda 2001, 15; 2004a, 184). This area corresponds to what has been called *okuyama*: the mountainous area that is the furthest removed from centres of human population. In pre-modern times, it was here that people engaged in ascetic practices, and deities and spirits were believed to dwell (Miyake 2009); today, however, these mountains are mainly covered by neglected coniferous plantation forests.

But there is a third possible interpretation of the logo: it is a mental representation of the sacred space of a Shinto shrine. Rather than a binary opposition between a strictly demarcated 'profane' and 'sacred' space, as Durkheim's classical theory presupposes, it may be argued that Shinto shrines can be characterised by different *degrees* of sacrality. The transition from profane to sacred space is a gradual one, and there are various zones one has to pass through, of increasing sacredness. The centre – the 'holy of holies', so to speak – is forbidden for all, except for the head priest on very special occasions, and contains the 'body of the god' (*shintai*): the object seen as the deity's physical shape or representation (e.g., a mirror). If we were to interpret the Shasō Gakkai logo from this perspective, it ceases to be a map of vegetation or an image of a tree, but becomes a model of sacredness.

First, rather than irrelevant 'profane' space, the 'public road' that constitutes the foundation of the tree may be seen as a subtle reference to the public (i.e., not private) significance attributed to shrines and shrine forests as symbolic community centres. Thus, the shrine and its forest are rooted (literally, in this case!) in the 'public' sphere – i.e., the community or 'collective body' (*kyōdōtai*). The *sandō*, then, constitutes the liminal space that connects the 'public road' with the shrine – similar to the trunk of a tree, connecting its leaves of with its roots. The liminal space is indicated by two red *torii*, one at the beginning and one at the end of the road – easily-recognisable symbols of a shrine, and characteristic of the *de facto* Shinto character of Shasō Gakkai. Next, the circles making up the upper half of the logo do not only represent different types of vegetation, but also signify notions of sacred space. The red dot in the middle is the *honden*, the sacred centre of the shrine; perhaps it also represents the heart of the entire tree/forest/map. The innermost circle is the 'open space' in the forest, where people have historically come together to perform *matsuri*, pray, and celebrate. This is surrounded by the dense *irazu no mori*, the 'forbidden forest', which has been set apart and may not be entered by ordinary people, as it is owned by the deity (i.e., the shrine). The outermost circle, finally, is the mountain traditionally believed to be the dwelling place of the deity; it was here that, on the occasion of a *matsuri*, priests would come to invite the deity and transport him or her to the central

shrine by *mikoshi* (portable shrine) – a ritual that, for instance, continues to be performed annually by Shimogamo and Kamigamo priests three days before the Aoi Matsuri (cf. Sonoda 1998, 34-35). As a mental space, therefore, the Shasō Gakkai logo is multi-layered – representing the organisation's concern with forest conservation, as well as with sacralisation.

10.2.3 Activities and publications

Shasō Gakkai organises a number of activities, some of them of an academic nature, others more practically oriented. As mentioned, Ueda Masaaki was critical of Umehara Takeshi's pleas for a reestablishment of the 'forest civilisation' inspired by Jōmon-period beliefs and practices – not because he does not agree with the latter's ideas, but because he considered them too abstract, arguing that scholarship needs to be combined with actual conservation practices (interview, December 2011). Others, however, have criticised Shasō Gakkai for being too abstract and theoretical as well. Because of this, they argue, the organisation is incapable of really appealing to the 'local communities' whose histories and identities are often said to be closely intertwined with 'their' *chinju no mori*, and whose involvement is commonly seen as necessary for the shrine (forest)'s preservation (interview with a member of a *chinju no mori*-related non-profit organisation, November 2011).

Indeed, it is true that Shasō Gakkai has an academic character – as illustrated by the high number of scholars and scientists in the organisation – but that is not all there is to it. Among the people taking the 'forest instructor' course, for example, are many 'laypeople' who are neither academically nor religiously affiliated, but who are simply interested in becoming active in forest conservation and want to learn the basics of forest ecology and maintenance. Moreover, among the activities organised by Shasō Gakkai are excursions and field research trips. Thus, academic though the organisation's focus may be, it is not merely theoretical; attempts are made to apply scientific knowledge to concrete conservation practices, and to educate those involved in these practices. That said, at the activities where I was present, I did not get the impression there were many shrine priests involved; most participants were either scholars or non-clergy volunteers active in local forest conservation projects, and I was surprised by the apparent lack of clergy. So perhaps there is some truth to the argument that Shasō Gakkai's activities are fairly abstract and academic, and do not appeal to local shrine communities.

In any case, in the past eleven years or so, Shasō Gakkai has been responsible for an impressive number of publications. Its foundational work is the book *Chinju no mori wa yomigaeru: Shasōgaku koto hajime* ('Restoring *chinju no mori*: the beginning of *shasōgaku* [sacred forest studies]') (Ueda & Ueda 2001), in which the purposes of Shasō Gakkai were explained, and 'sacred forest studies' (*shasōgaku*) was established as a legitimate field of study. This was followed by a second book, published a few years later (M. Ueda 2004c). In this book, several of the arguments of the first book were repeated, but it also included some new insights; it is entitled *Tankyū 'chinju no*

mori': Shasōgaku e no shōtai ('Research on "chinju no mori": An invitation to *shasōgaku'*). Incidentally, the titles and subtitles of these books confirm my previous argument that *chinju no mori* and *shasō* are by and large overlapping concepts that are often used interchangeably.

In between the first and the second book, both of which consisted of academic articles and speeches, a guidebook was published, which was more practically oriented (Ueda et al. 2003). This book does not only contain information about the spatial configuration and architecture of shrines, but also about tree species, birds and insects. Soon thereafter, in 2005, Shasō Gakkai took part in the Aichi World Expo, where it presented Japan's 'sacred forests' to a general audience. In the context of this event, the documentary series *Nihon wa mori no kuni* ('Japan is a land of forests') was produced (Sonoda & Mogi 2006). In sum, in the first years after its establishment, the scholars and scientists running Shasō Gakkai were highly productive and enthusiastic.

In addition to these publications, every year Shasō Gakkai organises a two-day symposium, the results of which are published in its journal, *Shasōgaku kenkyū* ('Research in sacred forest studies'). Every time, this conference takes place at a different location: previous locations include Shimogamo Jinja, Fushimi Inari Taisha, and Tsurugaoka Hachimangū (Kamakura). There are also shorter seminars, which typically last half a day and consist of a few public lectures. In addition to its annual journal, six times per year Shasō Gakkai publishes a newspaper with information, which is circulated among its members and available online. It also publishes occasional research reports; for instance, in the past two years, Shasō Gakkai members have been active in monitoring the state of shrines and shrine forests in the area of Tōhoku that was hit by the tsunami of March 11, 2011 (see next chapter). Finally, there are the 'sacred forest instructor courses', in which participants learn forestry theory from prominent scientists in a series of workshops. Those who finish the course and pass the exam are given a certificate as well as a symbolic gift, the 'Shasō Gakkai helmet'. I have got the impression that most participants in these courses are 'laypeople' interested in forest conservation, rather than shrine priests.

In June 2013, the annual Shasō Gakkai symposium took place at Ise Jingū and the nearby Shinto university, Kōgakkan University. It is perhaps surprising that none of the previous Shasō Gakkai symposia took place in Ise – its shrines are generally considered to be the most important ones in the country, after all, and its forest is impressive. On the other hand, Ise Jingū is closely connected with Jinja Honchō and the imperial institution; the fact that in 2013 Shasō Gakkai was finally able to organise its annual symposium here perhaps points to the increasing 'mainstream' character of its conservationist-environmentalist message, which is now also sanctioned by Jinja Honchō. In all likelihood, that would not yet have been possible ten years ago.

The symposium lasted two days. The first day started with a short visit to Gekū, the outer shrine, followed by a tour of the Sengūkan: the recently-built *shikinen sengū* museum. In the afternoon, we went on an excursion to the shrine forest, where the head of the *eirinbu* (forest department) showed us around. He explained us about the history of the forest, and about current production processes (in

contrast to so-called 'forbidden forests' where logging is not allowed, a significant proportion of the trees in the forest of Ise Jingū is grown and used for rebuilding the shrine). The second day started with an official visit (including ritual purification) to Naikū, the inner shrine, followed by lectures and paper sections at Kōgakkan University. Among others, Hiroi Yoshinori gave an interesting short paper in which he repeated some of the arguments he had made the year before: *chinju no mori* should become centres for the production of alternative energy, as well as community empowerment (Hiroi 2012). Most other papers concerned Ise forest management, as well as the architectural skills involved in the *shikinen sengū* (topics I will discuss in the next chapter). In total, there were about sixty to seventy participants. I was told that this number is higher than normal – usually, the annual conferences attract approximately thirty to forty people – which may have been due to the fact that it took place in Ise. Among the participants were scientists and scholars, but most of the people I talked to were involved with local shrine forest projects as volunteers, and took part in Shasō Gakkai activities to learn more about Shinto culture and forest preservation. In sum, despite the fact that Shasō Gakkai has a strong 'Shinto' identity – most of its publications are primarily concerned with shrines and shrine forests, which is also where its seminars and symposia take place – the number of shrine priests actively involved in the organisation seems limited. Whether this is because of a lack of time or a lack of interest remains to be found out.

10.3   Gosho Komataki Jinja and Sennen no Mori no Kai

10.3.1 The shrine and its forest

Gosho Komataki Jinja is a small shrine located on the north side of Mount Tsukuba, in the rural town of Makabe in Ibaraki prefecture (see figure nine). The surrounding landscape is largely made up of fields, rice paddies, forested hills, and small town and villages. The area is historically known for its stonecraft, and there are several workshops in the vicinity that make tombstones and stone statues. Although it is only a few hours by car or train from Tokyo, like other rural parts of Japan Makabe suffers from rural depopulation, an ageing population and a gradual decline in facilities. The shrine, for instance, cannot be reached by public transport anymore. Unlike the south side of Mount Tsukuba, few tourists or hikers make it here.

In contrast to large shrines such as Shimogamo Jinja, Meiji Jingū and Ise Jingū, which have nationwide (and even international) appeal, Gosho Komataki Jinja is not very well known – even though, in recent years, the shrine has received some media attention. In some ways, it is typical of rural shrines all over Japan: it is historically connected with a particular village community, its *ujiko*; it is a family shrine, run by a single priest (together with his wife); its annual *matsuri* is one of the main cultural events in the area, and plays an important part in the cultivation of social relations; it is located at the foot of a mountain, right behind the village, and is flanked by a forest on one side and

rice paddies on the other. There are hundreds, if not thousands such local shrines scattered around Japan, historically connected to a particular place; their names and their deities are usually only known to local community members, if at all. Many do not even have a permanent shrine priest.

Figure 9: Gosho Komataki Jinja
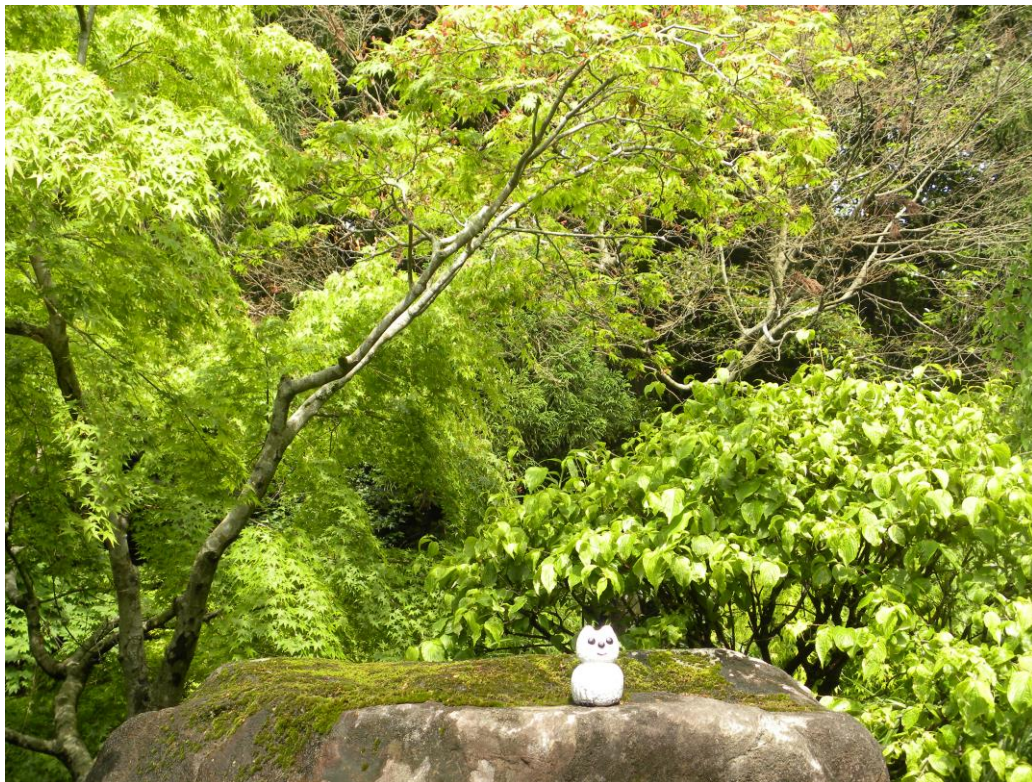
Figure 10: The forest of Gosho Komataki Jinja, with a small stone creature

In some ways, however, Gosho Komataki Jinja is atypical. There is a special quality to its *chinju no mori*: it is bright and cool, and consists of many different trees, mostly broad-leaved; it is mossy, has many fragrant plants, and a stream running through it; its *sandō* is lined with abstract artworks; and on top of a rock is a small white stone creature, that reminds one of a character from a Miyazaki film (reportedly donated by a stonemason from the village; see figure ten). Small though it is (approximately 1.5 ha), this is one of the most enchanting and atmospheric shrine forests I have visited. And I am not the only one who appreciates it, judging from the following comments made by visitors:[201]

> Can you hear the sound of water?
> Can you hear the birds chirping?
> When the wind passes through
> > What a good feeling!
> As soon as it is evening
> We can hear the cry of the owl
> I   love   this place
> Sometimes, trying to listen carefully
> > Is a good thing

'Breath' is the blessing of the gods. I feel happiness when I am breathing together with the trees, the breath of a thousand years, while I am embracing a big tree. I receive its energy.

It is the kind of forest in which a Totoro may appear, isn't it?

When I come to this place, it feels as if the cells deep in my lungs get healthy. Like my body is cleaned.

There is a lot to be seen at this place, isn't there? We really have to cherish nature!

Gosho Komataki Jinja is not only of interest because of its forest, but also because of its long history. It is said to have been founded in 1014. The current shrine buildings are of later date, but still go back more than three hundred years. At the time of writing, the shrine priest and local volunteers were busy preparing for a special *matsuri* to commemorate the shrine's thousandth anniversary. This is one of the reasons why the shrine has recently received some media attention, and the number of visitors has increased.

One thing that is interesting about Gosho Komataki Jinja (in addition to its forest and surrounding landscape) is the fact that, unlike most other shrines, it has some graves on its precincts. The head priest, Sakurai Takashi, explained this by referring to traditional Japanese beliefs, according to which the spirits of the deceased would 'go to the mountain' and, finally, become *chinjugami*. In modern times, death-related rituals have largely been the domain of Buddhist institutions, but

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[201] These and many other poems and comments by visitors were published in the shrine newspaper (*Komagataki* 2013; my translation).

according to Sakurai this was not always the case: shrines have historically played an important part in popular beliefs and practices related to the dead. The resurgence of traditional beliefs is an important concern for Sakurai, as he considers the decline of faith (*shinkō*) among contemporary Japanese people to be a great problem that has led to various social and environmental problems (interview, May 2013). In order to deal with these problems, Sakurai has founded the Sennen no Mori no Kai.

10.3.2 *Sennen no Mori no Kai*

In the shrine forest are two information panels. The first one says 'Gosho Komataki Jinja thousand-year forest-making (*sennen mori-zukuri*) | "Living" in the land of nature (*shizen no daichi ni "ikiru"*)', followed by the English sentence 'to return to Nature and to live with it'. The second one has the following text (my translation):

> Let us protect nature!
>
> Nowadays, the number of forests where you can still feel nature has become low.
> In the forest are various animals and plants, whose lives are interconnected. The air and water that we need to live is made and purified by the forest.
> In modern times, because of rapid cultural and industrial development, our irreplaceable nature is being destroyed.
> Humans cannot survive independently from nature. Each and every one of us has to learn to understand nature. Starting near ourselves, let us all endeavour to protect nature.

These panels are illustrative of the concerns of Sakurai Takashi and his Sennen no Mori no Kai. Sakurai was one of the first shrine priests not only to assert the importance of ecological issues and their intimate connection with Shinto cosmology, but also to develop shrine-based projects focused at nature conservation. Thus, he may be considered a pioneer in shrine-based environmental activism. Sakurai traces his activities to 1971, when he graduated from Kokugakuin University and returned to his native Ibaraki to become priest at Gosho Komataki Jinja. Reportedly, there was a food shortage at the time, and he started growing rice on a small paddy near the shrine (Sakurai 1999, 77). Soon thereafter, however, the pine trees that constituted the shrine forest died one by one, and he became aware of the importance of forest conservation: 'I felt that, without the forest, the god(s) would no longer have their place (*kamisama no basho wa nai*)' (ibid., 77). Accordingly, in the course of the 1980s, he started carrying out several reforestation and forest conservation activities.

Sakurai gradually became aware of the ecological interdependence between the mountain, the shrine forest and the rice paddies; he also realised that rural depopulation and environmental conservation are related issues. As he explains, 'the number of people working in the *satoyama* surrounding the shrine was decreasing, and I felt that by only protecting the shrine forest (*jinjarin*), we would not be able to protect the local environment' (Sakurai 2009). Hence, several activities were

developed that were related not only to forest conservation but also to rice cultivation, community empowerment and environmental education. His motivation was not solely ecological; community revitalisation was considered equally important. In developing these activities, Sakurai received support and assistance from a number of volunteers, as well as from his wife, Sakurai Mayumi (who works as a priest at the same shrine). In 1991, the Sennen no Mori no Kai ('thousand-year forest association' or 'millennium forest association') was formally established. As a non-profit organisation, it is legally independent from the shrine, although the two are obviously intertwined.

Sakurai's activities did not go unnoticed. In 1997, he and his wife participated in the 'Shinto and Ecology' conference at Harvard University, together with well-known scholars such as Carmen Blacker, Allan Grapard, Miyake Hitoshi, Miyawaki Akira, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, Sakurai Haruo and Sonoda Minoru. Significantly, the current president of Jinja Honchō, Tanaka Tsunekiyo, also took part in this conference. As one of the first local *chinju no mori* conservation movements, Sennen no Mori no Kai has captured the interest of quite a few Shinto scholars and organisations (including Shasō Gakkai and Jinja Honchō), and Sakurai has been invited to give presentations about his activities on a number of occasions (e.g., Sakurai 1999; 2009). Indeed, he has been a trendsetter not only because his organisation has served as an example for other projects, but also because he addressed topics and organised activities that in the 1980s and 1990s were not widely considered to be the responsibility of Shinto priests, yet have now become mainstream. As he told me, when he had just started his activities, people accused him of 'being a communist'; today, however, he is acclaimed by many (including Jinja Honchō president Tanaka Tsunekiyo) for his groundbreaking work. Indeed, Sakurai said that in the past twenty years, there has been an important shift in the shrine world: young priests in particular are increasingly aware of environmental issues, and interested not only in forest conservation but also in other topics, such as alternative energy. Needless to say, he applauds this development (personal interview, May 2013).

As Sakurai has explained on various occasions, Sennen no Mori no Kai has five objectives. First, it is devoted to the plantation and construction of forests; its aim is to grow a healthy *chinju no mori*, while fostering a spirit of care for all living beings among the participants. Second, it wants to raise awareness of the ecological importance of the local river, and contribute to keeping it clean. Third, it wants to teach people the importance of a simple life, without waste or overconsumption. Fourth, it gives people the opportunity to experience rice planting, and seeks to 'restore the rice cultivation culture that has been transmitted from ancient Japan'. And fifth, it organises traditional charcoal-making activities, to make people aware of the intertwinement of the different elements – fire, earth, wood and so on (Sakurai 1999, 77-78; 2009).[202]

As the above list makes clear, the purpose of the Sennen no Mori no Kai is not limited to forest conservation and maintenance. The organisation has a clear pedagogical purpose, combining

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[202] In Japan as in China, the five elements are fire, earth, wood, water and metal.

environmental education with education in traditional crafts and agricultural practices, so as to teach (young) people the 'ancient Japanese' spirit of respect for nature. Moreover, it has a social agenda: by bringing together local volunteers, it hopes to create a new sense of community, and contribute to social cohesion within the region. As Sakurai has told me, initially, the volunteers who were active in the Sennen no Mori no Kai came from different parts of the prefecture. There were more than fifty volunteers, but according to him they were not serious enough: doing some maintenance work every now and then was a form of recreation for them, and apparently they were not committed to this particular shrine and its community. In 2005, therefore, he restructured its organisation, asked former volunteers to leave, and established a new group of approximately 20 to 25 people who do feel connected to the locality and who are more committed (personal interview, May 2013). Thus, establishing a local network and involving people who live near the shrine are important objectives for Sakurai. For this, regular communication is seen as an important prerequisite: being visible in the neighbourhood, establishing social relations, organising community events and maintaining a weblog on forest-related activities are all part of this (Sakurai 2009). As a result of these efforts, reportedly more and more people come to visit the shrine – if only just for a stroll.

Throughout the years, Sakurai has learned a lot about forest ecology; when I visited his shrine, he explained me several things about the forest environment. In contrast to those who suggest that a resurgence of the 'traditional' Shinto 'spirit of gratitude' and an awareness of our 'coexistence with nature' are sufficient, Sakurai suggests that if we really want to solve environmental problems (whether on a local or a global scale), we do need practical and scientific knowledge – for even if we care about nature, we may still do things that are ecologically harmful out of ignorance. As I was told, Ibaraki prefecture is a very ecologically diverse region; as it constitutes the border area between Japan's two main climate zones, it has species both from northern and from western Japan. But this biodiversity is fragile: as all organisms in an ecosystem are mutually dependent, a small distortion can lead to significant biodiversity loss. Sakurai agrees with many contemporary scientists working on (shrine) forests that autochthonous broad-leaved trees are more ecologically beneficial than *sugi*, *matsu* or *hinoki*, as the latter species do not let through enough light for a diverse ecosystem to develop. However, he does disagree with them on some other points, suggesting that there are several problems with other *chinju no mori*-based conservation projects.

First, Sakurai is critical of the Miyawaki method of planting *furusato* trees. He is not opposed to planting trees, if necessary; however, he suggests that Miyawaki plants *too many* trees, which may disturb existing ecosystems. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to shrine forest projects that have a strong focus on tree-planting: instead of constantly planting trees, it is better to let existing forests develop themselves, while doing necessary maintenance work to prevent certain species from getting

too dominant.[203] Second, he does not seem to agree with Ueda Masaaki's ideal-typical distinction between *mori* as 'natural' and 'untouched' and *hayashi* as 'artificial'. The term used by Sakurai and others is *mori-zukuri*, forest-making – which according to Ueda's model would be an oxymoron.[204] Rather than setting apart an area of forest as 'forbidden' and staying away from it, biodiversity conservation requires more active maintenance, they argue. And third, most importantly, Sakurai suggests that many other projects have a focus that is *too* local: that is, they are only concerned with a particular *chinju no mori*, but do not consider its immediate environment. Yet, animals and plants do not thrive in small, isolated groves; in order for shrine forests to be ecologically diverse, therefore, they need to be connected to other areas of green space. To Sakurai, the shrine forest, the stream and the rice paddy (*shinsenden*; a term used for paddies associated with shrines, where rice is grown that is offered to deities) are all connected, and part of a larger ecosystem; he calls this the '*chinju no mori* biotope' (1999, 82-83). Hence, he suggests, conservation activities should not be limited to the shrine precincts, but also concern the surrounding area.

10.3.3 Education and sacralisation

As we have seen, however, Sakurai's concerns are not limited to environmental issues. He has repeatedly stressed the educational significance of his project – and that significance is not limited to environmental awareness. As I wrote in the previous chapter, *chinju no mori* are increasingly seen by members of the shrine establishment as symbolic resources that may be employed for educational purposes: educating children in 'traditional culture' (a term which is not usually defined, but typically refers to shrine practices, arts and crafts, and agriculture); cultivating their personalities by letting them experience work on a rice paddy; socialising them as members of the imagined community 'Japan' by teaching them the importance of 'love of nature' through such symbolic practices as planting trees, watching cherry blossoms and catching insects; and nurturing 'love of their native soil'. Indeed, such arguments are also employed by Sakurai (1999; 2009). In our interview, for instance, he lamented the problems of 'individualisation' and 'urbanisation', saying that children no longer obey their parents and teachers, play computer games instead of playing in the forest, do not learn to be grateful and respectful, and so on. Like his colleagues Sonoda and Ueda, then, Sakurai combines environmental advocacy with moral conservatism and a nostalgic longing for an idealised past.

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[203] Sakurai was not the only person I talked to who expressed this opinion. Miyawaki continues to be one of the most famous Japanese ecologists, but his ideas may not be as widely shared as they were in the 1980s and '90s; as Japan today seems to be suffering from *over*forestation rather than deforestation, the tree-planting paradigm seems to have lost support. That said, I have also talked to shrine volunteers elsewhere who cited Miyawaki as their great example. Opinions differ.

[204] Sakurai uses the ideas on *mori-zukuri* developed by the environmental scientist Nakagawa Shigetoshi. He recommended Nakagawa's *Mori-zukuri Textbook* (Nakagawa 2004), which is a practical guide to forest conservation and construction.

Yet, I would argue that, ultimately, the activities of Sennen no Mori no Kai are not only about nature conservation, community cohesion and environmental education. They are also about sacralisation and re-enchantment. The forest's 'enchanting' character – a mossy soil, fragrant plants, Miyazakiesque creatures, old wooden shrine buildings – is no coincidence, but the result of years of hard work to create such a space. Until three or four decades ago, this was a comparatively dark forest, largely made up of pine trees; since then, however, it has been reshaped significantly. In its current shape, the forest is as much the result of 'place-making' activities as it is of 'natural' (i.e., non-human) factors. Put differently, rather than constituting a 'wild' or 'natural' forest, the current shape of the forest is largely the outcome of spatial practices – pruning, planting, weeding and so on – that have contributed to the place acquiring its special (some might say: 'sacred') character.

When Sakurai laments the lack of people who have 'faith' in contemporary Japan, he expresses his dissatisfaction with the apparent loss of traditional worldviews, and with the social changes that have taken place in recent decades. His arguments do not only concern a gradual loss of 'faith' in deities ('secularisation', some might call it), but also the 'desacralisation' of nature; i.e., the increasing dominance of materialistic and utilitarian perceptions of nature, that strip it from its 'sacred' or mysterious qualities. Arguably, then, Sakurai is a romantic environmentalist, who is concerned not only with the return of traditional beliefs but also with *resacralising nature*: that is, he wants nature to be conceived of in mystical terms, setting it apart as something that transcends ordinary human society yet simultaneously constitutes its foundation. This is illustrated by the following citation:

> The participants [in the activities of the Sennen no Mori no Kai], myself included, have come to realise that all living creatures take part in the circle of life. As a result, they now understand things about *kami* and Shinto, even if they do not talk about the *kami*. Let me give a concrete example: when these children climb the mountain, even if they do not say anything, they put their hands together in front of the *kami* and pray for not getting hurt. That is the kind of shape in which it appears.
>
> In addition, I could see the sprouting of minds touched by the beauty and laws of nature. They became aware of the fact that they themselves are a part of nature, and live because of nature. One by one, the children became lively, and began to shine (…). Networks between people emerged, with nature as their medium. I realised that nature is good for educating children [the importance of] balance (1999, 80-81; my translation).

As this citation makes clear, Sakurai conceives of nature in a holistic way, arguing that all living creatures, including human beings, are part of it. As the divine is believed to reside in nature, where it interacts with us, his understanding of the relationship between gods and nature may be described as panentheistic. In addition, he attributes several special qualities to nature: it is able to arouse devotion, as well as feelings of reverence and gratitude; it can make people aware of the interdependence of all beings, and teach them how to achieve balance; and, in the end, it fosters social relations.

Sakurai's interest in social cohesion and education is evidenced by some of his other activities. Significantly, in addition to his work as a shrine priest and as leader of the Sennen no Mori no Kai, he regularly works in a prison to give pastoral care. As he told me, the prisoners do not usually ask him questions about gods, and he does not address that topic himself. But they do ask him what the forest looks like, what flowers are in bloom, what birds he has heard, when the rice will be harvested, and what the weather has been like. He always tells them about these things. That, he said, is one of the things the prisoners miss most: being outdoors, in nature, observing the seasonal changes. Nature, then, is discursively intertwined with hope and rehabilitation; its sacred qualities can be appreciated by and resonate with anybody, regardless of their particular 'belief'. While not 'religious' in the conventional sense of the word, this reinterpretation of nature may well be described as an attempt at sacralisation.

10.4   Shiroyama Hachimangū and Mori-zukuri Kaigi

10.4.1 The shrine and its forest

The two organisations and projects I have described so far – Tadasu no Mori Zaidan and Sennen no Mori no Kai – are officially independent, yet their activities are organised in direct interaction with their respective shrines. The same applies to NPO Hibiki and Afuhi Project, which will be discussed in the next chapter (Shasō Gakkai is somewhat different, as it is not related to one particular shrine forest). In three of these four projects, shrine priests are directly involved with the activities, or even the driving forces behind them.[205] When reading about these projects, one might get the impression that shrine priests have become more interested in nature conservation, education and other social and cultural issues. Certainly, it seems to be the trend that young priests are more interested in this sort of activities, and have become more socially engaged. Still, it is probably safe to say that the majority of shrine priests are busy with ritual ceremonies and administrative duties, and are not active in nature conservation or related cultural activities; either because of a lack of time and money, or simply because they do not see it as their main responsibility. Nor, for that matter, do they spend much time working in their shrine forest.

Generally speaking, only the wealthiest shrines in the country, such as Shimogamo Jinja, Meiji Jingū, Atsuta Jingū and Ise Jingū, can afford to permanently hire people for forest maintenance; most other shrines do not have the means to do so, and their forests are by and large ignored. In some cases, this may have led to the preservation of small areas of climax (i.e., 'natural') forest; more often, however, the lack of maintenance has contributed to forests growing wild, and of invader species taking over. In the case of urban shrines, this has caused discomfort for neighbours, who complain about fallen leaves, insects and untidy appearances, and want the shrine forest removed (Hasegawa

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[205] As we will see in the next chapter, priestly involvement in NPO Hibiki is less obvious than in the other three projects, but that organisation, too, organises its activities in direct cooperation with the shrine, by which it is facilitated, financed (partially) and sanctioned.

personal communication, May 2013). Such considerations may well have served as an extra incentive for shrines to sell (parts of) their precincts – in addition to the obvious economic incentives for selling land in an urban environment with high real estate prices. In sum, not all shrine priests are equally concerned with preserving *chinju no mori*, especially if there is external pressure to sell some of the land.

Of course, the rapid loss of shrine forest land in the 1950s, 60s and 70s – an area characterised by impressive economic growth and a countrywide construction craze – was exactly the reason why the *chinju no mori* movement (starting with the work of Ueda Atsushi and Miyawaki Akira, and leading to the establishment of Shasō Gakkai and various local conservation projects) emerged in the first place. As a result, today, shrine forest preservation has become a widely shared concern. That does not mean shrine forests are no longer threatened, however. The economic and other incentives that caused shrines to sell parts of their land in earlier decades are still there, especially in urban areas; and, as I suggested, the agendas of shrine priests are not always compatible with those of environmental activists.

Accordingly, when it comes to shrine forest protection, shrine priests are not always the main actors. In some cases, *chinju no mori* projects are set up and run completely by volunteers – in which case the involvement of priests is limited to giving permission (or not) for certain activities to take place. One such example is the non-profit organisation Mori-zukuri Kaigi ('forest-making assembly'), established in 2009 for the purpose of nature conservation, forest maintenance work and community development at the Shiroyama Hachimangū shrine in Nagoya (Chikusa ward). The organisation was set up by Hasegawa Yasuhiro, who was at the time working on his PhD dissertation on shrine forests in Aichi prefecture at Nagoya City University (Hasegawa 2012; cf. Hasegawa, Okamura and Kōsaka 2010). In his work, Hasegawa consistently uses the term '*shasō*' instead of '*chinju no mori*', which is no doubt related to the fact that he has been involved with Shasō Gakkai for several years. Together with his former PhD supervisor, he has presented papers at Shasō Gakkai conferences based on his field research (Hasegawa & Okamura 2009; 2011). In addition, he has taken part in Shasō Gakkai's 'sacred forest instructor' course, and has applied the skills and knowledge acquired there to his volunteer work at Shiroyama Hachimangū. Rather than 'Shinto', 'sacred space' or 'traditional culture', his main concerns are landscape architecture and environmental conservation. His work constitutes an interesting attempt to combine scientific research and analysis with a more practically-oriented, activist approach.

Unlike Gosho Komataki Jinja, Shiroyama Hachimangū is an urban shrine, surrounded by houses and other buildings. However, it is not even remotely as wealthy or well-known as large urban shrines such as Shimogamo Jinja or Meiji Jingū (or, in Nagoya, Atsuta Jingū). It is not visited by many tourists, but it does seem to have a certain local appeal. When I first visited the shrine, I

happened to be there around the time of the *shichi-go-san* festival,[206] and several families with beautifully-dressed young children had made it to the shrine in order to attend a ritual ceremony. Like other neighbourhood shrines, Shiroyama Hachimangū is a place where ritual purification ceremonies and weddings are organised, where *o-mamori* and *o-fuda* are sold, and where people come for *hatsumōde* (the first shrine visit of the new year) and other prayers. It is also the locus of the annual neighbourhood *matsuri*. In sum, in several respects, it looks like the 'typical' local urban shrine.

What is special about the shrine, however, is its spatial configuration. As the name suggests (*shiroyama* means 'castle mountain'), Shiroyama Hachimangū is located on the site of a former castle. It was here that Oda Nobuhide (1510-1551) (local ruler and father of the famous warlord Oda Nobunaga [1534-1582]) built his Suemori castle in 1547. Nobunaga's younger brother Nobuyuki (1536-1557) is said to have built the first shrine here, devoted to the god of Hakusan (now Shirayama Hime Jinja) in Ishikawa prefecture (Hasegawa 2012, 139). Before long, however, the Odas were defeated, and the castle was abandoned. Today, the only thing that has remained of the castle is the hill on which it was built, and the castle moats (which are now dry, and have given way to forest; see figure eleven). The current shrine was established much later, in 1936 (ibid., 139). As it was built on the site of a former castle, it was dedicated to the deity Hachiman, associated with warriors and archery.

Figure 11: Former castle moat, now part of the chinju no mori *of Shiroyama Hachimangū*

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[206] *Shichi-go-san* (literally: 7-5-3) is one of modern Shinto's life-cycle rituals. Every year around November 15, girls aged three or seven and boys aged five pay official visits to their local shrine, together with their parents. They are dressed in their best clothes, attend a ritual ceremony, and get candy or presents. See Bocking 1995, 163.

The forest of Shiroyama Hachimangū, it follows, is older than its present shrine buildings. While not a primeval forest, it does go back to the sixteenth century. For a small forest (approximately 2 ha; i.e., a sixth the size of Tadasu no Mori), it can boast a considerable species diversity. Apparently, the forest predates the time when *sugi* and *hinoki* were in vogue: its main tree species are *konara*, *abemaki* and *arakashi* (*Quercus serrata*, *Quercus variabilis* and *Quercus glauca*, three types of oak), *kakuremino* (*Dendropanax trifidus*), *yabutsubaki* and *sakaki* (*Cleyera japonica*).[207] In addition, there are *mukunoki*, *enoki* and *tsuburajii* (*Castanopsis cuspidata*). Some of these trees are very old, going back to the Edo period; the most famous of these are the shrine's *shinboku*, two entwined *abemaki* (a symbol of *en-musubi* and marital love, also called *renriboku*). There are also *kusunoki*, but these were planted after the Isewan typhoon had caused much damage to the forest in 1959. Unusually for a shrine forest, there are even some *shuro* (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), a species of palm tree (Hasegawa 2012, 140-141).

In addition to trees, the forest houses a variety of other plants and animals – including, reportedly, a rare species of owl. This latter fact, however, is not widely known. I actually asked the volunteers of Mori-zukuri Kaigi why they did not build a campaign around the owl. Thus far, they have had difficulties trying to involve people from the neighbourhood in their activities; an owl-protection campaign might be a good way to raise awareness of shrine forest's importance, and get some positive media attention, or so I thought. That was a bad idea, it turned out: as they explained, it might attract 'collectors' coming to the shrine forest in order to catch the owls. It was better to keep the owls' presence a secret, they assured me. Instead, they were developing activities to make fireflies come to the shrine forest. That, they believed, would be much better PR, as watching fireflies is a very popular activity in Japan.

10.4.2 *Setting up a* **chinju no mori** *project*

That brings us to the activities of Mori-zukuri Kaigi. As said, the organisation was founded in 2009. Initially, the group consisted of seven people, most of whom do not live in the vicinity of the shrine. In 2012, the organisation reportedly had eleven members: six from outside the area, and five from the inside (Hasegawa 2012, 140). Today, the number of active members is lower than ten; attempts to permanently involve local community members have not yet been very successful (Hasegawa, personal communication, May 2013). Among the members are some young people, including scientists, as well as a few elderly people who are retired. All of them share an interest in nature and environmental issues; considerations of the shrine as a 'sacred place' or as 'traditional culture' do not seem to play an important part. Revealingly, there are no priests among the group's members. When I first visited the shrine, I was introduced to the head priest, and we had a short conversation. He stated

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[207] *Sakaki* is an evergreen broad-leaved tree, the branches of which are often used for shrine ceremonies and offered to the gods.

that he was interested in environmental issues, and expressed his appreciation for the work done by Hasegawa and the others. It was clear, however, that he was not actively involved in any of the group's activities. Consequently, as we shall see shortly, there are some small but significant differences in opinion between the shrine management and the NPO.

In an information pamphlet published a year after the foundation of the organisation (apparently with the support of Shasō Gakkai), Hasegawa explained its main purposes and activities (Hasegawa 2010). *Chinju no mori*, he writes, are 'places where a culture was created that coexisted with nature' (*shizen to kyōzon shita bunka no sōzō no ba*); they are 'places of faith' (*shinkō no ba*), but their significance extends beyond that. The value of *chinju no mori*, Hasegawa summarises, is fourfold. First, they have 'natural value', because of their biodiversity and because they are places where old trees have been preserved. Second, they have 'cultural value': they house traditional architecture and cultural treasures, are historical landmarks, and constitute centres of tourism and 'city-making' (*machi-zukuri*; a term that refers to a range of activities employed to improve the living conditions of Japanese urban neighbourhoods). Third, they have 'environmental value', by which he does not refer to their ecology (that would constitute 'natural value') but by their spatial properties; i.e., they are 'places where one can experience traditional space' (*dentōteki na kūkan taiken no ba*) because of their spatial configuration (*torii*, *sandō*, *temizuya*, shrine buildings *et cetera*). And fourth, they have 'social value' as places where people come to meet, talk, play and worship, and where children can learn about nature; as such, they constitute community centres (ibid.).

Having explained his vision on the significance of *chinju no mori*, he goes on to describe the regular activities of Mori-zukuri Kaigi at the forest of Shiroyama Hachimangū, many of which are seasonal. As it gives a good indication of the type of work involved with such a non-profit organisation, I will list them all:

January	General meeting: evaluation of the past year and making plans for the new year.
February	Making baskets of *kuzu* (kudzu; *Pueraria lobata*) plants from the forest.
March	1. Meeting with the head priest of the shrine, in order to make plans (and get permission) for activities in the next months.
	2. Resume general forest maintenance work, such as cleaning up litter and removing overgrown *shuro*, *kuzu* and *sasa* (genus *Sasa*; a type of bamboo).
April	Doing forest research; checking the results of previous activities.
May, June	General forest maintenance work (see above).
July – September	Preparing and organising workshops (guided walks in the forest and neighbourhood, mushroom cultivation, environmental education); PR activities.
October	Guided walks by forest experts.
December	Mushroom cultivation events (using the logs of *abemaki* and *arakashi* trees, on which the mushrooms grow).
	(based on Hasegawa 2010; cf. Hasegawa 2012, 143-148.)

Members of Mori-zukuri Kaigi are only allowed to do forest maintenance work in the 'public' part of the shrine forest. As in some other shrines, the area behind the *honden* is fenced off and not open to non-clergy; accordingly, no activities can take place there (Hasegawa 2012, 142). We have seen that scholars involved with Shasō Gakkai, such as Ueda Masaaki, have applauded the tradition of setting apart a particular part of a shrine forest or mountain as 'sacred' and not allowing laypeople entry to this area. These areas are referred to as *irazu no mori* or *kinsokuchi*, terms I have translated somewhat loosely as 'forbidden forest'; i.e., places that have been subject to sacralisation processes, entry to which has been forbidden. Because of this tradition, they argued, areas of primeval forest have been preserved until today; accordingly, these areas are said to be of great environmental significance (M. Ueda 2004a, 37-39; Suganuma 2004, 85-94). Be that as it may, the majority of shrine forests today is *not* primeval, and rapidly-growing invader species (such as *sasa* bamboo) are pushing out trees and plants that are less dominant. Accordingly, the ideal of the shrine forest that grows naturally and is not controlled or managed is gradually giving way to the realisation that in most cases neglect leads to overgrowth and biodiversity decline, and that, in order to protect a shrine forest, human involvement (pruning, cleaning, felling invader species and so on) is necessary.

Thus, while there is general consensus on the *importance* of shrine forest protection among priests, scientists, environmental activists and urban planners alike, there is plenty of disagreement when it comes to the actual *practice* of forest preservation. Forest conservationists may want to remove *sasa* or *kuzu* from the entire forest, and not really care about what parts of the forest are considered 'sacred'; priests, however, may want to preserve the 'sacred' character of a particular part of the forest, by maintaining its status as a 'forbidden' area and leaving it to 'nature'. But then, there is no clear consensus among shrine priests, either. Before establishing Mori-zukuri Kaigi, Hasegawa conducted a questionnaire survey among shrine priests in the Nagoya metropolitan area; it turned out that most shrine forests (77-90%, depending on forest size) were 'moderately maintained' (i.e., only basic maintenance activities took place), but that there was considerable variation with regard to forest ideals. While some priests stated they want 'a natural forest' or 'a divine forest with many high trees', others opted for 'a forest where children can play' or 'a forest where seasonal excursions take place' (Hasegawa, Okamura & Kōsaka 2010, 42-43). Thus, some wanted their shrine forest to be primarily a 'natural' or 'sacred' site, while others were more interested in the 'social' and 'educational' properties. The head priest of Shiroyama Hachimangū also wants his shrine forest to be primarily an 'urban *shasō*': i.e., a place for recreation and social encounters, rather than, say, a natural park (Hasegawa 2012, 141). Yet, he does want to keep the 'most sacred' part of the forest closed.

In reality, then, there is no consensus on what an ideal shrine forest should look like, and what sort of maintenance activities should or should not take place. Even shrines that have priests who are, in principle, interested in forest preservation, often have difficulties in carrying out maintenance activities. Problems reported include a lack of human resources, a lack of financial means, a lack of practical knowledge, and complaints by people living in the vicinity of the forest (Hasegawa, Okamura

& Kōsaka 2010, 41-42). The first problem is fairly obvious: most shrines only have a handful of priests (or only one), who are usually busy with their various 'priestly' duties (ritual and otherwise) and have limited time available to work in the forest. Second, while activities such as cleaning up litter do not cost money, other forest maintenance activities do: for instance, treating a tree that is suffering from parasitic beetles is said to cost 3000 yen (approximately 25 euros) per tree per year (Hasegawa 2012, 141). This may not be much if it is only one tree, but these beetles are not known for their moderation; if one broad-leaved tree in a forest is affected, many others are likely to be affected, too. As for the issue of practical knowledge: few shrine priests are schooled in botany or ecology, so even though they may be willing to do maintenance work, many of them simply do not know what plants they should or should not remove. Hence, weeding activities may end up having a negative ecological impact.[208] As a result of these various constraints, at most shrines forest maintenance activities are kept to a minimum, and shrines often depend on volunteers to do some basic tasks. But not all shrines are successful in engaging volunteers: at Shiroyama Hachimangū, before the establishment of Mori-zukuri Kaigi, there had not been any volunteer involvement in forest maintenance (including cleaning up) for 15 years (ibid., 141).

10.4.3 Nature lovers?

Having read numerous treatises on the 'Japanese love of nature', and having lived in big cities in which I was longing for green space and clean air myself, one of the things I found most surprising about the Shiroyama Hachimangū project was the problems the organisers have in convincing people living around the shrine of the forest's importance. One would expect people living in a metropolis like Nagoya to be happy if they have a small forest in their vicinity, but apparently this is not usually the case. On the contrary: many neighbours reportedly perceive the shrine forest as a nuisance, and would rather see it disappear. In fact, Nagoya is not unique in this respect: shrine priests in other cities have also told me about the many complaints they have received about their forests, and the difficulties they have experienced in making local communities appreciate the forest's presence. Most of the time, people complain about falling leaves and branches. They also complain about insects coming from the forest, and about shade: shrine forests are seen as 'too dark' and block sunlight (Hasegawa, Okamura & Kōsaka 2010, 41).

As a result, neighbourhood committees sometimes put pressure on shrine priests to fell (some of the) large trees – which is exactly what happened at Shiroyama Hachimangū recently, much to the dismay of the volunteers of Mori-zukuri Kaigi, who had lobbied for their preservation. As Hasegawa told me, when it comes to low vegetation (i.e., removing *sasa*, *kuzu* and so on), the head priest and he are very much in agreement; it is the high trees, however, that are the main cause of friction (personal

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[208] This, incidentally, was one of the reasons why Shasō Gakkai set up its forest instructor course – but the participation of priests in this course depends on, again, human resources and financial means.

communication, May 2013). The volunteers want to protect them, because of their ecological significance. The shrine management, however, wants the forest to be a social meeting place, and is not particularly interested in preserving trees that are expensive to maintain (because they require protection from beetles), and cause annoyance to neighbours (i.e., the shrine's *ujiko*, upon which it depends both financially and practically).

In sum, shrine priests have to take into consideration different factors, and nature conservation is not necessarily always high on the agenda. In spite of popular representations of Shinto as 'ancient nature spirituality', or claims made by Jinja Honchō and other organisations concerning Shinto's alleged relevance for overcoming the global environmental crisis, in reality shrines have to deal with competing and at times conflicting interests. For the majority of shrine priests, the most important things are, firstly, correctly performing rituals, so as to maintain good relations with deities and preserve shrine traditions; secondly, attracting enough paying worshippers and supporters, in order to make ends meet financially; and thirdly, maintaining good relations with the *ujiko*, as they are the shrine's main patrons, and the people who co-organise and finance the annual *matsuri*. Exceptions notwithstanding, for most shrine priests, therefore, environmental issues are of secondary concern at best. Consequently, if environmental activists want to carry out activities in order to preserve the forest, they not only need the support and sympathy of shrine priests but also of the local community.

Of course, as we have seen, *chinju no mori* are commonly conceptualised not only as community *centres* but even as their very *cradles*. Accordingly, they are widely associated with community-building projects, and seen as the focal points – both physically and symbolically – around which new social networks can (and should) develop. This is not limited to social interaction during *matsuri*; in recent years, the notion of *chinju no mori* as community centres has been extended to include educational activities, local markets, and even the development of alternative energy (Hiroi 2012). Accordingly, *chinju no mori* have been described as 'social capital' (Hasegawa 2012, 137). The relationship with 'local communities' – whether referred to as *kyōdōtai* ('collective body'), *chiiki shakai* ('local society') or *komyunitii* (the English loanword) – has been described as one characterised by mutual dependence: supposedly, there is a strong ontological intertwinement between the shrine forest and the local community, in which the survival of the one depends on the other.

It may be argued, however, that a 'local community' is an imaginary construct in many ways. That is, in twenty-first century, hyper-urban society, people have multiple identities – work, family, online – and being a member of an *ujiko* or 'local community' is not necessarily one of them. Even if 'local communities' are 'real' in the sense that they represent a loosely defined collective of people living in the same area and coming together twice a year for a festival, that still does not make them a significant reality in the daily life of their 'members'. Urban society nowadays is characterised by a high degree of anonymity and fluidity; there are few closed communities in which all members know each other. Hence, ideal-typical representations of shrines as 'community centres' arguably do not correspond to contemporary social realities.

That does not mean, of course, that activities employed to improve social relations, living conditions and local environments – *machi-zukuri*, *komyunitii-zukuri* or *mori-zukuri* (city-making, community-making or forest-making), as they are called in Japan today – are meaningless. Quite the contrary: in urban societies characterised by a high degree of anonymity (and, perhaps, anomie), such activities can serve to establish social relations and provide people with a sense of security and belonging, even if the 'communities' they are said to help preserve are situational and constantly changing. Forest preservation activities may well serve a similar function. What is crucial, however, is the involvement and support of the people living in the immediate vicinity of the forest – the *ujiko*, so to speak. As the Shiroyama Hachimangū case makes clear, this is not something that is established overnight. Hasegawa *cum suis* are well aware of the importance of community involvement, and they have struggled to engage people – with limited success, so far. While some people have participated in workshops or other events, *permanent* community involvement is difficult to achieve. As they told me, not many Japanese people are really concerned about environmental issues and nature conservation; put bluntly, they only love 'nature' when it has the shape of pretty cherry blossoms, not when it has the shape of fallen leaves or insects from a shrine forest. The absence of a serious Green Party in Japan is symptomatic of this lack of concern, they suggested.

Nevertheless, they are trying to reach out. For this purpose, recently, they have been trying to get fireflies (*hotaru*) to the shrine forest. Today, there are fireflies in some other parts of Nagoya, further away from the city centre, but not here. As fireflies are very popular in Japan, the presence of these little insects may well help people in the neighbourhood like the shrine forest better, or so they reasoned. Indeed, throughout Japan there are non-profit organisations active to improve the conditions for both fireflies and dragonflies, in order to protect them or make them return to particular places. These projects have been going on for several decades, as Moon has pointed out: 'From the 1960s, nature protection groups began to draw attention to the diminishing firefly population and launched many anti-pollution campaigns to revive *hotaru*. (…) There are now eighty-five "firefly villages" (*hotaru no sato*) or "firefly towns" (*hotaru no machi*) in Japan, registered at the Ministry of the Environment' (1997, 225). Recently, some of these projects have been carried out in cooperation with shrines (e.g., Abe 2008). The significance of fireflies is not merely aesthetic: as they are vulnerable creatures, the presence or absence is often seen as indicative of the condition of a local ecosystem. Pollution by pesticides or chemicals, for instance, often leads to their disappearance. In order for fireflies to come back, it is argued, the overall environmental conditions need to be good.[209] Firefly

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[209] I am not sure to what extent this is correct. Interestingly, Moon writes: 'It is believed that dragonflies (*tonbo*) or fireflies (*hotaru*) can live, during the caterpillar stage, only in unpolluted water (…). This belief is a myth since it is known that slight pollution is necessary for the survival of caterpillars, especially in the case of fireflies. This means that if the water becomes too pure it might threaten the very survival of fireflies. Nevertheless, the existence of the insect has been widely advertised as a symbol of unpolluted nature, i.e. pure water, and the revival of the firefly through various types of anti-pollution campaigns comprises an essential part of many local tourist development plans (1997, 224).' Unfortunately, however, Moon does not specify what she

projects are a good example of the tactics employed by Japanese environmental organisations to get local people involved in their projects; even though the importance of fireflies may be symbolic rather than ecological, they do serve to establish coalitions and gain sympathy. After all, nobody is against fireflies…

Thus, when I last visited the shrine, I joined some NPO members on a walk through the forest, together with a firefly expert (i.e., somebody who had worked on a similar project elsewhere) who explained us about fireflies' habitats. Old branches and logs, he explained, should not be removed, but left in the forest, for this is where the larvae of fireflies grow. Whether or not the volunteers of Mori-zukuri Kaigi will be successful in creating their firefly forest, I cannot tell. Nor, for that matter, do I know how long they will continue their activities – the organisation is so small, that it is highly dependent on the willingness of a few individuals to spend their time and energy on the project. In any case, I do believe it is an interesting case, as it shows us what kind of challenges a newly established *chinju no mori* conservation organisation can meet. It also shows that actual attitudes to nature – either of shrine priests or 'ordinary' city dwellers – do not always correspond to what the theory tells us. Fallen cherry blossom is not the same as fallen oak leaves, it seems, and fireflies are not the same as other insects. There are many kinds of 'nature', not all of which are appreciated equally.

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means by 'pollution' – the widespread use of pesticides, presumably, does *not* contribute to the survival of fireflies (or dragonflies).

11 SHRINE FORESTS, TRADITIONAL CULTURE, AND NATIONAL REVITALISATION

11.1 Meiji Jingū and NPO Hibiki

11.1.1 Meiji Jingū

Having discussed various shrine-related nature conservation projects, I will now move on to discuss shrine forest projects that are less environmentally and more culturally oriented. The difference is not always clear-cut: as we have seen, some of the activities employed by the Tadasu no Mori foundation and the Sennen no Mori no Kai have clear cultural-nationalist subtexts as well, while some of the activities organised by the projects discussed below are nature-oriented. Nevertheless, I do believe there is a subtle yet relevant difference between practices whose main *raison d'être* is nature conservation and environmental protection, and those whose main purposes are the conservation of traditional culture, the education of shrine worship and mythology, and the revitalisation of the nation. All four cases discussed in this chapter arguably belong to the latter group.

Nevertheless, there are some differences. The first two, NPO Hibiki and Afuhi Project, are shrine projects not unlike the one at Shimogamo Jinja (albeit with a slightly different focus). The third case, by contrast, is not a cultural-educational project: here, I will discuss forest practices at Ise Jingū, and recent attempts to redefine the forest in accordance with contemporary Shinto discourse. Finally, the fourth subchapter is somewhat different in approach, as here I will not discuss a single site. Instead, I will examine a particular topic: the revitalisation of Japan (social and cultural) in the post-tsunami age (i.e., after 2011). This is a very large topic, of course, to which I cannot do justice in the limited space of this chapter. Hence, I will limit myself to a short, explorative discussion of discursive and spatial practices pertaining to both natural disasters and shrines (in particular, shrine forests). As the tsunami has had significant impact on Shinto discourse, as well as notions of 'nature' more in general, I do believe it is important to address this topic, however briefly.

First, however, I will discuss the forest of Meiji Jingū in Tokyo. Located behind Harajuku station, and surrounded by the hypermodern neighbourhoods of Shinjuku, Shibuya and Aoyama, the forest of Meiji Jingū is a unique area of urban woodland. The shrine and its forest have a total area of approximately 70 hectares, more than five times the size of Tadasu no Mori. This is one of Japan's best-known and wealthiest shrines, and one of the most popular places to visit for *hatsumōde*: on the first three days of January alone, more than three million people are said to come here and pray (or wish) for good luck, safety and prosperity (Cali & Dougill 2013, 80). But the shrine is popular year-round, and in addition to Japanese visitors, it is also frequented by foreign tourists.[210] Although the

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[210] I have got the impression that in recent years, the number of foreign visitors coming to Meiji Jingū has increased significantly; in particular, there are more and more Asian tourists from so-called 'emerging economies' such as China, Thailand and Indonesia. This impression was confirmed by some of the Japanese

shrine and its forest may appear old and 'traditional' to many visitors, they are of relatively young age: construction began in 1915, and the shrine was not officially opened until 1920. Most of the current shrine buildings date from 1958, after the previous buildings had been destroyed in air raids.

As mentioned before, the deities enshrined here are Emperor Meiji and Empress Shōken. Accordingly, the shrine is a product of the imperial ideology of prewar Japan, and intimately connected with the national ritual cult that would later come to be known as 'State Shinto'. In addition, it may be seen as a memorial site; i.e., a place in which memories of the Meiji period have been given physical shape. That does not mean the meanings attributed to it are unequivocal: as Imaizumi Yoshiko has demonstrated (2008; 2013), from the time of its establishment, the exact shape and functions of the shrine and its forest have been subject to contestation, debate, and alternative interpretations. That was especially the case in the early postwar period, when Shinto had to be dissociated from prewar imperial ideology, and reinvented as an 'indigenous religious tradition' (see chapter five). As for Meiji Jingū, discussions did not only pertain to the shrine's legal status, but also to its physical shape; for instance, there was a debate about whether the new shrine buildings should be made of wood or concrete, reflecting different notions concerning the ideal shape of shrines (Imaizumi 2008, 59-65).

Despite its historical background, few visitors today seem to associate Meiji Jingū with 'State Shinto' or Japanese imperialism. In sharp contrast to Yasukuni Jinja, Meiji Jingū has become a highly depoliticised place that does not seem to attract much controversy.[211] In 2009, it was visited by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; one year later, her German colleague Guido Westerwelle followed her example. These visits indicate that the shrine is not associated with Japanese imperialism (anymore), for if it had been, these foreign ministers would not have paid official visits. Instead, today Meiji Jingū is generally perceived in positive terms, as a vestige of 'traditional Japanese culture' and a 'green oasis' surrounded by concrete jungle. It is praised for its natural beauty, quietness, fresh air and cultural value.[212] In addition, various sacred and spiritual qualities are attributed to the forest, which houses one of Japan's most popular 'powerspots'. Although different people may feel attracted to different aspects of the shrine and its forest, few would deny their cultural, ecological and spiritual

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volunteers to whom I have talked. Meiji Jingū's recent international popularity is also illustrated by its *ema* (wooden plaques on which shrine visitors write their wishes). When I last visited the shrine (May 2013), I saw *ema* not only in Japanese, but also in English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, French, Portuguese and Bahasa Indonesia – something I had never seen at any other shrine.

[211] That is, there has been little or no controversy related to Meiji Jingū's historical association with the state and its imperial ideology. In recent years, however, there has been a controversy concerning Meiji Jingū's relationship to Jinja Honchō: there were tensions between the two institutions, and Meiji Jingū even left Jinja Honchō in 2004 (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 205-207), but the two are now reunited. However, this conflict seems to have been due to disagreements of a financial and institutional-political nature (as well as, probably, personal antipathies), not to ideological matters.

[212] For instance, in a magazine on Japanese culture, it was described as follows: 'The dense green of the forest surrounding Meiji Jingu makes it an oasis against a backdrop of skyscrapers. The gravel-strewn entrance path symbolizes purification and the evergreen trees towering above it seem to cover the sky, creating a feeling of purity and serenity' (Tsukada 2005).

significance. Yet, the historical associations with imperialism do not receive much attention. This approach is exemplified by Cali and Dougill, who write that

> All of this [the Meiji Period, 'State Shinto' and prewar imperial ideology] *is now history*. As the worshipper bows his head at the Meiji Jingu of today, he or she is more likely to be aware of how tall the trees are and how clean the air smells. No wonder this beautiful shrine is a favorite place for weddings and Shinto seasonal festivals. With its huge scale, lovely forested grounds, and tall stately *torii*, it makes a deep impression of reverence (2013, 80; my emphasis).

11.1.2 *Meiji Jingū's forest*

In particular, one aspect of Meiji Jingū that has captured the imagination of scholars and visitors alike is its forest – not only because of its 'tall trees' and 'clean air', but also because of its unique history. It is sometimes called Yoyogi Forest (Yoyogi no Mori) – not to be confused with Yoyogi Park (Yoyogi Kōen), which lies next to it – but usually it is referred to simply as 'the forest of Meiji Jingū' (Meiji Jingū no Mori). The forest of Meiji Jingū is a mixed forest of approximately 160,000 trees, comprising over 240 species (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 93, 98),[213] and it constitutes an interesting paradox. On the one hand, it is an artificial forest, completely designed and created by humans. Most specialists will be able to recognise it as such:

> When a forest specialist looks at the forest of Meiji Jingū, s/he will instantly notice that this is an artificial forest. Why? Because a *tsuga* [*Tsuga sieboldii*] is standing next to a *mokkoku* [*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*], and next to that is a *mochinoki* [*Ilex integra*], and so on. There is so much species diversity that it could not have developed naturally (ibid., 185; my translation).

On the other hand, however, this forest was designed as a 'natural' forest; i.e., a forest that is self-sustaining, and needs very little maintenance. In contrast to the above quotation, the website of Meiji Jingū even claims that 'after about 90 years it cannot be distinguished from a natural forest'.[214] Aomame describes the forest as follows:

> Meiji Jingū is a 'constructed forest' (*tsukurareta mori*), and many researchers come to have a look at it, even from overseas. Actually, there are other 'constructed forests' elsewhere in Japan, so what is special about this forest? The answer is: this is a *chinju no mori*. It is not a forest made for wood production, but it was made based on the thought 'let's make a natural forest' for the gods to reside (*kamigami no shizumaru 'tennen shizen no mori ni shiyō' to iu mori-zukuri no kangaekata*). That is very different from other forests (2010, 12; my translation).

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[213] The shrine website has numbers that are slightly higher: 170,000 trees, and 245 species. See http://www.meijijingu.or.jp/english/about/1.html (last accessed: July 19, 2013).

[214] From http://www.meijijingu.or.jp/english/nature/1.html (last accessed: July 19, 2013).

Thus, Meiji Jingū was designed and constructed by people, but it was designed in such a way that it would become by and large self-sustaining – not temporarily, but permanently. Hence, it has been described as a project to 'create an ever-lasting *chinju no mori*' (*eien ni tsuzuku chinju no mori o tsukuru*) (ibid., 6). In a way, this was the ultimate naturalisation project: a politically embedded historical construction and the site of (potentially) contested memories, the shrine was literally dehistoricised by creating an 'eternal' and 'natural' forest at its site. Arguably, then, Barthes' theory on mythmaking – a myth is 'depoliticised speech' employed to naturalise historical constructions – is not only applicable to texts; it may also help us explain certain landscape production processes. Places that are associated with collective memory and identity are often naturalised (i.e., their own construction processes are concealed, as are the historical and political factors involved in these), not only discursively but also spatially, by means of nature-making activities. Put differently, these places are the outcome of human production processes, yet the circumstances, agendas and contingencies that have shaped these processes are no longer visible, as they have come to be perceived as 'natural' – either in the literal or in the metaphorical sense of the word. This, in my opinion, is an important reason why many Shinto ideologues today insist that shrine forests are *mori*, rather than *hayashi* or *kōen* (parks): by doing so, they are configured as 'natural' (i.e., ahistorical) space, no matter how artificial many of them are.

'Natural' though the forest may seem today, when it was designed, the forest's shape and composition were subject to heated debate. The only part of the shrine forest that already existed at the time was the Edo-period garden now known as the Meiji Jingū *gyoen* (imperial garden), which had been given to the imperial family in the Meiji period. Today, this garden is still famous for its irises, as well as for 'powerspot' Kiyomasa's well (see footnote 56).[215] The surrounding area mainly consisted of wasteland and fields, so most of the forest had to be planted anew (Aomame 2010, 12). In the early Taishō period, a committee was established for designing and constructing the shrine and its forest. Several well-known scientists joined this committee. One of them was Honda Seiroku (1866-1952), a forest scientist and landscape architect holding a PhD from the University of Munich, who has designed several of Japan's modern urban parks (e.g., Hibiya Park in Tokyo) (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 168). Honda developed a plan for a new shrine forest, but it did not go unchallenged. As Imaizumi summarises, '[t]he creation of a "sacred" and "solemn" shrine forest was desired by all those involved with planning the shrine and its surroundings. However, exactly what constituted a shrine's forest "sacredness" and "solemnity", and how to differentiate it from the "park", became topics of considerable debate in the planning stage' (2013, 34-35).

Honda wanted the newly planted forest to be an evergreen broad-leaved forest (or laurel forest), with *kashi*, *shii* and *kusunoki* as its main species. These were more suitable to the Tokyo climatological and geographical conditions than coniferous trees, he argued, and would fit well in a

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[215] For a detailed description of the garden, see Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 72-92.

naturally regenerating forest (Aomame 2010, 13; Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 170-175).[216] These arguments, incidentally, are similar to Miyawaki's reforestation doctrine, which prescribes that forests must be made up of native trees. This notion has become paradigmatic in recent decades, but in the prewar period it was by no means self-evident. Honda's plan was opposed by Home Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922),[217] who wanted the new forest to be made up of *sugi* like those of Ise Jingū and Nikkō Tōshōgū. 'A mixed forest that looks like a thicket is not suitable for a shrine (*yabu no yō na zōkibayashi de wa jinja rashiku nai*)' (Meiji Jingū shamasho 1999, 171-172), Ōkuma argued, reflecting the dominant aesthetics at the time. A shrine forest, it was commonly believed, should be made up of old, majestic coniferous trees such as *sugi* or *hinoki*, giving it a dark and mysterious atmosphere.

In the end, however, Honda managed to convince Ōkuma and the others by using scientific arguments, and his plan was accepted (Imaizumi 2013, 38-39). As said, Honda wanted to build a forest for the future that would be self-sustaining and that would regenerate naturally, with as little human intervention as possible (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 173). As such a forest is not made overnight, he devised a long-term plan. In order for a planted forest to reach a point where it is truly 'natural', Honda thought, it has to pass through four stages (see figure twelve). As the illustration makes clear, in the first decades after plantation, pine trees would be dominant, while broad-leaved trees (which grow more slowly) would still be small (stage one). In subsequent decades, other coniferous trees, such as *hinoki*, would catch up with the pine trees; broad-leaved trees, at this point, would still be small (stage two). Gradually, however, the broad-leaved trees would overtake the coniferous trees. After approximately one hundred years, Honda expected, it would be a truly mixed forest; this is the stage the forest is in today (stage three). From now on, broad-leaved trees are expected to increase further in number, at the expense of the coniferous trees, which will eventually lose the competition (stage four).[218]

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[216] Note that Honda did want the forest to include *kusunoki* (camphor trees). Indeed, two of Meiji Jingū's best-known trees – the two *shinboku* in front of the worship hall that are connected by means of a *shimenawa* rope, said to symbolise the divine union between wife and husband – are *kusunoki*. As we have seen in the section on Tadasu no Mori, however, opinions about these trees seem to have changed: they are not native to central Japan, it is said, and their ecological impact may be negative (Morimoto 2003). While not (yet?) perceived as negatively as *sugi* and *akamatsu* (*Pinus densiflora*, a type of pine tree), they apparently do not have the status they once had, at least among forest scientists. In any case, what these debates about tree species make clear is that preferences and notions of what counts as 'natural' and 'indigenous' are subject to historical change. Some of the species that are now considered ecologically harmful were once considered special, and subject to sacralisation: among the centuries-old *shinboku* trees found at shrines throughout the country are relatively many *sugi*, *hinoki* and *kusunoki*, pointing to a significant change in status.

[217] Ōkuma Shigenobu was an influential Meiji- and Taishō-period intellectual and politician, who served several terms as Home Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister. He is also the founder of Waseda University, one of Japan's leading private universities.

[218] For a more elaborate discussion of these four stages of forest development, see Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 220-228.

*Figure 12: Original illustration of the expected four stages of development of Meiji Jingū's forest. The trees with small triangular crowns are pine trees (*matsu*); those with long triangular crowns represent other coniferous trees (e.g.,* hinoki *and* sawara*); and the trees with round crowns are evergreen broad-leaved trees (source: Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 226; cf. Aomame 2010, 15).*

When it comes to the aesthetics of shrine forests, then, it may be argued that Honda's design constituted the first step towards the postwar paradigm shift: 'native' trees gradually replaced *sugi* and *hinoki* as the trees of choice, and the ideal of the dark coniferous forest gave way to mixed or broad-leaved forests characterised by brightness and species diversity. As such, Honda was one of the intellectual predecessors of Miyawaki Akira, whose ideal *chinju no mori* consists of indigenous '*furusato*' trees; it is perhaps no coincidence that both scientists are German-educated. As the forest of Meiji Jingū grew older, and its trees more impressive, it has come to receive much attention, and is now seen as an example for other human-made *chinju no mori*. Its founder, meanwhile, is praised for his visionary forest design.

The species composition of Meiji Jingū's forest is not the only reason why it is seen as a paradigmatic case of *chinju no mori*-making, however. As we have seen, a core aspect of *chinju no mori*-related discourse and practices is the notion of community. Shrine forests are seen by many as a

tool (or even as a prerequisite) for the reestablishment of social relationships among community members and, hence, a sense of collective belonging, either on a local or a national scale. Environmental advocacy and nature conversation alone are not sufficient; community involvement is crucial. Significantly, the construction of the Meiji Jingū forest (i.e., the planting of trees) was not done by professionals, but by thousands of volunteers. It was a collective project, in which over 110,000 people are said to have participated (Tsukuda 2005). The symbolic significance of this should not be underestimated: instead of being seen as a state-imposed institution, it established Meiji Jingū as a collective memorial site. That is, by involving citizens in the construction process, the forest was symbolically turned into a 'people's forest'; it came to be widely perceived as a 'spontaneous', bottom-up expression of the people's patriotism and love for the deceased emperor, rather than a state-produced sacred space that would become an intrinsic part of the dominant ritual-ideological system. In other words, involving massive numbers of citizens in the forest planting process was an effective political strategy for socialising them into the imperial ritual-ideological system, which ultimately served to legitimise the ruling powers.

Interestingly, Meiji Jingū keeps a record of all its trees. The total number of planted trees in the forest is 122,572, of which 95,559 were donated (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 98) – an impressive number indeed. What is special about these trees is that the seedlings did not come from a single plantation, but that they were literally shipped from all over the country. As local communities throughout the country donated young trees or seedlings for the newly-planted forest, these communities, too, could symbolically take part in its construction. And as it is made up of trees coming from all over Japan, Meiji Jingū may be said to transcend its particular locality; because of the multi-rootedness (no pun intended) of its thousands of trees, as a symbolic space it encompasses the entire country. Hence, unlike most other shrines, it belongs to the nation as a whole, not to any particular local community. Operating as simultaneously a physical and a mental space – constituting a space that is both material *and* imagined – the forest's physical features (i.e., its pan-Japanese tree composition) have contributed to it being conceived of as a space of nationwide significance. And not just nationwide, for that matter: the forest also has trees from Taiwan, the Korean peninsula, Manchuria and Sakhalin (ibid., 177) – i.e., Japan's colonial possessions at the time – clearly pointing to its imperial legacy.[219]

Today, there are still people who wish to donate and plant a tree in the Meiji Jingū forest, but their requests are not normally granted. The forest has now reached the stage where it resembles a natural forest, and if new trees were planted the forest's 'natural' conditions might be disturbed (ibid., 184). Likewise, the shrine asserts that forest maintenance is kept to an absolute minimum. Shrine staff are quoted as saying '[r]ather than meddling with the forest, all we do is keep watch over the trees as

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[219] As a matter of fact, the shrine's second *torii* gate, which is the biggest wooden *torii* in the country (approximately 12 metres high), is made of a Taiwanese *hinoki* tree said to have been 1500 years old, felled for this purpose (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 29-31).

they grow naturally on their own' (Tsukuda 2005). Nevertheless, there are more than twenty people employed by the shrine for doing forest-related maintenance work (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 159). Some of them (the so-called *hakiyasan*) are responsible for keeping the grounds clean: every day, seven people sweep leaves of the main path, back into the forest (they are not thrown away, as fallen leaves are an integral part of the forest ecosystem). In addition, there are several forest specialists employed by the shrine. They monitor forest growth, remove dead trees, take measures to protect trees from diseases and parasites and so on (ibid., 159-162). Thus, 'natural' though the forest may be, it is still controlled and 'kept tidy' by people. In sum, rather than a 'wild' forest left to its own devices, the forest of Meiji Jingū is a human-nature co-product, not only because it was designed and constructed by humans but also because it continues to be used and influenced by them. As such, it belongs to the realms of 'culture' and 'politics' as much as it constitutes 'nature'.

11.1.3 NPO Hibiki

As indicated by the above discussion, the active participation and dedication of more than 110,000 volunteers is an important part of Meiji Jingū's foundation narrative. It is not very surprising, therefore, that these volunteers are presented as an example for today's youth; and, accordingly, that the forest of Meiji Jingū is seen as a place of great educational value. We have already seen that activities at Shimogamo Jinja and Gosho Komataki Jinja have a strong educational aspect, involving children and teenagers; as will become clear in the next section, the same applies to the Afuhi Project carried out at Kamigamo Jinja. Meiji Jingū is no exception. It has a children's club (Meiji Jingū Kodomo no Kai) that organises activities for children in the forest (Meiji Jingū shamusho 1999, 93). And it has a volunteer organisation, called NPO Hibiki, which organises a variety of activities, mostly but not exclusively for young people (i.e., people in their twenties; however, there are also elderly people among the volunteers). This organisation was founded in 2001, and was officially registered as a non-profit organisation (*NPO hōjin*) in 2003. In its pamphlet, the organisation describes itself and its *raison d'être* as follows:

> Japan is a country with a long history and traditions that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Its culture, life style and customs form the basis of the Japanese identity.
>
> Our support helps keep Japan one of the developed countries in the world. In order to do so, it is important that we have a sense of pride in our history and culture. It is also essential to broaden our horizons so that we can associate with people from all over the world.

Our organization has developed a wide range of programs intended for the Japanese youth, who will form the next generation to see themselves as citizens of both Japan and the world.[220]

There are three things noteworthy about this description. First, it has a strong cultural-nationalist focus, framing the activities of NPO Hibiki as a means to preserve and transmit Japanese cultural traditions. '*The* Japanese identity' is essentialised, and 'a sense of pride' is seen as a prerequisite for 'keeping Japan a developed country' – suggesting that a lack of pride might lead to cultural and economic decline. Second, it has an 'international' focus in the sense that it underlines the importance of interaction between people from different countries. This is not the same, it must be noted, as cosmopolitanism. As Jennifer Robertson has demonstrated (1998), 'internationalisation' (*kokusaika*) became highly popular in Japan in the 1980s and '90s; instead of transcending national identities, however, it was used as a strategy to reaffirm them. In reality, then, *kokusaika* paradoxically refers to discursive and institutional practices that serve to socialise people as members of the Japanese nation state, by reifying 'cultural' differences between nations (often stereotypical) and denying diversity *within* the nation. Arguably, NPO Hibiki's 'international' orientation should be interpreted in this light. Third, what is remarkable about the above description is the complete absence of any reference to nature or the environment. In contrast to, say, some of Jinja Honchō's English-language brochures, Shinto is not presented as an antidote to the global environmental crisis. Cultural conservation seems to be more important than environmental conservation. That does not mean nature conservation is seen as irrelevant: elsewhere in the pamphlet, it is mentioned as one of the three core concerns of the organisation. Nevertheless, from the way it presents itself in the above quotation, one gets the impression is that nature conservation is of secondary importance to the transmission of cultural traditions and values.

The main activities of NPO Hibiki are divided into three categories, called the 'greenery program', the 'rice farming program' and the 'international cultural exchange program'. Each program has its own group of volunteers, usually referred to as the 'acorn team' (*donguri chiimu*), the 'rice paddy team' (*tanbo chiimu*) and the 'international cultural exchange team' (*kokusai bunka kōryū chiimu*). In addition to the 'general activities' employed by these three different teams, there is also a number of *ad hoc* activities. Some of these involve outsiders, such as groups of school children or white-collar workers, who visit the shrine forest and collect acorns as part of school- or company-imposed excursions.[221] There are also activities for volunteers different from their ordinary activities,

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[220] From the NPO Hibiki English-language brochure; available online at
http://www.npohibiki.com/pdf/HIBIKI_Brochure_Eng.pdf (last accessed: July 19, 2013).
[221] For instance, when I first visited NPO Hibiki (November 2011), I joined a guided tour of the shrine and its forest, followed by acorn-collecting, which was co-organised by NPO Hibiki and Shibuya University. Shibuya University is not a university in the traditional sense of the word, but a non-profit network based on the notion of lifelong learning, involving activists, artists, designers, entrepreneurs and other creative Tokyoites, who see the city as their campus and try to create a sense of community in Shibuya – one of the most urban, energetic and consumer-oriented parts of Tokyo. On this day, several young people (mostly in their twenties) involved with

such as summer camps or special workshops. And, of course, there are various promotional activities (e.g., fundraising activities, keeping a weblog and a facebook page, running information stands at cultural events, and so on). These promotional activities are usually done by people who have been active as volunteers for a long time, as well as by the Hibiki president, who is employed by Meiji Jingū.

As their activities typically take place at the same time (usually on weekend days), there is little interaction between members of the different teams, other than greetings at the beginning and end of the day. I was told that volunteers do not usually take part in more than one program; switching activities is uncommon, and there seems to be quite a bit of competition between the different teams. Hence, if somebody wants to become active as a volunteer for NPO Hibiki, s/he also has to choose which of the three teams s/he wants to belong to. While the total number of people registered as volunteers at any given moment may well be over a hundred, not all of them participate regularly. When I took part in a day of 'general activities' (in May 2013), in which all three teams engaged in their respective practices (simultaneously, that is), there were approximately forty people. They were divided more or less equally among the three teams (the rice paddy team seemed slightly bigger than the other two, but as there was no single collective moment to mark the beginning of the day's activities I did not have the opportunity to actually count the number of people). I was told that the number of participants was a bit higher than usual, which may have been due to the lovely sunny weather.

The first of the three programs is called the 'greenery program', and it is here that the organisation's environmental agenda is expressed. In the shrine brochure, an explicit association is made between the construction of Meiji Jingū's forest in the Taishō period on the one hand, and today's environmental problems on the other. At the time of construction,

> About 110,000 young people volunteered to plant trees on the barren ground. Thanks to the dedication and perseverance of the supporters, the grounds turned into a unique man-made forest. [Now, e]nvironmental problems have become serious worldwide, and to combat this, greenery activities are gaining force. In order to create a new forest, we grow new trees from the acorns on the ground. We promote ecological activities and spiritual training through the processes [*sic*]. We believe that this program helps to pass down our traditional Japanese value for nature from generation to generation.[222]

Today's generation, it is suggested, should learn from the dedication of earlier generations, and engage in similar tree-planting activities as expressions of the traditional Japanese appreciation of nature. Accordingly, the greenery program's core practice consists of collecting acorns (*donguri*), planting them in pots, and raising the seedlings (see figure thirteen).

Shibuya University visited Meiji Jingū, where a member of NPO Hibiki taught them about shrine (forest) history, acorns, and Shinto beliefs. For some of them, visiting a shrine was a completely new experience.

[222]From the NPO Hibiki English-language brochure; available online at http://www.npohibiki.com/pdf/HIBIKI_Brochure_Eng.pdf (last accessed: July 19, 2013).

This is perhaps somewhat surprising, considering the fact that, as we have seen, Meiji Jingū does not allow people to donate and plant trees, fearing that it might disturb the 'natural' forest's ecological balance. Why then, one might ask, do volunteers have to collect acorns, plant them, and raise the seedlings, instead of simply letting nature run its course? How does the practice of collecting and planting acorns relate to the claim that the forest is 'left alone'? One answer is that, as there are so many acorns, under normal circumstances most of them will not grow to become trees – unless, that is, if they are planted. Significantly, most of the young trees cultivated by volunteers of NPO Hibiki are *not* replanted in the forest of Meiji Jingū, but sent elsewhere. These are all broad-leaved trees, such as *kashi* and *shii*, and they are used for reforestation and forest transformation (e.g., replacing *sugi* and *matsu* by broad-leaved trees) at other places. It is no coincidence that one of the founders of NPO Hibiki, with whom I have talked informally, expressed her admiration for Miyawaki Akira: the practices that take place here – collecting and planting acorns in order to raise indigenous broad-leaved trees – are in full accordance with Miyawaki's theories. Indeed, many of the seedlings raised at Meiji Jingū are used for projects coordinated or supported by Miyawaki's foundation. In the past two years, most trees have been used for an ambitious forestation project along the coast of Tohoku, called the Great Forest Wall Project. I will return to this topic in the final section of this chapter.

The second program is called the 'rice farming project'. This project is also framed in terms of the preservation of Japanese tradition, and presented as a countermeasure against cultural degradation. In typical nostalgic terminology, the brochure describes it as follows:

> Due to the development of technology, our modern lives have become more and more convenient, but at the same time, our tradition, culture and spirit are gradually disappearing. Since the Japanese were an agricultural people, rice farming is influential to our culture and lifestyle. (…) In the rice farming program, we handle all the processes of farming rice by hand, without the use of chemicals or machines. We use the wisdom of our ancestors and draw from their imagination, ideas, and patience.[223]

The rice farming activities take place at a tiny rice paddy, in a little-visited part of the forest, north of the shrine (see figure fourteen). In fact, there is nothing particularly special about a shrine having its own rice paddy: called *shinden* ('divine paddy'), many shrines have (or had) small rice paddies where ceremonies are conducted. As mentioned in chapter eight, even the imperial palace has a small paddy, where the emperor is said to grow rice and perform rituals. What is new, however, is that an urban shrine such as Meiji Jingū has a rice paddy, constructed and cultivated by volunteers doing hard manual labour on their free Sundays in order to symbolically take part in the (agri)cultural traditions of their ancestors, while shrine priests only show up for the occasional ceremony.

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[223] From the NPO Hibiki English-language brochure; available online at
http://www.npohibiki.com/pdf/HIBIKI_Brochure_Eng.pdf (last accessed: July 19, 2013).

Figure 13: Seedlings of broad-leaved trees, grown by Hibiki volunteers

Figure 14: The 'rice paddy team'

When I visited the rice paddy in May 2013, there were about fifteen to twenty volunteers, most of them in their late twenties or thirties. They had worked for several hours, and were still busy digging and moving rain water from a temporary basin to the paddy (it was not enough, so they had to add tap water as well). I did not have rubber boots, so unfortunately I could not engage in participant observation, but I did get the opportunity to talk to some of the volunteers. They seemed to have different reasons for joining. Several of the volunteers had office jobs, and had to works indoors five days a week; they liked the physical labour, and they liked being able to work outdoors, in nature. Others mentioned the cultural value of rice cultivation, suggesting that they wanted to contribute to maintaining this aspect of traditional Japanese culture. One young man had a different story. For him, working on a rice paddy associated with a shrine was an active act of worship; he described it as a way not only to stay in touch with nature, but also with the divine powers residing in nature, and to show his reverence and gratitude.

Before my brief visit to the rice paddy, I joined members of the 'international cultural exchange team' in their activities. These activities have little to do with nature, or with the forest as such. Their main objective is 'internationalisation', that is, teaching foreign tourists about Meiji Jingū, and about 'Japanese culture' in general. This is done by means of free guided walks. Starting at the main *torii*, the guided walks include some basic information about the history of the shrine, its garden, the large sake and wine barrels next to the main path (which capture the imagination of many visitors), the *temizuya* (including an instruction on the proper way to wash one's hands and rinse one's mouth), the two *shinboku* trees and the main hall (where Shinto prayer customs are explained, and visitors are invited to say a prayer/make a wish[224] themselves). All volunteers were laypeople, who were not particularly well-schooled in shrine beliefs and practices. Interestingly, the contents of the guided walk were not prescribed very strictly, and I had the impression that different volunteers focused on different aspects of the shrine. There also seemed to be considerable variety in English language skills, and communication between volunteers and tourists did not always go very smoothly. That said, NPO Hibiki explicitly tells its volunteers that the guided walks are *not* the same as tours conducted by experts; their main purpose is not education, but cultural exchange and social interaction. Hence, volunteers were encouraged not only to tell visitors about Japanese culture, but also ask them about their countries of origin.

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[224] There is of course a semantic difference between 'saying a prayer' and 'making a wish', in Japanese as well as in English. In reality, however, the two often overlap – and not only in Shinto, for that matter. A typical Shinto prayer consists of a small symbolic financial offering (one or a few coins), followed by two bows, two claps, a silent prayer/wish/request/expression of gratitude, and a final bow. Many shrines have signs prescribing people how to pray – apparently, many Japanese people today are not familiar with the procedure. In fact, as John Nelson has demonstrated (1996), there is considerable variety when it comes to praying practices, and shrine visitors are generally free to pray pretty much in whatever way they want. In May 2013, when I visited the shrine as part of the Hibiki guided walk, I was in the company of some Indonesian tourists. Although they were Catholic, they took the prayer very seriously, and stood praying in front of the worship hall for several minutes (usually, shrine prayers only last a couple of seconds). The Japanese volunteer who was guiding them was surprised, and clearly uncomfortable with the situation – he had never seen such a display of devotion at a shrine!

Although there were a few young people as well, most volunteers in the 'cultural exchange team' were older than those in the other teams: there were several middle-aged and elderly people. In contrast to the volunteers in the 'acorn team' and 'rice paddy', they did not seem particularly interested in Shinto, nor in nature or environmental issues. Instead, they had other motivations for joining. One man participated because his company ordered its employees to spend a few hours a week doing 'volunteer' work, and this was one of the more attractive options. Another man said he was doing this because he was retired, enjoyed being active, and liked talking to foreigners. Somebody else wanted to work as a professional tour guide in the future, and saw this as a good opportunity to practice. One young woman said that after she had graduated from high school and had not passed the university entrance exam, her parents encouraged her to do something useful, like volunteering work; as she had often visited Meiji Jingū as a child and felt a special connection to this shrine, she wanted to join Hibiki. Some others joined because it gave them the opportunity to practise and improve their English speaking skills.

In sum, NPO Hibiki is a bit of a mixed bag. Unlike the Tadasu no Mori Zaidan or the Sennen no Mori no Kai, its main concern is not nature conservation, even though it does have a 'green' profile and employs activities related to environmental education and forest preservation. Interestingly, the practice to collect and plant acorns, raise seedlings, and send them to other parts of the country for reforestation projects mirrors the history of Meiji Jingū's forest, when trees from all over the country were sent to Tokyo for the purpose of constructing a new sacred forest. It is, perhaps, a way to repay that historical debt. In any case, it creates similar symbolic connections, once again turning Meiji Jingū into a place of nationwide significance that transcends its particular locality. It may even be seen as a contemporary version of the traditional practice by powerful shrines to establish smaller auxiliary shrines in the province; the main difference being that, in this case, it is not the gods themselves that are replanted in other places, but their trees.

But as we have seen, Meiji Jingū's activities are not limited to tree-planting. The symbolic significance of having a sacred rice paddy (no matter how small) in downtown Tokyo should not be underestimated: it is a strategy for establishing a symbolic connection between the modern big city society and the imagined ancestral past. Moreover, rice-related rituals are believed to constitute an important part of Shinto ritual practices – and, indeed, are often referred to by representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in order to illustrate Shinto's alleged intertwinement with nature – so it is not very surprising that Meiji Jingū sanctions this sort of activities. Finally, the 'international cultural exchange program' seems the odd one out, both in terms of volunteers' motivations and contents; nevertheless, for a religion that continues to be perceived negatively and associated with wartime imperialism (by some, at least), PR activities are of crucial importance. Shinto institutions are actively trying to rebrand their tradition as an ancient, peaceful nature religion, intrinsically Japanese yet tolerant and internationally-oriented. 'International exchange' activities are in full accordance with that trend.

11.2   Kamigamo Jinja and Afuhi Project

11.2.1   The shrine and its plant

Together with Shimogamo Jinja, Kamigamo Jinja – officially called Kamo Wake Ikazuchi Jinja – is generally considered as one of Kyoto's oldest and most famous shrines. The two shrines are closely related: both are historically associated with the powerful Kamo lineage, and were among the highest-ranking imperial shrines in the Heian period; the deity enshrined at Kamigamo Jinja – Kamo Wake Ikazuchi no mikoto, a god associated with thunder – is believed to be the son of Tamayorihime and grandson of Kamo Taketsunumi, enshrined at Shimogamo Jinja; the two shrines continue to co-organise and co-stage the annual Aoi Matsuri; and in 1994, both were enlisted as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Kamigamo Jinja is located a few kilometres north of Shimogamo Jinja, upstream on the Kamogawa river; hence their respective names (Kamigamo Jinja means 'upper Kamo shrine'; Shimogamo Jinja means 'lower Kamo shrine').

Despite (or, perhaps, because) of these intimate historical, mythological and ritual connections, there seems to be a fair amount of rivalry, or even animosity, between the two shrines and their staff. Both shrines, for instance, claim to predate the other, and to be the 'original' shrine of the Kamo lineage; both even claim to be the oldest shrine in all of Kyoto (a claim also made by Matsuo Taisha, which is historically associated with the Hata lineage). As the origins of neither shrine are clear, their historical narratives are significantly different. As John Nelson has made clear in his book on Kamigamo Jinja, historical records of the Kamo shrines' early history are extremely scarce, and claims are based on little or no textual evidence (2000, 92). This partly explains Shimogamo Jinja's interest in archaeological research: it is believed to provide 'evidence' of prehistoric worship practices and, therefore, legitimise the shrine's claims to seniority.[225] Self-evidently, as they co-organise one of Kyoto's biggest festivals, there are formal relations between the two shrines, and ritual procedures are of course observed. But cooperation does not seem to go much further than the annual *matsuri*. There is little or no interaction between priests of the two different shrines, I was told by somebody who knows the organisation well; once a priest has worked at and is associated with one of the two shrines, he has little or no chance of being employed by the other.

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[225] The same, incidentally, applies to Izumo Taisha, where excavations led to the discovery of the remnants of three giant pillars in 2000. This discovery has given rise to the theory that 'in ancient times' the main hall of Izumo Taisha was a wooden structure of almost 50 metres high (explained and illustrated by means of a metres-high scale model at the nearby Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo). In Izumo as in Tadasu no Mori, archaeological findings add to the historical narratives provided by the shrines, and provide them with a certain status and authenticity. Ise Jingū, by contrast, does not allow archeologists to do excavations in or near its main buildings, as that would probably be seen as a violation of its 'sacred' character. Likewise, in the Meiji period, no excavations of imperial sites (e.g., tombs) were allowed, and some Shinto actors still adhere to this norm. Clearly, within the shrine world, there are different, even contradictory attitudes to archaeological research at shrines.

Accordingly, there is no cooperation between both shrines' *chinju no mori*-related organisations, Tadasu no Mori Zaidan and Afuhi Project. Indeed, when I first interviewed Shimogamo Jinja shrine priests about the conservation of Tadasu no Mori (March 2011), I was surprised to find out that they were not familiar with Afuhi Project at all. That has changed by now – not only because I told them about it, but also because representatives of both projects gave presentations at a symposium organised by Kamata Tōji in November 2011 – but as far as I know, they do not work together. That may be surprising, considering the two shrines' close historical intertwinement, but it is illustrative of the rivalry and lack of interaction between them.

In any case, Kamigamo Jinja is an interesting shrine, with unusual spatial configurations. Instead of a large forest, it is known for its wide, open grass fields, in front of the main entrance. They are used for spectacular horseracing and horseback archery (*yabusame*) performances, held several times a year; and, during Aoi Matsuri, for the audience to sit and watch the priests and other participants walk in procession to the shrine. Most of the time, however, the fields are empty (except for a few picnickers, if the weather is nice), giving the shrine a park-like appearance. Behind the second *torii* are the main shrine buildings; these are surrounded by a small forested area, and two streams converging in the middle of the shrine grounds. In an English-language shrine pamphlet, this is described as 'an area of thick forest that offers a different enchantment with each season' (Kamigamo Jinja not dated). While this description is in accordance with the dominant shrine forest ideal, the label 'thick forest' is arguably exaggerated. The forest is mixed, and consists of, among other species, *ichii* (*Taxus cuspidata*; Japanese yew), *sudajii* (*Castanopsis sieboldii*) and *shidarezakura* (*Prunus subhirtella*; weeping cherry) (ibid.), many of which seem to have been planted rather than 'grown naturally'. Like those in Tadasu no Mori, some of Kamigamo Jinja's broad-leaved trees suffer from parasitic beetles, and their stems are covered with plastic in order to protect them.

Unlike some other famous shrines, the *sandō* and shrine buildings at Kamigamo Jinja are not straight; the shrine buildings are asymmetrical, and one has to turn around a corner in order to get to the worship hall, from where the *honden* and *gonden* (the two most sacred places)[226] are only partly visible. In sum, the layout appears somewhat unstructured and chaotic. I was told, however, that this is deliberate, so that visitors will not approach the *kami* in a straight line. According to the priest who showed me around, the spatial organisation of Kamigamo Jinja is typical of ancient Shinto – after all, the shrines of Ise are similar in this respect – while shrines with a straight *sandō* going directly to the shrine buildings (e.g., Shimogamo Jinja) are of a later date. He also explained to me that the actual object of worship is not the *honden*, but the sacred mountain behind it, Mount Kōyama: that is, the original *shintaizan* of Kamigamo Jinja, where the deity was/is believed to reside. For many centuries, Kamigamo Jinja was one of Kyoto's northernmost human constructions, and the forest of Mount

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[226] While most shrines have a *honden* housing the *shintai* (physical representation of the deity), a *gonden* is less common. Cali and Dougill explain: 'The shrine maintains that the *gonden* is intended for use in an emergency, if anything should happen to the *honden*. (…) [It] is used every twenty-one years to host the *kami* temporarily while the *honden* is being rebuilt' (2013, 115).

Kōyama began immediately behind the shrine. Unfortunately, in 1948, much of the forest was destroyed and replaced by a golf court. Nevertheless, some hidden shrine ceremonies still take place at the foot of the mountain, near the golf court. For instance, every year on May 12, the deity is summoned down from the mountain in a famous ceremony called Miare-sai, an important (and secret) preparatory ritual for the Aoi Matsuri (see Nelson 2000, 218-220).

The mountain's ongoing symbolic significance is also illustrated by the two conical sand hills (*tatesuna*) located in a small demarcated area (*himorogi*) in the middle of the shrine grounds. They are said to symbolise the mountain and the deity's descendence – although they have been interpreted in various ways, and it has also been suggested that they may be ancient fertility symbols (Nelson 2000, 73-76). The same, incidentally, has been said about the shrine's core symbol, the *aoi* plant (ibid., 78-84). Although it is possible that the Aoi Matsuri ultimately goes back to some sort of fertility ceremony – many shrine traditions do, and in some cases the sexual imagery is quite explicit – I am not convinced that this is the most accurate interpretation for understanding the significance of the symbol today. Of course, symbols can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, and a sexual reading of them is undoubtedly possible; nevertheless, in contemporary Japan the primary significance of *aoi* as a symbol arguably lies elsewhere. Today, the plant signifies the preservation of heritage, tradition and culture; most of all, it stands for *historical continuity*. Mentioned in ancient texts and found on old images, it represents the intertwinement of the Kamo shrines with Kyoto as both a physical city and a mental space; and, accordingly, with the nation as a whole. Such notions are arguably more ideologically and socially relevant than possible ancient sexual connotations.

Botanically speaking, the name *aoi* refers to a variety of plants, most of them belonging to the genus *Asarum*. The plant that is central to the symbolic and ritual traditions of the Kamo shrines is commonly identified with *futaba aoi* (*Asarum caulescens*) (see figure fifteen). It is often translated into English as 'hollyhock', but this is not botanically correct as hollyhocks are flowering plants that belong to the genus *Alcea*, and look different from *Asarum*. Confusingly, however, whereas the plant used for the Aoi Matsuri is *futaba aoi*, the plant that appears on shrine amulets is said to be *tachi aoi* (*Alcaea roseai*), which *is* a species of hollyhock (ibid., 266). And to make it even more complicated, the name *futaba aoi* means two-leaved *aoi*; the three-leaved *mitsuba aoi* is another commonly used symbol (it is used for the Tokugawa family crest, for instance), but since *mitsuba aoi* is not a real species, this is actually a three-leaved *futaba aoi*. In any case, the *aoi* that is central to the Kamigamo project that I will describe shortly is *futaba aoi*, i.e., *Asarum caulescens*. As the common translation 'hollyhock' is incorrect, I will refer to the plant by its Japanese name.

Figure 15: Asarum caulescens.
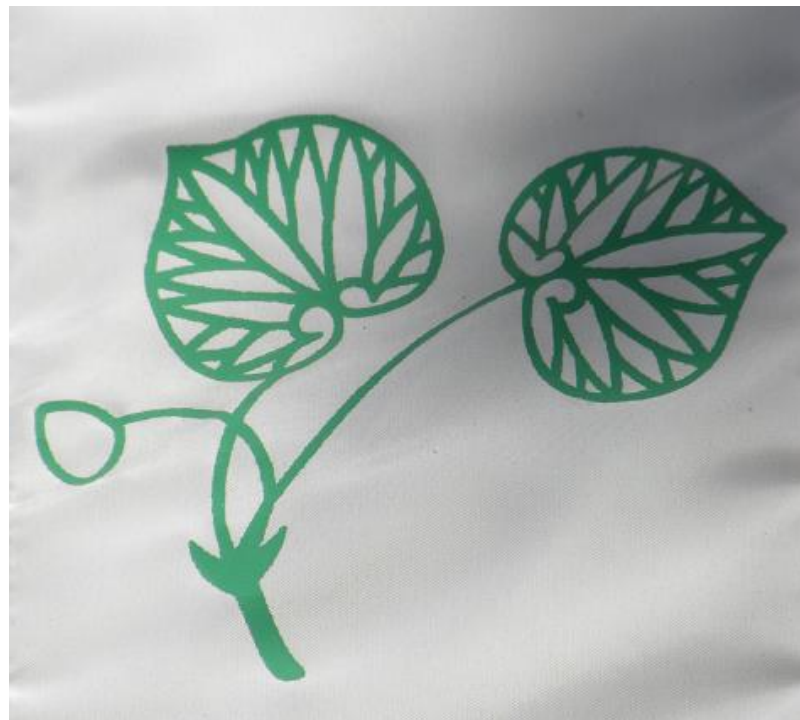
Figure 16: Futaba aoi *as a decorative motif, Kamigamo Jinja.*

The symbolic significance of the *futaba aoi* can be traced back to Kamo foundational mythology. As described on the Afuhi Project website, in the *Yamashiro-no-kuni Fudoki* (a mythological text), the following story is told:

[The area a]round Raku-hoku (North Ward) of Yamashiro-no-kuni (Kyoto) was controlled by [the] Kamo family. The princess of [the] Kamo family, Tama-Yori-Hime, became pregnant by the myster[ious] power of the red arrow she picked up near a stream, then a boy (Waka-Miya) was born. At the celebratory banquet for the coming-of-age of Waka-Miya, he went back to the place of his father, Amatsu-kami (a deity in heaven). One day, in a dream of his mother who strongly wishe[d] to meet again with Waka-Miya, he told her to hold a festival decorated with hollyhock [i.e., *aoi*] and Japanese Judas tree [*katsura*] and to wait for him.[227]

In accordance with its central position in shrine mythology, the plant has long been associated with the Kamo lineage. According to John Nelson, '[w]hile today the *aoi* is increasingly difficult to find, the early Kamo people liberally decorated themselves and their horses with it' (2000, 78). Nowadays, *futaba aoi* appear frequently as a decorative motif on shrine buildings, traditional clothes, shrine souvenirs (e.g., protective amulets, postcards, biscuits) and so on (see figure sixteen). And, of course, they figure prominently in the Aoi Matsuri. Not just as a decorative symbol, for that matter: during the festival, the actual plant itself is also used. That is, those participating in the procession decorate their hats with *futaba aoi* leaves – reportedly, approximately 10,000 leaves are used for this purpose every year.[228]

11.2.2 Afuhi Project

According to the Afuhi Project website, once upon a time *futaba aoi* 'used to clump in the [shrine] precincts like a carpet, but [they] can only be seen in the far mountains now.'[229] In modern times, the number of *futaba aoi* growing in the forests in and around Kyoto is said to have decreased significantly (cf. Morimoto 2003, 147) – probably related to the fact that many areas of broad-leaved forest have been replaced by coniferous forest, in which they cannot grow well because of a lack of sunlight, although there may be other causes as well. Presumably, then, the leaves used for today's *matsuri* are cultivated and purchased by (or donated to) the shrines, instead of harvested in the forest, as seems to have been the case in the medieval period. According to the shrine priest I interviewed twice (March and September 2011), there was a time when the forest surrounding Kamigamo Jinja as well as the nearby Kamogawa river banks were full of these plants. Until well into the Edo period, he

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[227] From http://www.afuhi.jp/about/enishi.php (last accessed: July 23, 2013). Because of this mythological connection between *aoi* and *katsura*, it is suggested, they are often used together for offerings. According to Nelson, 'to place the *aoi* flower within a sprig of *katsura*, as is common during the Kamo Festival [Aoi Matsuri], is to symbolize sexual intercourse' (2000, 266).

[228] From http://www.afuhi.jp/about/festival.php (last accessed: July 22, 2013). In addition, the plants are used as decoration during some other ceremonies, such as Shimogamo Jinja's preparatory Mikage-sai ceremony. In 2013, I attended both the Mikage-sai (May 12) and the Aoi Matsuri (May 15). On both occasions, I noticed the *futaba aoi* leaves on the hats of the priests, but I was surprised by how they looked: in the hot weather, they did not last very long, and they had withered completely.

[229] From http://www.afuhi.jp/top.php (last accessed: July 23, 2013).

said, they grew there in abundance, but now they have disappeared almost completely. His objective was to reintroduce *futaba aoi* into the local ecosystem, so as to recreate the landscape of the past.

For this purpose, Afuhi Project has been established. Like Sennen no Mori no Kai and NPO Hibiki, it is legally registered as a non-profit organisation, and therefore *de jure* independent from the shrine where its activities take place. *De facto*, however, the activities employed by these organisations are sanctioned by and organised in cooperation with their respective shrines. Generally speaking, their activities are closely related with the shrine's cultural traditions, physical landscape and political agendas. In a country with a strict separation of state and religion, shrines ('religious juridical persons') have limited leeway when it comes to organising educational and social activities, applying for public funding for the conservation of forests and buildings, *et cetera*. Establishing non-profit organisations – in cooperation with scientists and scholars, local politicians, entrepreneurs, schools and so on – has become a common tactic for shrines to extend their scope, and become active in educational and conservation activities. In other words, establishing this kind of semi-public non-profit organisations in cooperation with non-clergy outsiders allows them to become active in 'civil society'. Kamigamo Jinja's Afuhi Project is no exception.

That does not mean, however, that these projects are completely controlled by the shrine management, and that their legal 'NPO' status is merely cosmetic. Of the fourteen or so shrine priests employed by Kamigamo Jinja,[230] only three are listed as involved with Afuhi Project: the head priest of Kamigamo Jinja, Tanaka Yasuhiro, who is one of the two vice-chairmen of the organisation (and whose role, presumably, is largely symbolic); Muramatsu Teruo, a shrine priest who is actively involved in the Afuhi Project, including its PR activities; and Ōnishi Masahiro, another shrine priest. All other board members and project organisers are laypeople, either scholars (most noticeably, Kamata Tōji), businesspeople, or other active members of Kyoto civil society.[231] Naturally, some of these also exercise influence on what sort of activities are organised, so the shrine priests do not get to decide everything. Moreover, the majority of the priests at Kamigamo Jinja is not involved with the project at all; they are busy with 'ordinary' activities such as wedding ceremonies, rituals and administrative duties, and may hardly be aware of (or interested in) the activities of Afuhi Project. This, incidentally, is similar to Shimogamo Jinja's Tadasu no Mori Zaidan, with which only two shrine priests are directly involved. It also explains why, generally speaking, only comparatively wealthy shrines such as Shimogamo Jinja, Meiji Jingū and Kamigamo Jinja can afford to be active in organising environmental, educational and cultural activities: only they have the capacity to allow one or two priests to devote some of their time to this, and the connections necessary for setting up projects (including the fundraising). Sakurai's Sennen no Mori no Kai is one of the few exceptions to

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[230] That was the number reported by John Nelson (2000, 147-148), which does not include young apprentices and other shrine staff such as *miko* ('shrine maidens'). The number may have changed, but it is probably safe to say that the total number of employed priests at Kamigamo Jinja is around fifteen.

[231] Source: http://www.afuhi.jp/project/organization.php?language=jp& (last accessed: July 23, 2013).

this rule. Other shrine forest projects taking place at relatively small shrines are run by volunteers, with only nominal support from shrine priests (e.g., Shiroyama Hachimangū).

Before I move on to discuss Afuhi Project's main activities and objectives, a brief note on the meaning of the project's name. *Afuhi* is pronounced as *aoi*. It is the same word, transcribed according to the classical Japanese *kana* spelling. 'Afuhi Project' is therefore pronounced as 'Aoi Project' (*aoi purojekuto*, in Japanese). As *afuhi* is not phonetically correct, I have considered writing 'Aoi Project'; however, as the organisers deliberately chose this alternative spelling, I will follow their lead. There are two reasons why they chose to write *aoi* as '*afuhi*'. First, transcribing the word according to the archaic spelling instead of the modern Japanese pronunciation is a discursive strategy for establishing the connection between today's project and classical Japanese culture. Hence, it gives the project an air of authenticity, tradition, and even a certain dignity.[232] Second, the spelling *afuhi* allows for a triple entendre: if written in *kana* instead of the Chinese character (i.e., あふひ instead of 葵), it may also be read as 'the day of a meeting' or even, apparently, 'encounter with the spirit'. The first meaning is described on the project website as 'the relationship between people and nature, the contacts between people… The day on which we meet by chance (*meguri au hi*): AFUHI.'[233] The second meaning is explained as follows:

> The '*hi*' in '*afuhi*' refers to life force and divine spirit. The 'encounter' (*afu*) with this divine force (*hi*) is the etymology of the word *afuhi* (*afu-hi*). Because of this, '*afuhi*' has become a symbol of the establishment of relationships (*en o musubu shōchō*). (…) We feel that '*afuhi*' is an intermediary for relationships between 'people and people' and 'people and nature' today.[234]

Thus, the plant *futaba aoi* symbolises social encounters, as well as the establishment of relationships and mutual dependence: between different people, between humans and 'nature', and between humans and the divine. As a symbol, then, it functions similarly as *chinju no mori*, to which the same qualities are attributed. Not surprisingly, the 'encounter in the forest/shrine' (社で会う) that is seen by Ueda Masaaki *cum suis* as the origins of society (社会) is the same word as the 'day we meet' or 'encounter with the spirit' in *afu-hi* (modern Japanese *au* 会う), even though it may be written with an alternative character (as 合う, which means both 'to meet' and 'to match'). Such popular etymologies, homophones and alternative readings of words are a fairly common discursive strategy in Japan, employed to attribute various meanings and qualities to names or concepts. Whether

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[232] It is for similar reasons that Jinja Honchō uses classical *kana* spelling in some of its publications (most notably, the *Jinja shinpō* newspaper).

[233] From http://www.afuhi.jp/project/index.php?language=jp& (last accessed: July 23, 2013). My translation.

[234] From http://www.afuhi.jp/about/enishi.php?language=jp& (last accessed: July 23, 2013). My translation. On the English version of the website, *en o musubu* is translated as 'the contract of [a] relationship', but I am not convinced *en-musubi* should be translated as 'contract'; rather, the concept refers to the (divinely sanctioned and mediated) establishment of social relationships (including but not limited to marriage). Cf. http://www.afuhi.jp/about/enishi.php?language=en& (last accessed: July 23, 2013).

historically accurate or not, they do serve to 'prove' or justify particular historical claims, while also contributing to terms being multi-layered and open to multiple interpretations. In any case, the *futaba aoi* has come to represent more than only 'traditional culture': it has now been reinterpreted as a symbol for the revitalisation of interhuman, human-nature and human-*kami* relations *in contemporary Japan*. Hence, their reintroduction into the shrine forest and surrounding ecosystem is about more than forest conservation: it is about the reestablishment of social harmony.

I deliberately use the word '*re*establishment', for Afuhi Project is similar to other expressions of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm in its understanding of the modern period as a time characterised by social, cultural and ecological decline, which should be overcome by means of a return to 'ancient' values and practices. The disappearance of *futaba aoi* from local ecosystems is seen not just as an environmental problem that must be solved, but as a *symptom* of this general state of decline. This is clearly illustrated by the following text on the website:

> The things that our ancestors have cultivated for thousands of years…
> Around us, many things that were taken for granted before are suddenly disappearing.
> Changes in the natural environment, such as those caused by global warming; terrible events that happen in our society.
> We think that the key to regaining the things we have lost can be found in the precious culture transmitted by our ancestors.
> Since ancient times, people have feared and venerated nature, and lived in harmony with it (*kyōsei shite kimashita*).
> Is not '*aoi*', which has been preserved since ancient times, a symbol of that?
> Our children, who will be the next generation, are now cultivating the *aoi* that seemed to be disappearing from the nature near them.
> Through the process of raising this small life (*chiisana inochi o hagukumu katei*), they learn about notions of the environment, and about the circle of life. (…)
> This 'Afuhi Project' aims at restoring the essential spirit (*kihonteki na kokoro*) of our important culture, which we have inherited silently, by building networks between humans and nature, and between people and people.[235]

There are three important similarities between Afuhi Project and the projects discussed previously. First of all, nostalgia is a core motive: environmental and cultural conservation practices are carried out in order to re-establish the social relations, moral values and physical landscapes that are believed to have been lost. That, at least, is how those who organise and describe the projects tend to explain their significance. Second, although in neither case nature conservation is the sole (or even primary) objective, all projects employ environmentalist rhetoric, and express a concern for environmental problems. Although opinions regarding possible solutions for these problems differ, most actors involved do seem to agree about their urgency, and explicitly frame their activities as contributions to a better environment. And third, like NPO Hibiki, Afuhi Project is first and foremost concerned with education: its main purpose is to contribute to the socialisation of 'the next generation'

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[235] From http://www.afuhi.jp/project/index.php?language=jp& (last accessed: July 23, 2013). My translation.

in 'traditional Japanese culture', of which environmental ethics is believed to be an integral part. For, as should be clear by now, nostalgia, moral conservatism, cultural nationalism and environmentalism are not at all incompatible; in the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, they are closely intertwined, and complement each other. It may even be said that these three features – a nostalgic concern for nearly-lost values and practices, an awareness of the urgency of environmental problems and the importance of nature conservation, and an interest in education as a means to restore tradition and overcome today's problems – are the three core aspects of contemporary Shinto-environmentalist discourse, which underlie many of the social and cultural activities organised by/at shrines today.

11.2.3 Activities

As suggested by the above quotation, the core practice of Afuhi Project consists of giving pots with small *futaba aoi* plants to children of primary school age. These children raise and take care of the plants – supervised by their parents, of course – for one year. Afterwards, they are supposed to return them to the shrine, so that the plants can be planted in the precincts (which the children may do themselves). Thus they contribute to the shrine regaining its alleged former landscape. By taking part in this process, then, these children become symbolically involved with the shrine, and perhaps establish a personal relationship with it. That, at least, is the project's objective. Most plants are distributed by schools cooperating with the project, but it is also possible for individual citizens or families (referred to as 'foster families' on the website) to purchase a plant, raise it, and return it to the shrine. At several Kamigamo Jinja *matsuri* and other events, a small Afuhi Project stand is present, selling pots and trying to raise money by selling souvenirs such as T-shirts and badges. But it is even possible to order a pot online, and have it delivered to one's home.[236]

Although Kamigamo Jinja does not (yet) have its 'carpet' of *futaba aoi*, as a result of the activities of Afuhi Project the number of *aoi* plants on the shrine precincts has increased. Today, they mainly grow on the banks of the small stream running through the precincts. The reintroduction of *futaba aoi* into the local ecosystem does raise two sets of questions, however. First, if the ecological conditions that have led to the disappearance of these plants in the first place have not changed, will the plants be able to survive? Is the shrine forest not too dark for them to grow well? In case it is, will some of the existing trees be felled in order to make the forest brighter (which obviously would not be in accordance with the notion that shrine trees are sacred and should be preserved)? Second, *if* the plans are successful and the forest will be full of *futaba aoi*, why would that be ecologically healthy? Why is the establishment of something resembling a monoculture more desirable than biodiversity? Or is the ideal of a forest almost completely made up of *futaba aoi* based on their symbolic rather than

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[236] When ordered online, one pot costs 2100 yen (approximately 16 euros), which includes shipping and VAT. See http://www.afuhi.jp/supporter/division.php (last accessed: August 25, 2013).

ecological significance, and will the plants be picked every year in order to be used as decoration during the Aoi Matsuri?

These are complicated questions, to which I have only received partial or vague answers – although this may have been partly due to my own lack of knowledge of ecological issues. When I interviewed one of the project's organisers (September 2011), he did confirm that, in order for the *aoi* to grow well, different ecological factors must be taken into consideration – according to him, this was very difficult indeed, and it might not be established overnight. He also said that it was important to have ecological balance in the shrine forest – hence, the *aoi* should not become *too* dominant. Right now, however, the first challenge was to reintroduce them and make them grow well, or so he explained. In the end, I did not get the feeling that these ecological concerns are really taken into consideration. Even more so than at Tadasu no Mori, the Afuhi Project's objective to replant *futaba aoi* is based on their symbolic significance, and on the desire to recreate the landscape of the past, not on a well-informed vision of the local ecosystem.

Accordingly, I would argue that, despite the environmentalist rhetoric, Afuhi Project should *not* be conceived of as a nature conservation project, let alone as environmental advocacy. In this respect, it is quite unlike the activities of Shasō Gakkai, Tadasu no Mori Zaidan and Sennen no Mori no Kai, which are more clearly (though not exclusively) focused on forest conservation. Afuhi Project's primary concern is educating children in 'traditional culture' – an empty signifier covering a wide range of practices – the ultimate purpose of which is to make them identify with Shinto in general, and Kamigamo Jinja in particular. After all, Shinto is not a membership-based religion, and as traditional *ujiko*-based identities and obligations are gradually eroding shrines have to employ alternative strategies to secure their social status and central place within the local community (the same, incidentally, applies to Buddhist temples). Educational activities constitute one such strategy. However, shrines' involvement in public education cannot be far-reaching, for that would violate the separation of state and religion. Hence the importance of establishing a non-profit organisation like Afuhi Project.

The focus on educational activities is clearly visible in some of Afuhi Project's other activities, two of which I have been able to attend. The first was a fairly large event, the *aoi ennichi*, which may be translated as '*aoi* shrine fair' and which was held in October 2011. It was organised for the purpose of improving the position of the shrine as a 'place of encounter' for members of the local neighbourhood community, although people from other parts of the city were also welcome. Several cultural organisations, galleries and shops had stands on the grass field in front of the shrines, where they were selling products and handing out brochures. More interestingly, throughout the day, there were various workshops in 'traditional culture', as well as performances and concerts. In fact, not all of these were equally 'traditional' – a *manga* class and a guitar concert would not usually be classified as such, I think – but arguably, they did contribute to bringing together people, and increasing the visibility of Kamigamo Jinja as well as its relevance for local community life.

The most noteworthy event taking place this day was a workshop in 'traditional food culture', to which children living in the vicinity of the shrine had been invited (see figure seventeen). One of Kyoto's most famous restaurants had been found willing to send some of its cooks (*pro bono*, it seems) and provide ingredients for this purpose. All food was freshly made by the children, supervised by the cooks, and it was absolutely delicious. Every dish was said to be 'traditionally' Japanese; i.e., no 'fusion kitchen' or other recent inventions. Of course, rice was on the menu. The most interesting aspect of the workshop, however, was something we may refer to as 'religious socialisation in disguise'. That is, after the food had been prepared, it was ritually offered to the gods of Kamigamo Jinja. Before this was done, one of the priests told the children about shrine mythology, and explained them about the importance of gratitude to the deities. The children were ritually purified, and prayed collectively, before they were finally allowed to eat the food they had made. Thus, under the label of 'traditional culture', the shrine actively tried to engage children in shrine mythology, ritual practice, and belief. This illustrates how in contemporary Japan, practices may be discursively 'de-religionised' (i.e., they are reconfigured as 'culture', 'tradition' or 'heritage', not as '*shūkyō*'); that does not mean, however, that they have lost their devotional aspects. Institutional actors are finding new, alternative ways to secure the continuation of beliefs, ritual practices and sacred places.

Approximately one month later, in November 2011, I attended another Afuhi Project event. Unlike the shrine fair, this was not a public event. It was organised in cooperation with schools, and took place at a nearby public primary school. The children at this school (the highest classes, that is) were visited by peers from a school in Shizuoka prefecture, who came to Kyoto on a school trip. The school apparently was chosen to take part in Afuhi Project because it is located near a shrine associated with the famous first *shōgun* of Japan, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), whose family emblem is also made up of *aoi* leaves. Children from the two different schools were seated at tables together, and shared their lunch; afterwards, each child gave a brief presentation (*happyō*) about a place, festival or historical episode associated with their neighbourhood to the other children sitting at their table (there were about ten to twelve children at each table). Some children had made big slides with colourful illustrations to support their presentation (see figure eighteen).

After this social exchange (which was too short for any of the children to really have made new friends), the school from Shizuoka went to Kamigamo Jinja. It would have been an ordinary school trip, if it were not for the fact that the children did not merely receive a guided tour, but were ritually purified, entered the inner precincts of the worship hall, and attended a special prayer ceremony. Thus, despite the fact that some of their teachers complained to me about the strict secularist laws forbidding them to teach children anything about Shinto, their pupils did take part in a ritual ceremony as part of a school trip – after having studied the history, *matsuri* and deities of their local shrine, and given presentations about this. Because of their school's involvement in the Afuhi

Project, then, these children got to experience a ritual shrine ceremony, and learn about Shinto.[237] This is another example of what I referred to above as 'religious socialisation in disguise'. Through Afuhi Project, Kamigamo Jinja can teach the pupils of public schools about shrine beliefs and rituals – and indeed, let them take part in it – in ways that might not be possible otherwise. Although labelled as 'traditional culture' and organised by a 'non-profit organisation', the children really did get education in shrine ritual and belief, however briefly.

Finally, I have been told that recently there have also been 'internationalisation' activities organised under the banner of Afuhi Project. In May 2013, a group of Canadian high school students visited Kamigamo Jinja as part of an exchange program. Shrine priests explained them about *aoi*, and about 'Japanese culture' in general. Afterwards, the students tried their hand at calligraphy, and made decorations of *futaba aoi* leaves. Thus, Afuhi Project is similar to NPO Hibiki in the sense that it is not only concerned with educational activities for Japanese people, but also organises 'international exchange' activities. In fact, compared to most other shrines, Kamigamo Jinja does seem to have quite an international orientation: it has allowed some foreign scholars and writers to do research and take part in shrine activities;[238] it regularly invites foreign diplomats to famous *matsuri* and events such as *yabusame*, and provides them with English-language commentary (one of the current priests speaks English fluently); and both the shrine website and the Afuhi Project website have English-language versions (which is not the case for most other shrines and shrine-related projects). That does not mean shrine practices and discourse are devoid of nationalist imagery; however, they do not display the kind of exclusive nationalism that stresses the superiority of the Japanese nation (as asserted by some right-wing politicians and organisations), but rather the kind of cultural nationalism that is based on a positive assertion of Japan's unique cultural features and traditions *vis-à-vis* the other nations of the world, so typical of *kokusaika* discourse.

In sum, under the banner of Afuhi Project, Kamigamo Jinja can engage in a range of activities that allow it to engage potential future Shinto practitioners; gain some media attention and positive publicity; redefine itself as a site of 'cultural' rather than 'religious' significance; and profile itself as an open-minded, international and environmentally active organisation. While doing so, however, it remains true to its traditions and heritage – as symbolised by the *aoi* plant. The plant, then, may be

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[237] Two of the children, however, did not join, which was accepted by their teachers. This may have been because they belonged to another religious organisation, or because their parents did not improve of their involvement for another reason (I asked one boy why he could not join, but he told me that he was not sure why; he just was not allowed). Whatever the reason, it was clear that the children were not enjoying the situation. As I have written elsewhere, some Christian parents do not allow their children to enter shrines or temples on school trips, which often makes their children feel uncomfortable and embarrassed (Rots 2012a, 333).

[238] John Nelson spent more than a year conducting field research at Kamigamo Jinja in the 1990s, on which his book *Enduring Identities* is based (2000). In the past few years, an American writer, Rachelle Robinson Soto, has been 'embedded' in the shrine, and actively involved with several activities; her presence has generated quite a bit of media attention, and contributed to Kamigamo Jinja's 'international' image. And perhaps the fact that I was allowed not only to interview one of the Afuhi Project organisers but also to attend the primary school exchange event (which normally would be closed for outsiders) also counts as illustration of Kamigamo Jinja's relatively 'open' character.

said to provide a symbolic connection between the past (mythology and *matsuri*), the present, and the future (by engaging 'the next generation'). Clearly, its significance is not merely ecological.

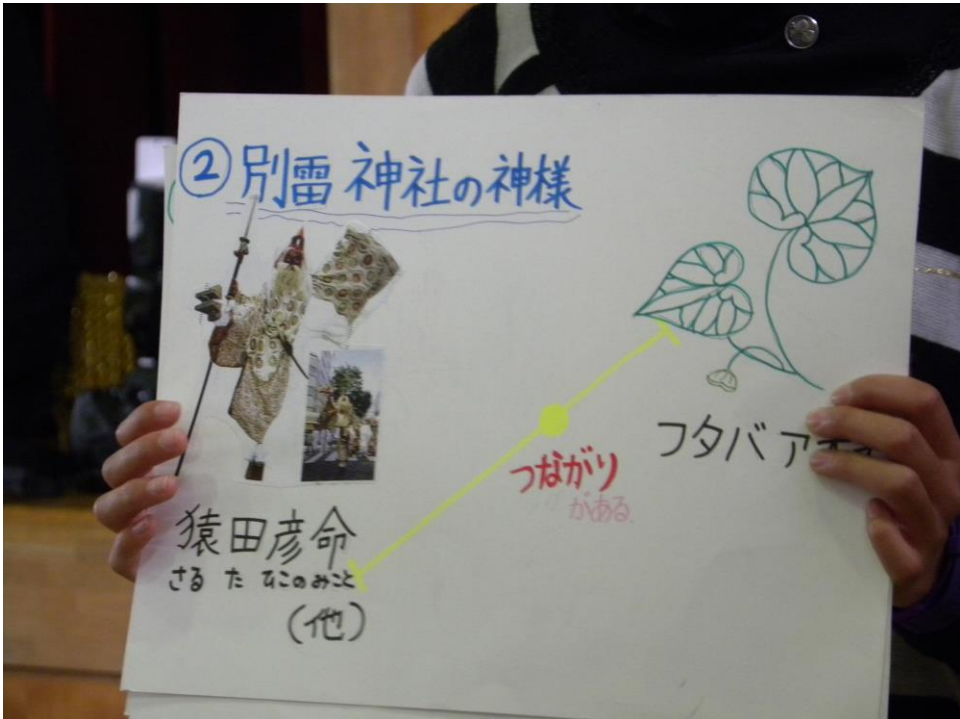*Figure 17: Cooking for the gods at the* Aoi ennichi

Figure 18: A primary school student gives a presentation about the connection between deities and futaba aoi *as part of the Afuhi Project*

11.3 Ise Jingū and its forest

11.3.1 *Ise Jingū and the* shikinen sengū

Ise Jingū is without a doubt one of the most important, oldest, best-known and most-visited shrines in Japan. It played a central part in the development of *kami* cults in the medieval period, which preceded and influenced premodern conceptualisations of Shinto as the 'indigenous', pre- and non-Buddhist worship tradition of Japan. In the Edo period, it was one of the country's most popular pilgrimage destinations, attracting millions of visitors; during this time, it was the centre of numerous popular cults, many of them incorporating elements from Buddhism and *onmyōdō* (yin-yang practices), some of them with millenarian orientations (Davis 1992, 45-80). In the Meiji period, the shrine went through some significant transformations; as the ancestral shrine of the imperial family, it came to constitute an integral part of the state cult and ideology.

In the postwar period, Ise Jingū has become a 'religious institution' like all other shrines, but it continues to be widely perceived as a place of nationwide significance, where some of Japan's oldest traditions have been preserved. Accordingly, it has a special status within Jinja Honchō as the most important shrine in the country. Ise Jingū has been redefined as the *furusato* (ancestral village) not only of the emperor, but of the Japanese nation as a whole – not in the least in PR campaigns focused on attracting touristpilgrims.[239] Ise Jingū is generally considered to be the most sacred site in Shinto, and many of Jinja Honchō's policies are geared towards raising money for its rebuilding, every twenty years (Breen 2010b). As Breen and Teeuwen have rightly pointed out, in modern Shinto, Ise has a 'central position'; simultaneously, however, it 'is in many senses a very exceptional shrine, and perhaps the least representative of them all' (2010, 22).

Although a single institution since the Meiji period, Ise Jingū is not just one shrine. It is a shrine complex, made up of two large shrines, Naikū (Inner Shrine) and Gekū (Outer Shrine), and numerous smaller shrines.[240] Since medieval times, there has been a strong rivalry between Gekū and Naikū over the question which of the two would be the most powerful, which at times has caused serious friction between priests and patrons (e.g., Teeuwen 1996b, 11-12) – not unlike the rivalry between the two Kamo shrines, perhaps. Naikū is the shrine where the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, the mythical ancestress of the imperial family, is enshrined. It is also believed to house one of the three imperial regalia,[241] the mirror of Amaterasu, which according to shrine mythology is kept

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[239] Donna Haraway coined the term 'natureculture' (no space, no hyphen) to describe the hybrid intertwinement of nature and culture, which cannot be neatly separated, as almost everything today – landscapes, human beings, food – is a co-product of the two. Likewise, I use the term touristpilgrim to refer to those hybrid people who come to famous 'sacred sites' to pray and to play, to experience divine presence and consume local culinary specialities, to purchase protective amulets and to take pictures of themselves in front of famous sites. I.e., the majority of all 'pilgrims' – not only in Japan, and not only today.
[240] The entire shrine complex of Ise Jingū is said to consist of a total of 125 shrines (Cali & Dougill 2013, 220).
[241] The imperial regalia (*sanshu no shinki/jingi*) are believed to be the three most sacred objects in Japan. They allegedly date back to mythical primordial time and are said to have been used by the gods themselves. The mirror is one of the three; the other two are the imperial sword (said to be in Atsuta Jingū in Nagoya) and the

in the inner sanctum of the *honden* where nobody can see it. The deity enshrined at Gekū is Toyouke Ōmikami, who is associated with food and clothes. According to the website of Ise Jingū, Toyouke is responsible for 'taking care of' Amaterasu's food – which suggests that she is of lower status.[242]

In the course of history, the meanings attributed to the shrines of Ise have been subject to continuous change. Hence, it should come as no surprise that today Ise is redefined as the quintessential example of the ancient 'Shinto' spirit of harmonious coexistence with nature. One of the places where this is believed to be visible is the forest of Ise Jingū, which I will discuss shortly. In addition, the ancient ecological knowledge supposedly preserved in Ise is said to take shape in traditional practices carried out in connection with the shrine, such as ritualised rice cultivation, salt production, and of course the various skills and practices associated with the *shikinen sengū*. As mentioned previously, the *shikinen sengū* is the ritualised reconstruction and replacement of all shrine buildings (see figure nineteen). This tradition is said to take place every twenty years, and date back to the seventh century.[243] As Adams has summarised, during the *sengū*, '[s]ixteen separate shrines are renewed, incorporating sixty-five buildings, bridges, fences, and auxiliary structures, costing some $320 million [in 1993]. It is accompanied by over thirty Shinto rituals that mark various milestones during the construction process' (1998, 49).

In recent years, the *sengū* has come to be redefined as a sustainable tradition that contains important 'hints' for the twenty-first century world. While it may be argued that completely rebuilding an entire shrine complex every twenty years is a waste of materials, and therefore unsustainable, in fact the opposite argument is made: in shrine publications, popular books and scholarly texts alike, the *shikinen sengū* is lauded as an environmentally-friendly practice that may serve as an example for the rest of the world. It is described as a process that is imbued with a spirit of gratitude to nature, intimately connected to the shrine's physical environment. The following quotation is illustrative of this reinterpretation:

> Since ancient times, people have enjoyed the gifts provided by nature: food, clothing and lodging. Over the centuries, the caretakers of the Grand Shrine of Ise have taken a

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jewel (said to be in the imperial palace). Hidden from the outside world, hardly anybody knows what these regalia actually look like, when they were constructed, and whether they exist at all. Not surprisingly, they have historically been the subject of much speculation and mythmaking. See Bocking 1995, 154.

[242] See http://www.isejingu.or.jp/english/gegu/gegu.htm (last accessed: July 26, 2013). Contrary to what is suggested on this website and on other shrine and tourist publications (typically characterised by a lack of historical perspective), Toyouke has not always been a food deity serving Amaterasu. Throughout the medieval period, the identity of the main deity worshipped at Gekū was repeatedly redefined. Toyouke has been identified with various imperial deities, including Ame no Minakanushi, 'the first god of the universe' (Teeuwen 1996b, 31-48).

[243] In the first centuries after the establishment of the shrines in Ise, *shikinen sengū* were conducted whenever there was a need for reconstruction, not necessarily after a period of twenty years. Sometimes, the period between different *sengū* was shorter; there has also been a long period in the 15th and 16th century without *sengū*. In the last four centuries or so, most *sengū* took place after a twenty-year period, but there are some exceptions. There have also been additional smaller *sengū* to repair a particular part of the shrine complex. At the time of writing, priests at Ise Jingū were busy preparing the 2013 *shikinen sengū*, the 62nd in total (the previous one took place in 1993).

conservation approach by preserving the natural resources of the area and planted and maintained the vast forests that surrounding [*sic*] the sacred landmark. After millennia of use, clean water still flows down from the mountains, replenishing the fields and the crops that are grown there, flowing on to the sea nearby, where it provides the healthy environment from which nourishing plant and animal sea life is harvested. (…) the Grand Shrine has protected to date the benefits of nature through the ceremonies and festivals for the deities (Public Affairs Headquarters for Shikinen-Sengu 2010, 8).

In particular, one of the aspects of the *shikinen sengū* that has drawn the attention of scholars is the craftsmanship and traditional use of materials involved. In fact, it is not only the shrine buildings that are reproduced: every twentieth year, new lacquerware, textiles, jewellery, swords and other items are made. Still, it is the architecture that seems to fascinate most – in particular, the use of ancient architectural techniques believed to predate the introduction of continental architecture (with some adaptations, admittedly [Adams 1998, 56-57]).[244] In building practices, too, Shinto's respect for and gratitude to nature is recognised. For instance, in classical Whitean fashion, architect Cassandra Adams asserts that

> One group of [construction] rituals marks activities that disturb the natural environment, such as tree harvesting and ground breaking. Consistent with the ancient Shinto understanding of the interdependence of human life and the natural world, these rituals are intended to thank and appease the *kamis* (deities) for the lives that are being extinguished. From the workers' viewpoint, these apologetic actions protect them from heavenly recrimination for the harm they cause by their activities. This group of rituals reveals a major ethical difference between Japanese and western relationships to nature. (…) The core of the difference between these two perspectives is that the ancient Shinto view acknowledged the dependence that humans have on nature for their livelihood, a condition that many westerners (and many modern Japanese) do not appear to understand or act on (1998, 55-56).

There are several problems with this interpretation. First of all, the non-critical use of the essentialist dichotomies East-West and traditional-modern arguably does not do justice to the complexity and multi-layeredness of today's world. More importantly, the projection of contemporary notions of 'nature' and 'the environment' onto traditional practices and worldviews is anachronistic and leads to misrepresentation. The performance of a certain ritual for a tree that is felled does not tell us anything about ancient attitudes to 'nature', for that tree was not conceptualised as 'nature' (and placed in opposition to 'culture') until the modern period. Even if we focus on the contemporary period, the fact that trees are ritually greeted and thanked when they are felled does not tell us anything about environmental attitudes *per se*; all it shows is that tree-felling is a ritualised practice, which may or may not be traced back to notions of trees as spirited (and, hence, in need of ritual pacification), but which is primarily performed because it is part of the prescribed ritual repertoire. Even *if* the labourers felling the trees were filled with a profound sense of reverence and gratitude – which I doubt, frankly –

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[244] For discussions of Ise shrine architecture, see Adams 1998; Hvass 1999.

that in itself would still not tell us anything about the environmental impact of their activities (or lack thereof), as attitudes do not necessarily correspond to practices.

Figure 19: Before the shikinen sengū*: an old shrine building next to a newly-built one*

Figure 20: A hinoki *in the Ise* kyūikirin*, cultivated for a future* shikinen sengū

Nevertheless, explanations like the one above are typical of contemporary interpretations of the *shikinen sengū*. In particular, the Ise rebuilding process is regularly described as recycling *avant la lettre* and therefore seen as a great example of the sustainability and environmental knowledge supposedly present in 'ancient Shinto' (e.g., Y. Satō 2008). This claim is based on the fact that if it has not decayed too much, wood of the former shrine buildings is used for other constructions in the Ise shrine complex, as well as for other shrines elsewhere in the country:

> The timbers removed when the Shrine is rebuilt are distributed to shrines throughout Japan, where they are reused, particularly to disaster or earthquake-stricken regions. Some of the sacrificial offerings and other contents of the Shrine are also distributed among other shrines. Following the 61st Shikinen Sengu [in 1993], lumber and contents of the Shrine were distributed among 169 shrines throughout Japan. (…) [Moreover, t]he *munamochi-bashira* [large pillars] of the Goshoden, or Main Sanctuary, of Naiku and Geku are diverted to and used for another 20 years as internal and external shrine gates for the Uji Bridge [the main bridge going to Naikū] (Public Affairs Headquarters for Shikinen-Sengu 2010, 14).

Whether this reusing of building materials is based on ancient ecological thought or on practical necessity (i.e., limited availability of timber and other resources) may be subject to debate. In any case, the above quotations illustrate how the *shikinen sengū* has come to be redefined in the light of contemporary environmentalist discourse, and framed as an ecologically sustainable tradition, despite the fact that objectively speaking the architectural techniques used are not sustainable at all – i.e., they lead to the quick decay of building materials, which is why the buildings needed to be replaced regularly in the first place. Either way, the *shikinen sengū* requires a significant amount of timber, which is one of the reasons why Ise Jingū has such a sizeable forest. It is to the topic of this forest that I will now turn.

11.3.2 The forest of Ise Jingū

As far as I know, the forest of Ise Jingū is significantly bigger than any other shrine forest in Japan. But then, it is not a shrine forest in the ordinary sense of the word. Accordingly, it is not typically referred to as a *chinju no mori* – even though, as we have seen, some people are not opposed to using the word if used in its more generic and symbolic meaning. Others would not use the term *chinju no mori* in this context, but may opt for *shasō* instead. However, neither term is used regularly by the shrine management itself.

The forest of Ise Jingū is divided into different sections (see map two). The first section is similar to shrine forests elsewhere, and is referred to by the name *shin'iki*, which is translated as 'divine area'. These are the areas of forest surrounding the shrines. As explained in the information brochure published by the shrine forest management department (Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated a/b), '[t]he divine area is strictly protected from cutting to preserve its holiness, and nature has been

carefully conserved' (Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated b, 3). That does not mean, however, that these are 'natural' forests not influenced by human activities. They are particularly famous for their centuries-old *sugi* trees, which, in all likelihood, have been planted by people. Moreover, the entire spatial configuration is the outcome of human planning, and has been subject to various historical transformations: for instance, the park-like approach to Naikū (between Uji bridge and the *temizuya*) was designed and constructed in the Meiji period, and did not exist previously (see Breen 2013). Today, various forest maintenance activities take place here, ranging from sweeping the path to taking protective measures against parasites in order to preserve old trees.
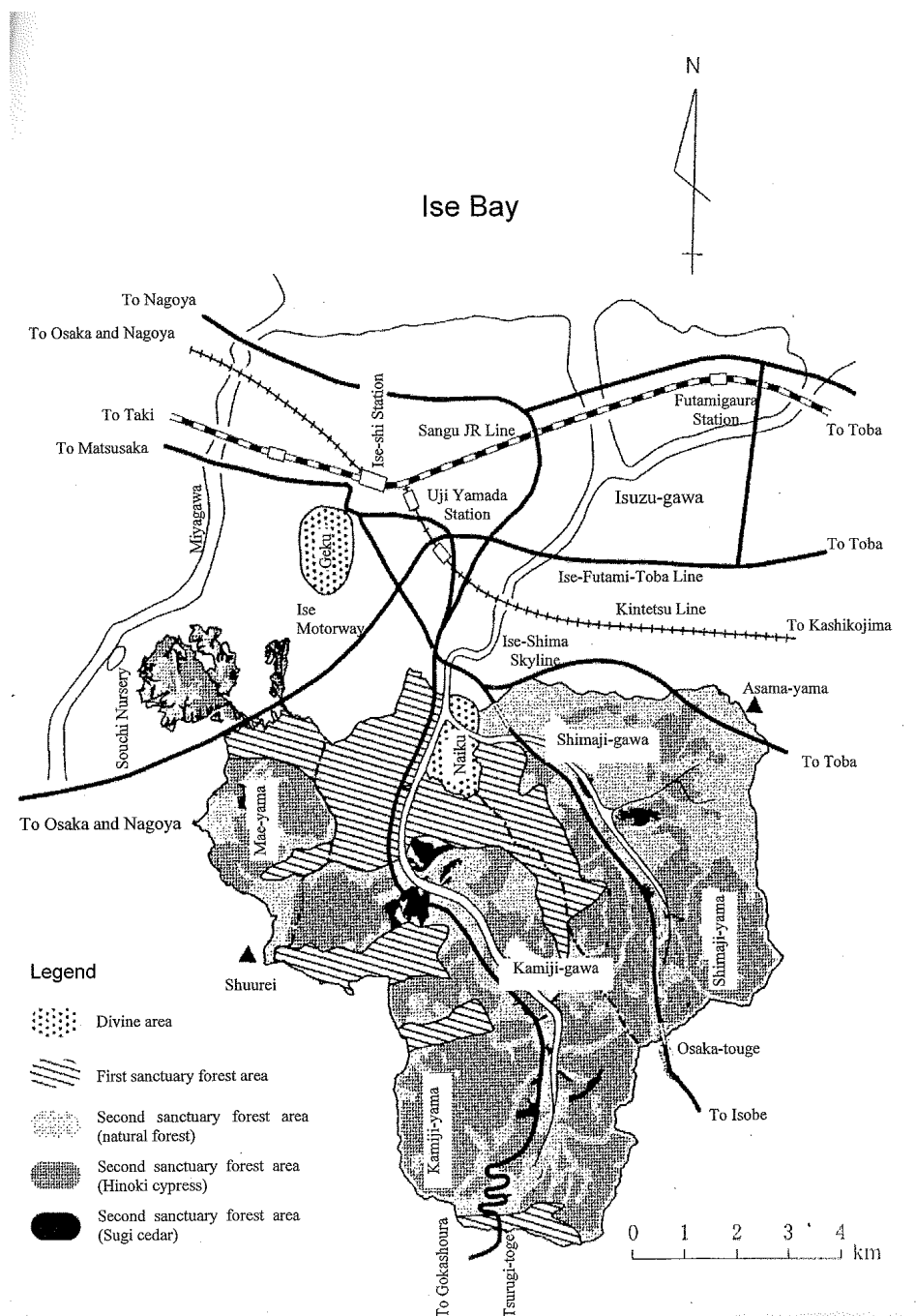
Map 2: Map of the Ise shrine forest (source: Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated b, 7).

With total areas of, respectively, 93 ha and 90 ha, Naikū and Gekū have comparatively large shrine precincts (the forest of Meiji Jingū has a size of approximately 70 ha; Tadasu no Mori is merely 12 ha).[245] However, this is still very small compared to the main forest, which is referred to by the term *kyūikirin* (translated as 'sanctuary forest'). The *kyūikirin* is divided into two types, which are called *daiichi kyūikirin* ('first sanctuary forest area') and *daini kyūikirin* ('second sanctuary forest area'). They have a size of, respectively, 1094 ha and 4352 ha. The former consists primarily of broad-leaved trees (925 ha), with small areas of coniferous forest (*sugi* 87 ha; *hinoki* 75 ha). The latter is a mixed forest: it consists for a large part of planted *hinoki* trees (2459 ha), which are used as material for shrine buildings, but there is also a significant proportion of broad-leaved trees (1708 ha), as well as some *sugi*. The main difference between the first and the second *kyūikirin* is that the first is not used for production, and is considered 'natural' and 'sacred', similar to the *shin'iki* areas. The second *kyūikirin*, on the other hand, is further divided into so-called 'special-operation areas' – forest areas along rivers and roads, which are not used for timber production, and which are said to be 'academically valuable' (which, I assume, refers to their species diversity, on which scientists do research) – and 'normal-operation areas', mainly made up of *hinoki*, where timber is produced for the *shikinen sengū* (Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated a/b, 2-4).

'*Kyūikirin*' is a modern term. In medieval and pre-modern times, the forest was referred to by the term *misomayama* ('[honorific prefix] timber mountain'), a name that continues to be used today. Until the Kamakura period, wood for the *shikinen sengū* came from this area. But as the forest was also used for other purposes, deforestation and forest degradation gradually increased, and from the 14th century onwards the shrines mostly used timber that was grown in other parts of the country. In the Edo period, unsustainable forest exploitation continued, and many trees were felled in order to serve as firewood for the millions of pilgrims visiting Ise. This led to erosion, which caused the regular flooding of the Isuzugawa river. In the early twentieth century, the forest was largely made up of *akamatsu* pine trees (the roots of which do not go very deep), many of which were younger than fifteen years; consequently, a strong typhoon that hit the area in 1918 caused high floods and significant damage (Kimura 2010, 5-8).

The current forest dates back to 1923, when it was designed. It was constructed in accordance with at-the-time modern forestry techniques. Thus, the forest of Ise Jingū – in its current shape, that is – is a contemporary of the forest of Meiji Jingū. The main difference, of course, is that the forest of Meiji Jingū was designed to be 'natural' and look 'sacred', whereas the main purpose of the forest of Ise Jingū is the cultivation of *hinoki*, the primary resource for the *shikinen sengū* (see figure twenty). The first *hinoki* were planted around ninety years ago; in 2013, the first of these Taishō-period trees were used for shrine buildings. For the first time in approximately 700 years, therefore, wood from the

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[245] The combined size of other, smaller shrines in Ise (referred to as *betsugū*; auxiliary shrines) is another 58 ha; the largest of these is Takihara-no-miya (45 ha). In addition, the precincts of subshrines (*sessha* and *massha*) have a combined size of 26 ha (Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated a/b, 3).

Ise forest is used for rebuilding the shrine. However, for one *sengū*, a significant amount of timber is required (about 10,000 m³, or 14,000 logs); not all of which can be provided by the *kyūikirin*. In fact, only one fifth of all wood used for the 2013 *sengū* is grown in this forest; the remaining 80% comes from production forests in Nagano and Gifu prefectures. At future *sengū*, however, the proportion of timber coming from the *kyūikirin* is expected to get higher and higher; the current shrine forest management is working with a 200-year plan, carefully selecting (and marking) the trees that are believed to have the potential to grow high and thick, and those that may be used sooner. As in other shrine forests, tree-planting ceremonies take place in the Ise forest, where the *hinoki* of the future are planted by selected volunteers and shrine priests (*Chūnichi shinbun* 2013; Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated a/b; Kimura 2010; *Mainichi shinbun* 2013).

Yet, as we have seen, not the entire *kyūikirin* is used as production forest. In principle, the areas that are designated as 'first sanctuary forest area' as well as the 'special-operation areas' in the 'second sanctuary forest area' are not used for production. Together, these areas make up approximately 40% of the total *kyūikirin*. Even the production forest is not solely made up of *hinoki*: 'some useful trees are left to grow to form a mixed forest with Hinoki cypress and broad-leaved species that is ecologically sound' (Jingū shichō eirinbu not dated b, 4).[246] The other areas are mostly made up of mixed or broad-leaved forest, and they are said to constitute ecologically valuable natural areas. A recent NHK wildlife documentary (NHK 2013) showed some of the animals living in the forest. According to this documentary, the forest houses 19 mammal species (including sika deer, raccoon dog [*tanuki*] and Japanese macaque), 141 bird species, and over 3000 species of insects. The forest of Ise, it was suggested, constitutes 'the original Japanese forest landscape' (*Nihon no mori no genfūkei*). Among the various animals portrayed were rare species of insects (including swallowtail butterflies, fireflies, cicadas, longhorn beetles and dragonflies); colourful songbirds, such as *ōruri* (blue-and-white flycatcher; *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*) and *sankōchō* (Japanese paradise flycatcher; *Terpsiphone atrocaudata*); as well as rare fish, frogs and crustaceans (in the river, that is). In addition, the forest is said to have 120 species of trees and over 600 species of plants (Inata 2009, 92). In sum, the forest of Ise Jingū is considered to be a natural area of profound ecological and scientific significance, housing a great diversity of species, some of which are rare or endangered.

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[246] There seems to be some disagreement, however, about the extent to which broad-leaved trees should be allowed to 'infiltrate' the *hinoki* plantation area. At the Shasō Gakkai conference in Ise (June 2013), there was a short but interesting discussion between the head of the Ise forest management office and a well-known forest ecologist. The latter suggested that the *hinoki* areas of the *kyūikirin* are too close to being a monoculture, and not very ecologically stable; according to him, more species diversity should be allowed. The former did not agree, and defended his approach by referring to classical forest theory. Clearly, then, the two had different perspectives and agendas. The discussion, unfortunately, was cut short by the organisers, as it was the end of the day and we had run out of time.

11.3.3 Ise Jingū, Jinja Honchō, and the sacralisation of nature

Although they are different institutions, there is a strong connection between Ise Jingū and Jinja Honchō. The continuation of the *shikinen sengū*, the conservation of Ise's status as the most important shrine in Japan, and the revitalisation of Ise's deep symbolic connection with both the imperial institution and the nation as a whole are among Jinja Honchō's core concerns. Despite the numerous transformations it has gone through in the course of history, Ise is a symbol of continuity – the continuity of ancient building techniques and other skills, the continuity of the imperial family as a sacred institution, and the continuity of worship practices and beliefs. It is a symbol that is carefully protected and reinforced by Jinja Honchō by means of various publications, media texts and PR campaigns stressing Ise's 'natural' and 'eternal' (i.e., transhistorical) character, as well as its strong relationship with both the Japanese people and the life-giving god that represents both the sun and the imperial lineage, Amaterasu.

Significantly, in discursive representations of Ise, nature – the forest, river, sea and rice paddies – is displayed prominently, indicating the eternal and uncreated character of the shrine and its *fūdo*.[247] For instance, on posters designed to attract visitors to Ise or sell amulets, Jinja Honchō does not usually show any people: rather, the posters show beautiful but generic and ahistorical forests, skies and mountains, sometimes with a simple wooden shrine building. For instance, one such poster shows a picture of a wooden *torii* gate, together with the word 'thank you' (*arigatō*) in large letters, and the following text in small print:

> To the sun, to the sunlight, to the warmth of this star,
> Thank you.
> To the rain, to the river, to this clean water,
> Thank you.
> To the earth, to the forest, to my rice,
> Thank you.
> To my ancestors, to my father, to my mother, to my life,
> Thank you.
>
> If we become aware of the things that deserve our gratitude,
> We can protect the things that are important to us.
>
> Behind this *torii* gate,
> Prayers expressing gratitude

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[247] Likewise, in Jinja Honchō media texts, the claim that Shinto is a national, ethnic tradition that belongs to the entire nation (symbolically united under the emperor, the living descendant of the sun goddess herself) is literally naturalised by using symbols of the land, landscapes, and natural beauty. The Jinja Honchō website, for instance, juxtaposes instructive texts on shrine rituals, festivals and Shinto's ancient history with seemingly unrelated pictures of sunrise, forests, mountains, animals and the sea, implying that shrine buildings, ceremonies and festivals are as much part of the Japanese landscape as mountains and trees, equally self-evident and eternal. See http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/index.html (last accessed: July 30, 2013).

Have been said continuously
For over two thousand years.[248]

Together, the image and text assert and signify a number of things. First: Shinto is, essentially, an expression of gratitude for the life-giving forces of nature. Second: Shinto is concerned with respect and gratitude for parents and ancestors, and, accordingly, aware of continuity between past and present, as well as moral responsibility and indebtedness vis-à-vis one's ancestors. Third: the sun is the foundational and primary force of nature, just like the sun goddess is the *prima inter pares* of the myriad deities of Japan; and, accordingly, Ise the most important shrine of the country. Fourth: as it has provided space for rituals for over two thousand years, Ise represents a direct continuity between the present and prehistorical past. Fifth: In addition to the sun, Shinto is a tradition based on gratitude to the earth, water, forests and of course rice – the staple food that serves as a symbolic marker for the unity and continuity of the nation (cf. Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). Sixth: Shinto in general, and Ise in particular, is responsible for the protection (i.e., conservation) of things that are important – and has protected these things for centuries. Thus, Shinto serves a crucial social function, as it preserves important traditional practices and beliefs that would otherwise be lost. Seventh: doctrine, religious institutions, shrine buildings, priests, laws and so on are not mentioned, nor are they shown; the implication seems to be that anything that is historically particular is, ultimately, peripheral to the core essence: the expression of gratitude towards nature and the ancestors. And eighth: nature is portrayed as, ultimately, life-giving and benevolent – accordingly, it deserves our reverence and protection.

The notion of gratitude towards nature also takes central stage in a recent commercial, made by Jinja Honchō to advertise Ise talismans (*o-fuda*).[249] A young woman is seen walking in a pristine natural landscape, with beautiful forests, rivers and sunlight. Her facial expressions and body language suggest feelings of happiness, awe and reverence, and she is wearing a simple white dress that signifies purity and innocence. A female voice-over slowly recites lines similar to the poster text quoted above. Finally, we see the woman place a talisman on a *kamidana* ('god-shelf'; a Shinto home altar), put her hands together, and pray to the sun. The advertisement suggests eternal beauty, benevolence and purity, and is profoundly apolitical. The product that is advertised, however, has been the cause of much dissatisfaction within the Shinto clergy, and is a contested symbol of Jinja Honchō's problematic attempts to impose its will on member shrines – highly political indeed. These particular talismans represent the protective power of the shrines of Ise, and the sun goddess. They are produced by Jinja Honchō as a means to raise funds for the *shikinen sengū* (Breen 2010b).

However, the symbolic significance of 'nature' is not limited to publicity campaigns. As the most famous and most important shrine in the country, developments in the shrine world as a whole inevitably affect Ise, and *vice versa*. It is not surprising, therefore, that this is one of the places where the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is enacted. In recent years, Ise has become a focal point for

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[248] Ise Grand Shrine, tourist poster, 2011. My translation.
[249] The commercial can be watched online at http://www.sengu.info/pr.html (last accessed: July 27, 2013).

activities related to religious environmentalism, national as well as international. For instance, the Ise-based interfaith organisation Ise Kokusai Shūkyō Forum (Ise International Forum of Religions) has organised several academic events on the topic 'religion and the environment'.[250] Furthermore, Ise is one of the three shrines involved with Jinja Honchō and ARC's sustainable forestry project (discussed in chapter seven). As mentioned previously, in 2000, Jinja Honchō leaders officially pledged 'not only to manage all of their sacred forests in sustainable ways but also only to buy timber from sustainably managed forests'.[251] The forest of Ise Jingū was one of the three shrine forests visited and studied by ARC members, together with WWF and FSC forestry specialists, in 2005 (the other two were Kashihara Jingū and Ōmiwa Jinja in Nara prefecture).[252] Thus, Ise constitutes one of the examples upon which the international 'religious forestry standard' is based. This is a document drafted by the ARC, based on the 'forest theologies' provided by the various religious actors involved, which will be presented at a large international and interreligious conference that is scheduled to take place in Ise in 2014. If everything goes according to plan, by the time this conference takes place, 'millions of hectares of religious forest' worldwide are managed 'ecologically'.[253]

As I argued previously, the question as to what extent Jinja Honchō's commitment to environmental issues is 'genuine' or 'sincere' is impossible to answer – not only because Jinja Honchō is an organisation with considerable internal diversity, in which different opinions and agendas are represented, but also because there is no global standard for environmentalist activism. All expressions of environmentalism are contingent upon culturally and historically embedded conceptualisations of 'nature' and 'the environment', as well as notions of crisis and decline, and possible strategies for improvement. They are intertwined with identity politics, economical issues, competing land claims and cultural values. Jinja Honchō is no exception.

What is clear, however, is that for Jinja Honchō, involvement with ARC is *not only* motivated by a concern for environmental issues; there are also concerns of a more strategic nature. Several years ago, Jinja Honchō hired a small PR company named Copla to help with the publicity for the next *shikinen sengū*. Together, they founded the non-profit organisation Sennen no Mori Forum (Millennium Forest Forum; not to be confused with Sennen no Mori no Kai). I had the opportunity to talk to some people working for this organisation (November 2011). As I was told, cooperation with the ARC is important for improving the visibility and general perception of Shinto abroad. It provides Jinja Honchō with an opportunity to redefine and reposition itself globally as an internationally-oriented, ecological organisation; and, accordingly, to present Shinto as a tradition of nature worship that goes back to ancient times yet is of great contemporary relevance.

Thus, the significance of Jinja Honchō's cooperation with ARC is twofold. First, it provides Jinja Honchō and some of its member shrines with the opportunity to learn about nature conservation

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[250] See http://www.iifr.jp/index.html (last accessed: July 27, 2013).
[251] From http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=161 (last accessed: July 27, 2013).
[252] From http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=345 (last accessed: July 27, 2013).
[253] For details, see http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=529 (last accessed: July 27, 2013).

and sustainable forest management, and get support for projects developed to improve shrine forest ecology. Second, it is part of a deliberate PR strategy to rebrand Shinto as a tolerant, open-minded ecological tradition, and contribute to its international dissociation from rightwing nationalism and imperialism – while still maintaining that it is the ancient, indigenous tradition of 'the' Japanese people, closely intertwined with both national culture and its physical landscapes.

Sennen no Mori Forum is not only involved with the organisation of the ARC conference and the development of Jinja Honchō's 'forest theology', however. It has also organised a range of other activities for the purpose of raising domestic awareness of the upcoming *shikinen sengū*, attracting paying visitors, and improving the overall opinion and knowledge of Shinto in general and Ise Jingū in particular. In addition to facilitating TV documentaries and other media campaigns, it was one of the co-organisers of the 'great shrine exhibition' held in the Tokyo National Museum in the spring of 2013.[254] Moreover, it published a book on Ise Jingū and its forest, written by the photographer Inata Miori (2009). More than anything, this book – which is illustrated by many beautiful photographs – provides a clear illustration of the contemporary trend not only to redefine shrines as transcendental, sacred and spiritual places (i.e., 'powerspots'), but also to extend this to forests and, indeed, to nature as a whole.

For instance, the author describes how, when she first visited Ise, she felt that she became a 'part of nature' and was 'purified'; she felt a strong sense of gratitude, as if she was coming home (Inata 2009, 4-5). This, she stresses, is the 'real Japan' (*honmono no Nihon*) (ibid., 6). She also describes how she went into the 'natural' area of the *kyūikirin*, where she could feel a divine presence in a special rock, as if she had entered the 'world of myths' (ibid., 86). She suggests that it is the forests that 'give people life' and protect them; in mystical vocabulary that remind one of Kamata and Eliade, she writes that, when she was deep inside the forest, she could feel 'the original energy of life' coming 'directly from the centre of the earth' (ibid., 98).[255] The forest is also known for its large 'natural' *hinoki*, which are likewise considered sacred, and which look impressive indeed; unlike the twentieth-century planted *hinoki* in other parts of the forests, they are not to be used as building material (ibid., 93-98).

In sum, the forest of Ise Jingū, and the practices associated with it, are described in two ways today – not only by Inata Miori, but in general academic and popular discourse. These two descriptions are complementary rather than contradictory, and both of them may be seen as expressions of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm. According to the first description, Ise is Japan's

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[254] See http://daijinja.jp/ (last accessed: July 27, 2013). The exhibition included shrine treasures from all over the country, most of which are not usually on display, such as wooden statues of deities. When I visited the exhibition, the number of visitors was very high; apparently, it was a great success. In early 2014, the same exhibition will be held in the Kyushu National Museum in Fukuoka. I was told in 2011 that there were also plans to organise a similar exhibition abroad, but I am not sure whether these plans still exist.

[255] It is certainly true that, in the 'natural' area of the Ise forest, there are some noteworthy trees and rocks. When I visited the forest with a member of the shrine forest management office, I was taken to a peculiar tree that was shaped like a rope, growing horizontally over a small waterfall like a *shimenawa* demarcating sacred space. I was assured that this tree had grown naturally, without human intervention.

most sacred and most ancient sacred place. It transcends history, and represents nature in its purest, primordial shape. As such, it is the archetypal *chinju no mori.* As Inata writes: 'The original natural forests of Japan have been preserved in the various *chinju no mori, beginning with Ise*. For us, people of the contemporary age, *chinju no mori transcend time*, and have protected wonderful treasures' (ibid., 93; my translation, my emphasis). Sacredness and naturalness are here two sides of the same coin. Both are conceived of as transhistorical, and as the Other of human society and politics; unlike them, they are not subject to historical change and contingency.

Second, Ise is generally described as a place where humans and nature live in harmony. Traditional practices such as rice cultivation, salt production and shrine architecture are all conceived of in terms of the balance between human culture and the natural environment – the naturecultural *fūdo*, we could call it (fusing Haraway's and Watsuji's terminology). Despite the fact that the forests of Ise have long suffered from deforestation and resource depletion, its modern forestry practices are presented as remnants of the Japanese tradition of coexistence with nature. Rather than leaving 'nature' be, this is a narrative of interdependence and balance, not unlike the *satoyama* ideal. In Ise, however, this tradition of interdependence is not only preserved in agricultural practices and traditional arts and crafts, but also in its supposedly unchanging ritual traditions – most prominently, the *shikinen sengū*. These traditions, it is argued, 'certainly contain important hints for the world of today. (…) If we want to know how we should live from now on, as a part of nature, I think we should learn from Ise's long history' (Inata 2009, 101-102; my translation).

11.4 Shrine forests, nature, and disaster

11.4.1 2011: A year of disasters

On March 11, 2011, I was at Shimogamo Jinja, talking to two priests involved in the Tadasu no Mori project. I asked them whether *chinju no mori* is a uniquely Japanese phenomenon, or whether similar sacred urban forests can be found in other countries. I also asked if the underlying principle of the conservation of 'sacred nature', which they had told me about, would be globally applicable. One of them answered. I believe his answer was somewhat evasive, but he suggested that *chinju no mori* were primarily a Japanese affair, and that their relevance was local rather than global. He then compared Tadasu no Mori to Central Park in New York, but I did not catch everything he said, because I was distracted by the earthquake I felt. They must have noticed it, too, but they did not seem to pay much attention to it. After all, in Japan, small earthquakes occur quite frequently. We continued the interview.

Two hours later, I was contacted by a friend, asking me if I had felt the earthquake, and telling me it was much more than just a small, local affair. Its epicentre was east of Tohoku, in the northeast of Honshu, far removed from Kyoto. It was one of the strongest earthquakes in modern history, and it

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caused an enormous tsunami that destroyed entire coastal towns, killing more than 20,000 people. The tsunami also caused serious damage to a nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture, which led to a nuclear crisis, the consequences of which are still unclear (and disputed). As if that was not enough, later that year Japan was hit by more natural disasters: in September, the southern Kansai region (especially Wakayama prefecture) suffered from typhoons and floods, which caused serious damage and casualties. In sum, 2011 was a year of disasters.

These events posed some serious challenges to Shinto organisations. Not only did they cause significant material damage to shrines and shrine forests, they also led to the death, suffering and displacement of many shrine priests and practitioners, thus uprooting local communities. In addition, the disasters constituted challenges of a more theological and ideological nature. That is, they problematised the ideal typical notion of nature as essentially gentle and benign that underlies the popular myth of the harmonious Japanese co-existence with nature, which, as we have seen, has strongly influenced recent reinterpretations of Shinto. Thus, the catastrophes of 2011 quite dramatically put the topic of theodicy onto the agenda of contemporary Shinto thought, leading authors and priests to consider ways to reconcile notions of nature as benevolent and animate with the widespread destruction and suffering brought about by the very forces of nature they had idealised.

Meanwhile, however, the events also seem to have given new impetus to Shinto-related activism and brought about new ideological vigour. Local shrine-based volunteer organisations, as well as other Shinto organisations, have set up a variety of activities to support affected shrines and communities. It has also been suggested that the events have contributed to a new interest in the devotional aspects of supposedly secularised ritual events, such as *matsuri* (Porcu 2012, 102-103). In addition, there have been various ideological responses to the events, ranging from the rhetoric of 'national resurrection' – a concept that not only refers to the reconstruction of buildings and roads, but also to idealised notions of traditional culture, social harmony and morality – to the development of more radically environmentalist apocalyptic ideas of destruction and rebirth.

The disasters of 2011, it seems, have affected both shrine practices – throughout Japan, but especially in the affected areas – and theoretical understandings of the relationship between 'Shinto' and 'nature'. I do not have the space to discuss the important yet complicated topic of 'Shinto' responses to (natural) disaster at length here – I have made a first attempt to address the issue elsewhere (Rots forthcoming), and I hope to be able to continue my inquiry into this topic in the near future. For now, I would like to limit myself to a short, explorative discussion of practices and ideas pertaining to the core themes of this study: conceptualisations of 'Shinto' in relation to 'nature', and organisations devoted to the conservation and (re)construction of sacred shrine forests. In the first section, I will look at various institutional responses to the disasters, and examine the discourse of national resurrection employed by some of these institutions. Next, I will look at the topic of 'nature' and 'theodicy' – i.e., attempts to reconcile notions of harmony, human-nature coexistence, and the 'sacredness' of nature with the events of 2011.

11.4.2 'Religion', shrine activism, and national resurrection

Soon after the events of March 11, Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō (born 1932) – well-known for his nationalist populism, historical revisionism and xenophobic remarks – made international headlines with his statement that the earthquake and tsunami were the result of 'heavenly punishment' (*tenbatsu*) for the 'greed' and 'selfishness' of the Japanese people (*Asahi shinbun* 2011).[256] There were many angry reactions to this statement, and Ishihara later apologised. Apparently, however, his comments did not significantly affect his popularity – one month later, he was re-elected as governor. Internationally, his statement was interpreted as a 'religious' comment, and compared with the views of Evangelicals in the US and elsewhere seeing various disasters as punishments or warnings by God (Dwyer 2011; Gilgoff 2011). By way of response, soon afterwards scholar of religion Levi McLaughlin published an online essay, later republished as a journal article, in which he argued that Ishihara's comment is by no means representative of Japanese religious responses in general (McLaughlin 2011a; 2011b). In this essay, he listed a number of activities undertaken by religious organisations in Japan to provide support for the victims of the disaster. These include temples, shrines and churches providing shelter to people who lost their homes; various religious organisations setting up fundraising events and donating money as well as emergency supplies; Christian churches and Buddhist 'new religions' sending volunteers to the affected area and so on. Thus McLaughlin corrected the negative impression of 'Japanese religion' audiences outside Japan may have got, based on Ishihara's statement.[257]

McLaughlin's article gives a useful overview of the various activities undertaken by religious groups in response to the natural disasters. His list is by no means exhaustive. For instance, a recent documentary portrays attempts by Buddhist priests to redefine their tradition in the light of the recent

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[256] In international media, *tenbatsu* was usually translated as 'divine punishment'. It may be argued, however, that 'heavenly' is a more accurate translation than 'divine'. The character *ten* 天 means heaven, after all, and refers to an impersonal entity rather than a particular deity. The concept is of Confucian origin, and, as with other combinations with this character (e.g., *tennen*, 'nature'), it may be debated whether the term should be considered 'religious'. That is, it does not refer to any particular divine actors (as for instance *shinbatsu*, punishment by a deity), nor is it historically associated with particular ritual practices or doctrinal texts.

[257] Problematically, however, McLaughlin did not question the common interpretation of Ishihara's words as 'religious'. On the contrary, he confirmed the association between the latter's words and the category 'religion', by juxtaposing these words with the various positive contributions made by religious organisations. In his conclusion, he even argues that, notwithstanding the low percentage of Japanese identifying themselves as such, recent events suggest that they are quite religious after all: 'The resources available within Japanese religious traditions inform Ishihara's pronouncement of the tsunami as "divine punishment," and they inspire thousands of clergy and lay adherents to devote themselves to the this-worldly and transcendent salvation of suffering people. More generally, the spirit of community, resilience, and an obstinate refusal to give up in the face of adversity speaks to the country's legacy of self-cultivation, communitarianism, and self-sacrifice in the interest of social improvement—all qualities that can be characterized as "religious"' (McLaughlin 2011b). As discussed in chapter two, I would be hesitant to use the term 'religious' in such a generic way, as the concept is fraught with preconceptions and therefore not helpful as an analytical category. Needless to say, such a use of the term does not correspond to common Japanese understandings of '*shūkyō*'.

events, and provide care for victims (Graf & Montrasio 2012). The disaster has also served as an incentive for the development of new interreligious initiatives: at Tohoku University, for example, a number of academic and religious actors (including representatives of Buddhist, Shinto, Christian and 'new religious' organisations) have joined forces in setting up a practically oriented, trans-denominational research centre devoted to the topic of post-disaster pastoral and spiritual care (Suzuki Iwayumi, interview, May 2013; cf. Kamata 2011, 160-163).[258]

As for Shinto, several shrines and shrine-related organisations throughout Japan have made efforts to contribute to the rebuilding process, by means of fundraising activities, special prayer ceremonies and other symbolic practices. For instance, the proceeds of the Afuhi Project cultural day (*ennichi*) in October 2011 were sent to tsunami victims in Tohoku. At this event, a choir consisting of local school children performed several songs as a means to express their sympathy with tsunami victims (see figure twenty-one). Meanwhile, since March 2013, many of the seedlings grown from acorns found by Hibiki volunteers in the forest of Meiji Jingū have been sent to Tohoku, where they are used for the 'Great Forest Wall'. This is an ambitious project, set up by Miyawaki Akira and like-minded scientists, to build a 'wall' (or dam) along the coast of Tohoku made of debris on which trees are planted. If their plans are successful, this wall of trees will have a length of more than 300 kilometres, mainly consisting of 'indigenous' broad-leaved trees. According to the project developers, this 'forest wall' will protect future generations from destructive tsunamis. However, for a wall of 300 kilometres, 90 million seedlings are needed.[259] The seedlings from broad-leaved trees grown at Meiji Jingū are therefore most welcome.[260]

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[258] The centre is called 'Department of Practical Religious Studies', and it is the first centre of its kind in Japan. It organises seminars, practical courses and activities for victims. The centre is special for at least two reasons. First, because it is organised by a public (and, hence, not religiously affiliated) university – in Japan, it is highly uncommon for public universities to cooperate actively with religious organisations and offer practical religious educations. Second, in Japan as elsewhere, pastoral care is usually the monopoly of religious organisations (or, in some countries, non-religious 'worldviews' such as humanist organisations, which are nevertheless institutionalised according to the denominational model). Trans- or non-denominational pastoral care, therefore, is a rarity. But the fact that the centre is located at one of Japan's leading universities points to a significant shift in perspective with regard to the role of religious organisations in the public sphere. Suzuki Iwayumi – a scholar of religion who has done research on attitudes to death in Japan (e.g., I. Suzuki 2013), and is one of the organisers of this research centre – told me that he hoped these activities would contribute to a more positive perception of 'religion' in Japanese society. He also stressed that none of the religious organisations involved did so for the purpose of making converts – their concern was with spiritual care, not with proselytising, or so the organisers hope (interview, May 2013).

[259] See the English-language pamphlet on http://greatforestwall.com/files/2013/05/f5190cedf8ec2c.pdf (last accessed: August 15, 2013).

[260] When I first joined an NPO Hibiki guided tour together with people from Shibuya University (November 2011; see footnote 221), we visited a small garden where dozens of seedlings were standing in pots. We were told that these would be sent to Tohoku, where they would be used for replanting forests; the same was the case for the acorns we had collected. This way, we were told, we could help 'rebuild' the areas that had been hit by the disasters. Everybody did their best to collect as many good acorns as possible. By doing so, we could make a small contribution to the 'forest wall' project. Arguably, then, the practice had strong symbolic significance: by collecting and planting acorns 'for the people in Tohoku', participants may have felt a connection to the victims and the affected areas in which they live. Through this symbolic practice, they became part of a nation-wide movement and shared in a newly imagined collective identity defined by the notions of 'rebuilding' and 'reconstruction'.

The 'Great Forest Wall' project is a concrete manifestation of Miyawaki's theory that forests made up of 'indigenous' tree species are not only ecologically relevant, but also serve an important social function, as they help prevent natural disasters. There is obviously some truth to this: deforestation, for instance, can lead to erosion and floods. The same applies to the replacement of mixed or broad-leaved forests by coniferous production forests, as the trees grown there (especially *sugi* and *akamatsu*) have short roots, do not prevent erosion as well as broad-leaved trees, and are easily uprooted in case of floods or typhoons. According to Miyawaki, (shrine) forests have protected people from earthquakes and fires, saving their lives (2000, 12-16; cf. Ōmori 2010, 98-99). By contrast, he has suggested that the postwar construction boom, which has led to rapid deforestation in urban areas, has contributed to natural disasters causing destruction (Miyawaki 2000, 18). A famous example of a shrine forest that has literally protected people is the *chinju no mori* of Ikuta Jinja in Kobe: albeit a very small shrine forest, the trees here reportedly prevented surrounding houses from collapsing during the great earthquake of 1995 (Yamamura 2011, 48, 129-133).

Shasō Gakkai has also been actively involved with reconstruction activities. In 2011, several scholars and scientists related to this organisation went to Tohoku in order to monitor the damage done to shrines and shrine forests. Whereas several shrines located on high grounds escaped serious damage, others were severely affected. In some cases, shrine buildings were partly destroyed, and many trees were uprooted. In November 2011, Shasō Gakkai organised a seminar on this topic, in which the results of their research were presented; in addition, they published a report containing details and pictures of affected shrines, as well as suggestions as to how they should be rebuilt.[261] While the study offered a compelling overview of the condition of shrine buildings and their forests hit by the tsunami, the question as to how this rebuilding should be financed was not addressed. As Shasō Gakkai is an organisation of modest financial means, it seems unlikely that they can do more than monitor developments and make suggestions concerning the replanting and design of (shrine) forests.

Likewise, in the months following the disasters, *Jinja shinpō* published several articles on the damage done to shrine buildings, and reported about the various reconstruction activities conducted by Jinja Honchō and individual shrines. In addition, the newspaper reported on fundraising events organised by shrines throughout the country, as well as other social activities, such as a summer school for children from Fukushima (*Jinja shinpō* 2011a) and a special market where farmers from the affected area could sell their products (*Jinja shinpō* 2011b). In the affected area, too, shrine priests have undertaken a variety of activities, as reported in a recent book by Kawamura Kazuyo (2012). Examples mentioned in this book include shrine priests' involvement in coordinating the work of volunteers coming to Tohoku to assist in cleaning and reconstruction activities; the organisation of a variety of special events and festivals (including *matsuri*), serving the dual purpose of providing some

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[261] Symposium *Shasō ga tsumugu chiiki no kizuna: inochi to kokoro o mamoru chinju no mori*. Tokyo, 16 November 2011.

joy and distraction for people living in the affected areas, and raising funds for rebuilding activities; and even the construction of a temporary library for children on shrine precincts.

Figure 21: Children perform songs for tsunami victims at the Aoi ennichi, *Kamigamo Jinja*

Figure 22: The temporary 'Rainbow library' and sacred tree at the site of Imaizumi Hachimangū. The shrine buildings were completely destroyed.

This last project is organised at Imaizumi Hachimangū in Rikuzentakata (Iwate prefecture), a shrine that was almost completely destroyed by the tsunami (see figure twenty-two). The only thing remaining was a high *shinboku*, which reportedly received quite a bit of media attention.[262] Here, the non-profit organisation Ashita no Hon ('Tomorrow's books') has collected books for children living in areas affected by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. The shrine priests and their family have set up a temporary library, *Niji no raiburarii* ('Rainbow library'), located in a prefab building on the shrine precincts. I had the opportunity to talk to one of the organisers, who told me the library serves an important function not only as a place where children can come and play (or read), but also as a place where neighbours can come for a chat – i.e., a community centre. It is important to do these things, she told me, in order to maintain some sort of social cohesion in a community suffering from the death of loved ones, the loss of facilities, and ever-increasing depopulation (Araki Sōko, interview, May 2013).[263] The shrine itself, however, has not yet been rebuilt. There are plans to rebuild it on top of a high construction so as to be safe from a possible future tsunami. For the time being, the shrine priests and some of their supporters are still busy trying to raise funds.

Another shrine that was completely destroyed by the tsunami is Yaegaki Jinja, in the town of Yamamoto (Miyagi prefecture). Today, it consists of a small prefab building and a temporary altar; like Imaizumi Hachimangū, it has not yet been rebuilt. This shrine is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First of all, the shrine priest, Fujinami Shōko – one of the few female Shinto priests whom I have had the opportunity to talk to – is a remarkably optimistic person, who has a very different understanding of what it entails to be a shrine priest from most of the other priests I have met. Rather than stressing the importance of conducting rituals in order to transmit tradition, she talked about her experiences in providing pastoral care to *ujiko* members. For instance, many tsunami survivors report seeing or hearing the spirits of the deceased, and they often feel the need to talk to somebody about it. Second, Yaegaki Jinja constitutes an interesting example of a shrine where, despite the fact that the shrine buildings were destroyed, the annual *matsuri* was conducted as usual. As this *matsuri* is related to the sea (and involves going into the sea), Fujinami was not sure whether people would still want to participate; however, most *ujiko* members insisted that it should take place (interview, May 2013). The *matsuri* seems to have an important symbolic function as a marker of continuity and community survival, now more than at any time.

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[262] Sadly, however, I was later told that the tree is no longer alive today. It certainly did not look very healthy when I saw it in May 2013.

[263] See also their website, http://www.jbby.org/ae/ (last accessed: October 9, 2012).

Figure 23: The newly-planted chinju no mori *of Yaegaki Jinja*

Figure 24: The banner at Oyu-no-hara, Kumano Hongū Taisha

Third, and most relevant from the perspective of this study, Yaegaki Jinja is the location of a *chinju no mori* plantation project, organised by Miyawaki Akira (see figure twenty-three). In June 2012, Miyawaki came here to direct a collective tree-planting event, in which many local volunteers participated. As a result, today the shrine precincts are surrounded by young trees, an unmistakable sign of hope and reconstruction. Needless to say, all of these are broad-leaved trees, on which

Miyawaki insisted – even though some *ujiko* members were strongly against it, as it would change the appearance of the shrine forest (which, previously, was predominantly coniferous), and therefore constitute a break with tradition (Fujinami Shōko, interview, May 2013).

As suggested by these and similar cases, the dramatic events have caused much suffering and despair, but they have also given rise to new creativity and social engagement, as well as to optimistic expressions of a desire to rebuild and resurrect communities and cultural expressions. In areas previously characterised by rural depopulation and a decline in facilities (including a lack of financial means to maintain local shrine buildings and perform ceremonies, and a dwindling interest in *matsuri*), paradoxically the disasters may have given new impetus to shrine-related community activism and, possibly, brought about new interest in 'traditional Japanese culture', including Shinto.

This impression is confirmed by my observations in another disaster-affected area, the Kii peninsula in Wakayama prefecture (known for the Kumano shrines and pilgrimage trails). In early September 2011, the southern part of Japan was hit by Talas, one of the country's most lethal typhoons in modern history. Causing heavy rainfall and floods, Talas caused the death of approximately one hundred people, as well as significant damage to roads, buildings and natural landscapes. A few weeks later, additional damage and deaths were caused by another typhoon, called Roke. The area most severely affected by Talas was the Kii peninsula in southern Wakayama prefecture. Of the three main shrines of Kumano, Kumano Hongū Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha and Kumano Hayatama Taisha, the first in particular has suffered damage. When I visited the place two months after the typhoon, the effects of the devastating flood were still clearly visible. One of the lower shrine buildings had been destroyed, as well as the nearby visitors' centre; many houses, restaurants and shops had been damaged (some had just reopened, others not yet); many trees in the area had been uprooted, leaving river banks empty; and so on.

But reconstruction activities were going on everywhere. At Oyu-no-hara, Hongū Taisha's historical location on the river bank famous for having the country's largest *torii* gate,[264] construction workers were busy returning the place to its former shape. A large banner had been put up (see figure twenty-four), saying:

> From people to people
> Call out
> Let us connect our hearts (*kokoro*)
> PRAY
> From Kumano for the rebirth of Japan![265]

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[264] Until 1889, Kumano Hongū Taisha was located at Oyu-no-hara. In that year, the shrine was seriously damaged as a result of floods, after which it was rebuilt at its present location, on top of a nearby hill.

[265] The first three lines were written in small black letters. The character for 'pray' was written large, in red, next to the equally large last line, written in green.

Here, the connection was made between the rebuilding of Kumano, and the rebirth of Japan as a whole. Implicit reference was thus made to the destruction and suffering in Tohoku, suggesting that the national reconstruction process would somehow originate in Kumano. Clearly, this notion of 'rebirth' is not limited to material reconstruction; on the contrary, it has significant moral, cultural and ideological connotations. After all, as one of the oldest pilgrimage sites in the country (linked to mythical events narrated in the *Kojiki*), there are strong symbolic connections between the sacred landscapes of Kumano, ancient 'Shinto' myths, and romantic nationalist notions linking a utopian future Japan to the mythical golden age of the Yamato dynasty.

It came as no surprise, then, that two of the three head priests of the Kumano shrines to whom I talked during my visit expressed themselves in explicitly nationalistic terms. During these conversations, they combined pessimistic complaints about the alleged ignorance of contemporary Japanese youth with nostalgic glorifications of the supposedly unique Japanese capacities of gratitude and love of nature, as well as enthusiastic visions of a resurrected Japan that would be able to stand up for itself internationally. In this context, particular significance was attributed to the recent victory of the Japanese women's football team in the World Cup. The symbol of the national team, the three-legged crow (*yatagarasu*), is a character from the *Kojiki* that is associated with Kumano;[266] accordingly, a special connection has emerged between the national football teams and the shrines of Kumano. Football players now visit these shrines before and after important tournaments, and some of the worship halls and shrine offices are full of signed footballs, shirts and similar paraphernalia. As the head priests suggested, the victory of the national team was a significant first step towards the resurrection of Japan, and they pointed to the central role that Kumano, as an important historical and cultural site, would play in this process.[267]

11.4.3 Theodicy and apocalypse

Whether Ishihara's comments should be considered 'religious' or not may be subject to debate. In any case, they do address an important, universal question: *why did this happen to us?* If one adheres to a worldview that is neither nihilistic nor materialistic but sees some sort of moral purpose to human existence, one has to find a way to account for, or at least accept, death, suffering, and destruction. This is a classical philosophical problem that has occupied Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians for centuries: why would a God that is both omnipotent and absolutely good want His children to

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[266] According to the *Kojiki*, the crow was sent by the heavenly deities to guide the great-great-grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami from Kumano to Yamato, where he would become Jinmu Tennō, the mythical first emperor of Japan (*Kojiki* volume 2, section 46; online available at http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/kj/index.htm [last accessed: 9 October 2012]; cf. Ashkenazi 2003, 117, 181-183).

[267] In fact, one of them even went so far as to suggest that the victory was the result of his personal prayers to Amaterasu. While this claim is far-reaching and perhaps not very representative of Shinto priests in general, it does illustrate how devotional practices may be intertwined not only with ancient mythical symbols, but also with modern spectator sports and popular nationalism.

suffer? But the question is by no means limited to the so-called 'Abrahamic religions'; the world over, people have come up with ways to make sense of suffering and disaster, and to prevent bad things from happening again. Asian traditions of worship may not have as clear-cut a dichotomy between good and evil as, say, Christianity, and deities can be morally ambivalent and immanent rather than transcendent and omnipotent; but that does not mean that there is no need for theodicy (i.e., reflections upon and explanations for large-scale suffering). Japan is no exception. Due to its geographical location, throughout history the country has been hit repeatedly by natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons. It seems likely that early *kami* cults (not to be equated with the singular 'Shinto' as it was later conceptualised) were focused on maintaining a good relationship between human communities and deities residing in and/or being in control of certain aspects of the natural environment. These were not only deities taking care of a successful harvest, but also powerful, potentially destructive deities residing in mountains, the sea and the sky. Recently, some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that 'the essence of kami worship (…) can be sought in the avoidance of the kami's violent apparitions (*tatari*). It was only later that kami came to be viewed as beings that had compassion on humans' (Itō et al. 2002, 4; quoted in and translated by Havens 2006, 19). Later, these cults were incorporated into so-called Buddhist and Shinto traditions. Thus the notion of divine wrath is by no means alien to Japanese worldviews, modern rhetoric of natural harmony and benevolence notwithstanding.

As we have seen, in recent decades, new discursive associations have been made between 'Shinto' and 'nature', and the notion that sacred beings somehow correspond to natural phenomena has been re-emphasised. Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that the association between Shinto and natural disasters receives new attention as well. Indeed, in the course of 2011 and 2012, various academic symposia and seminars have been organised by Shinto institutions, inviting Shinto scholars and priests to reflect upon the topic of natural disasters; examples include Jinja Honchō and the International Shinto Foundation.[268] Several traces of shrine worship historically focused on the prevention of disasters have been rediscovered. One shrine in particular that has received considerable media and scholarly attention is Kashima Jingū in Ibaraki prefecture. The deity of this shrine, Kashima Daimyōjin, is traditionally believed to control a giant subterranean catfish (*namazu*) supposedly causing earthquakes; while the precise origins are unknown, the site and its deity became very popular during the Edo period (Bernardi-Morel 2012; Mitchell 2011; Smits 2012). The association of earthquakes with giant creatures living deep in the earth or sea goes back to medieval times, and seems to have been influenced by Chinese cosmology (Smits 2012); as such, it constitutes an interesting

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[268] For instance, on June 13, 2011, the weekly shrine newspaper *Jinja shinpō* reported about two recent events organised by different committees within Jinja Honchō: a seminar on 'natural disaster and revival', where, among other topics, the notion of *tenbatsu* was discussed (May 31); and a research seminar on Shinto doctrine, where scholars reflected upon the relationship between the Tohoku disasters and 'the Japanese sense of nature' (June 3) (*Jinja Shinpō* 2011c; 2011e). Likewise, Shinto Kokusai Gakkai organised an international conference on 'the sacred and natural disasters' on November 3, 2012.

example of 'transnational' East Asian beliefs and ritual practices, which has received little scholarly attention so far.[269]

The association between Shinto and natural disasters is not limited to worship practices, however. It also has significant ideological implications, and may affect ways in which Shinto is conceptualised in years to come. As noted, in times of crisis and suffering, the problem of theodicy inevitably resurfaces. Authors who have praised 'Great Nature' (*daishizen*) for its mysterious benevolence, and Shinto for its unique sense of harmony with and gratitude for nature, have to find ways to reconcile these idealised notions with the reality of earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons causing havoc. One of the scholars who have made an attempt to do so is Kamata Tōji, whose ideas on sacred space I have briefly discussed before. Recently, he published a new book, *Gendai shintō ron: Reisei to seitaichi no tankyū* (*Contemporary theory of Shinto: A study of spirit and ecosophy*) (Kamata 2011), in which he outlines his ideas concerning the role of Shinto in post-3/11 Japanese society. The book is basically a collection of personal notes and travel accounts, mixed with reflections on Shinto, nature, and disaster.

Kamata begins his book by arguing that we are currently living in a time that is characterised by a series of crises and disasters, in Japan as well as internationally, and that this has led to a decline in traditional values and community spirit. As such, he suggests, the current situation is very similar to medieval Japanese society, which also suffered from a series of wars, disasters, and political chaos – as narrated in the *Hōjōki* (1212) by Kamo no Chōmei. However, in medieval Japan, the various crises gave way to the creation of new forms of religion (Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren Buddhism, as well as Yoshida Shinto). Similarly, he argues, today's crisis should give birth to a New Age, in which a new Shinto leads the way (2011, 7-13, 61-73). According to Kamata, this new Shinto will be characterised by an intuitive appreciation of sacred places, a new communitarian spirit, and an overcoming of sectarian differences. Central to this new Shinto will be a new mode of relating between humans and their social and natural environments, which Kamata refers to by the term *seitaichi*. He defines this as follows:

> I understand this '*seitaichi* (ecosophia, ecological wisdom)'[270] as 'the techniques and wisdom
> of a sustainable and creative system of balance, rising from a deep and humble sense of

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[269] While Kashima Jingū has recently received much attention, one site historically connected with earthquakes in Japan has thus far been ignored by scholars of Japanese religion, probably because it is not located inside the country. In the late sixteenth century, Japanese migrants in Vietnam built a temple bridge (*chùa cầu*) in Hoi An (a historical port town in central Vietnam that was home to a sizeable Japanese merchant population until the mid-seventeenth century), possibly together with members of the nearby Chinese community. Vietnamese sources suggest that one of the purposes of this bridge was the pacification of a gigantic, pan-Asian subterranean monster (or dragon) causing earthquakes throughout the continent, the body of which was believed to stretch all the way from India to Japan (e.g., Chuong 2011, 293; Nguyễn not dated). In these Vietnamese publications as well as on tourist websites, the monster is reported to have been called *mamazu*; as there is no such word in Japanese, however, this is probably a mistaken rendering of *namazu*.
[270] In the original quotation, the terms 'ecosophia' and 'ecological wisdom' are written in English. The term *ecosophia* seems to be derived from *ecosophy*, a concept coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, founder of the Deep Ecology movement. Næss defined *ecosophy* as 'a philosophy of ecological harmony or

awe/reverence towards nature, and refined through keen observations and experiences from daily life'. I believe these have been preserved in the sacred sites, holy places and healing spaces (*iyashi kūkan*) that are the source of today's 'powerspots', as well as in the various traditional skills (*waza*) that have existed since ancient times as part of the culture of everyday life. Sacred places are 'places that evoke numinous experiences, in which the sacred spirit (*mono*) manifests itself', and as in those places a power and wisdom dwells that can only be called *seitaichi*, for a long time prayers, *matsuri*, (…), initiation rituals and ascetic practices (…) have been conducted there (ibid., 205; my translation).

Thus, rather than relating the notion of 'ecological wisdom' to practical knowledge of one's natural environment, it is associated with so-called 'sacred places' and shrine worship. The performance of 'traditional skills', in particular those pertaining to devotional and ascetic practices (e.g., *kagura* dance, *nō* theatre, *matsuri*, mountain worship and so on), is seen as a manifestation of this 'ecological wisdom'. 'Nature', on the other hand, remains the empty signifier it usually is in Japanese ideology: the possible relevance of knowledge of local ecosystems, non-human species, and environmental change is not seriously addressed. 'Ecological wisdom' thus becomes a rhetoric device for reasserting the importance of shrines and ritual practices for twenty-first century Japan, if not for the whole world, but has little concrete substance.

According to Kamata, for the establishment of this new, universally oriented Shinto, supposedly founded on ancient ecological wisdom, three places in particular may serve as models. The first one is Tenkawa Jinja (or Tenkawa Dai Benzaitensha), a famous contemporary pilgrimage site and spiritual 'powerspot' in Nara prefecture, that attracts a colourful variety of followers of New Age and UFO movements as well as esoteric 'ancient Shinto' (*koshintō*) aficionados (ibid., 110-116, 242; cf. Shimazono 2004, 293-296). The second one is Mount Miwa, the well-known sacred mountain often referred to by representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm as an ancient site of nature worship (Kamata 2011, 21-24; see chapter eight). And the third one, significantly, is Kumano – not only because it is an ancient *shinbutsu shūgō* site, where the impressive natural landscape was sacralised and considered a *mandala*, but also because it was repeatedly visited by emperors during the medieval period, which supposedly contributed to the rebirth of Japan (ibid., 7-12, 231-233). Considering the intimate connection between Kumano, Shinto spirituality, natural beauty and the mythical origins of the nation, it comes as no surprise that Kumano is seen as a utopian model for the resurrection of both Japan and Shinto. Throughout the centuries, as Max Moerman (2005) has demonstrated, the landscape of Kumano has lent itself to various utopian models; apparently, it still does.

Arguably the most interesting and moving part of the book is Kamata's account of a field research trip he made to the affected areas of Tohoku, several months after the disasters there (2011, 153-218). As elsewhere, his writing is characterised by a confusing mixture of genres, blurring the

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equilibrium' (1995, 8). Significantly, some important works on Deep Ecology have been translated into Japanese, and Næss' ideas have received considerable attention in Japan. Cf. Drengson & Inouchi 1995; Sonoda 2007.

boundaries between observation, scholarly reflection, autobiography and travelogue; nevertheless, as an impression of a visit to the tsunami-struck area, it is certainly relevant. While he does make reference to some positive developments (the aforementioned interreligious pastoral care initiative in Sendai; various types of community activism; performances of 'traditional culture', such as *kagura* and tiger dance; a post-disaster festival in Fukushima), he also shares his despair with his readers: not only does he repeatedly state that he lacks the words to describe the destruction and suffering he has witnessed, he also suggests that, for a while, he was confronted with the limitations of the notion of nature being great and benevolent, and could no longer wholeheartedly engage in his worship practices (ibid., 236-237).

In fact, it may be argued that the book as a whole has a strongly apocalyptic undertone. As said, Kamata believes we are living in an age that is characterised by crisis; he compares the contemporary condition to the 'sea of decay' as it was imagined in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (see chapter six), and states that we have reached the point where purification rituals such as *misogi* are no longer sufficient (ibid., 167). He makes the comparison with the Buddhist notion of *mappō* (ibid., 151), the period of the 'End of the Law' that is characterised by chaos, destruction and moral decay. In the end, however, Kamata does seem to overcome his despair, and embraces an optimistic, even utopian vision of the future. As in most apocalyptic narratives, the period of destruction and suffering is followed by a time of peace and harmony, social as well as spiritual. Any death is followed by rebirth, after all: 'while accepting nature's actions as they are, I believe in the fundamental purifying power, the power of restoration, that emerges from within' (ibid., 239; my translation).

Likewise, in a recent book discussing the topic of Shinto in post-disaster Japan, the journalist Yamamura Akiyoshi (2011) argues that shrines should play an important part in rebuilding Japanese society. He suggests that shrines have traditionally played an important part in helping people overcome their suffering. On the one hand, they serve a memorial function, as they may be built at places previously hit by disaster where commemorative rituals may be performed. On the other, they may help people regain their courage and endure difficulty (Yamamura 2011, 106-107). Yamamura then proceeds by raising the question as to how misfortune was perceived in ancient Japan, and makes the interesting comparison between powerful deities associated with fire and lightning in ancient times and nuclear power today: both can be seen as energy-giving and beneficial, yet potentially destructive and wrathful (ibid., 107-110). Central to an understanding of traditional perceptions of disaster, he argues, is the notion of *magagoto* – the idea that, somehow, misfortune comes about as the consequence of 'bad deeds' (i.e., actions that disturb the 'natural' harmony). Contemporary Japan, the argument goes, is a country with huge social problems; allegedly, it has become a *muen shakai* (society without social ties), where people no longer fulfil their obligations vis-à-vis their family members and ancestors. Hence, Japan is in need of a national *harae* (ritual purification) so that it can

overcome its *magagoto* (evil distortions), and start 'looking for an ideal image of a bright future Japan' (ibid., 126-129).

The implication is clear: there is a causal relationship between the alleged social and moral degradation of the Japanese nation (e.g., increasing numbers of people do not worship their ancestors), and the disasters of March 2011. Indeed, the suggestion is made that the tsunami may have served some divine purpose in 'purifying' Japan – an argument remarkably similar to Ishihara Shintarō's infamous '*tenbatsu*' statement discussed before. At this point, it is difficult to say how common these ideas actually are. Some of the shrine priests I interviewed made similar suggestions, albeit usually in more diplomatic terms – the tsunami being somehow related to a 'balance being distorted', which was connected to 'social problems' as well as environmental destruction. While terms such as *magagoto* and *tatari* were not immediately on their lips, the underlying principle of causality may be more common in Shinto circles than one would expect of the followers of a 'peaceful nature religion'. That is, as suggested by Yamamura's book as well as my interview data, there seems to be a fairly widespread assumption that a disturbance of relations between humans and nature, as well as between humans and divine (or ancestral) powers, can somehow lead to divine retribution. It may well be the case, then, that notions of natural disaster as some sort of divine counter reaction, often combined with apocalyptic ideas of destruction and resurrection, are quite common among members of the Shinto priesthood and establishment. This is a hypothesis that requires further examination, however.

Needless to say, fantasies of apocalyptic destruction are by no means alien to environmentally oriented movements (Skrimshire 2010), and Japan is no exception. What is noteworthy about the narrative of Yamamura and others in Shinto circles is the intimate discursive association of environmental problems, moral decline, disaster and national resurrection. Environmental destruction and natural disasters here become part of an apocalyptic scheme, and play a part in the ('re')establishment of a harmonious, utopian Japanese society characterised by moral virtue, patriotism, humbleness and harmony with nature. Rather than as a revival of 'religiosity' in a supposedly secularised society, these narratives should be interpreted as, first and foremost, nationalist-utopian constructions of an ideal future society, legitimised by an imaginary golden age located somewhere in the faraway past. While these ideas constitute a significant part of the worldviews advocated by some 'religious' actors in Japan (ranging from parts of the Shinto establishment to so-called 'new religions' such as Seichō no Ie, Sūkyō Mahikari, Kōfuku no Kagaku and some Christian groups), they are by no means limited to the societally differentiated realm of 'religion'. On the contrary, similar ideas are shared by 'non-religious' members of the political establishment, such as Ishihara, and expressed in a variety of pseudo-scientific *nihonjinron* texts that are not explicitly religious. In sum, notions of destruction and national rebirth do take centre stage in contemporary discursive practices; in the case of Shinto, they are often associated with idealised notions of nature worship and social harmony in ancient Japan. In these narratives, suffering ceases to be meaningless, as the 'sacrifice' of some becomes the first step towards purification and national resurrection.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, in this study I have made an attempt to address four different yet interrelated themes. First and foremost, this is a study of so-called 'sacred shrine forests' – or *chinju no mori*, as they are commonly called in contemporary Japan – and the various discursive, spatial and institutional practices pertaining to these forests. As illustrated by the title, *Forests of the Gods*, these *chinju no mori* constitute the core topic of the dissertation. I have tried to approach this topic from a variety of perspectives, using a combination of critical discourse analysis and ethnographic field research in order to explore the various ways in which these forests have been conceptualised, used, shaped and reshaped in academic, religious-ideological and popular discourse, as well as in institutional practices. I have argued that, in recent years, *chinju no mori* have acquired significant symbolic capital, encompassing yet transcending notions of ecological harmony, biodiversity and nature conservation. They have come to symbolise continuity between the present and the (ancient) past, not only in terms of their physical composition – as evidenced by the widely shared but problematic belief that many of them constitute remaining areas of 'primeval', 'climax' and/or 'natural' forest – but also in terms of worship practices, sacredness, 'traditional culture' and moral values.

Accordingly, scholars such as Sonoda Minoru, Ueda Masaaki and Ueda Atsushi have redefined these forests as the essence and origins of Shinto, Japan's primordial 'ethnic religion' (*minzoku shūkyō*), and, by extension, of the nation as a whole. The preservation of these shrine forests, therefore, is seen as a matter of both environmental and social relevance. Interestingly, through their work for Shasō Gakkai, these scholars have made serious attempts to practise what they preach: monitoring the state of shrine forests, disseminating knowledge regarding forest conservation, and setting up networks of scientists, shrine priests and active volunteers, for the purpose of empowering local shrines. Partly as a result of these activities, in recent years shrine forest projects (devoted to forest conservation, environmental education, cultural activities, international exchange and so on) have emerged at various shrines throughout the country. Some of these projects have been discussed in chapters ten and eleven of this dissertation.

There are some noteworthy differences between the projects I have examined. Sennen no Mori no Kai, Mori-zukuri Kaigi and, arguably, Tadasu no Mori Zaidan are primarily focused on nature conservation (or, at least, define themselves as such). NPO Hibiki and Afuhi Project also employ environmentalist rhetoric, but have a more cultural and educational focus. That said, educational practices and community-building activities are also an important aspect of the activities of Tadasu no Mori Zaidan and Sennen no Mori no Kai. Some of these projects – in particular, Tadasu no Mori Zaidan and Afuhi Project – have developed spatial practices concerned with recreating an imagined pre-modern or ancient landscape. Others have combined nature conservation with the symbolic practice of rice cultivation (NPO Hibiki and Sennen no Mori no Kai). Some projects are run by shrine

priests in cooperation with volunteers (Tadasu no Mori Zaidan, Afuhi project and Sennen no Mori no Kai). NPO Hibiki, by contrast, is not run directly by priests, but its activities are nevertheless facilitated and sanctioned by the Meiji Jingū shrine management. Mori-zukuri Kaigi is a slightly different story: set up and run by environmental activists, the organisers constantly have to negotiate with shrine priests, who have to juggle the various demands made by these activists as well as *ujiko* members living in the vicinity of the forest.

Despite these differences, however, there is clearly a family resemblance between these projects: all of them have a particular shrine forest as their focal point; all of them are largely dependent on the support of volunteers and patrons, in addition to the shrine management; all of them somehow relate to environmental issues, as well as to notions of nature as sacred and in need of protection; and all combine this with a social agenda, expressed in various cultural and educational activities. Ise Jingū is a slightly different case, but there are also some significant similarities between forest practices in Ise and the projects mentioned above: the notion that the continuity of a local society and its traditions depends on the conservation of a particular landscape; the reinterpretation of shrine practices in the light of contemporary environmental discourse; and the sacralisation, both discursive and spatial, of (aspects of) the shrine forest.

Finally, one thing that all these cases have in common is that they are embedded in a wider discourse on cultural and national revitalisation. The notion that Japan is facing various crises (social, moral, political, economic and environmental) is widespread, not only in Shinto circles but throughout contemporary Japanese society (e.g., Kamata 2011; Sonoda & Tabuchi 2006; cf. Yoda 2006). Shrine worship, *chinju no mori* conservation, the preservation of 'traditional culture' (e.g., *matsuri*, *kagura*, rice cultivation, the *shikinen sengū*, tea ceremonies and so on), tree-planting, *futaba aoi* cultivation and so on are all seen as ways to reconstruct the 'traditional Japanese' harmony between humans and nature, and contribute to the establishment of new social networks. These practices have come to symbolise the revitalisation of Japanese society, culture and morality – and, thus, of the nation as a whole. This is especially the case in post-tsunami Japan, where reconstruction and national resurrection are issues that are discussed widely, affecting shrine practices as well as more abstract Shinto discourse.

As discussed previously, in the last decade or so, the notion that Shinto is an ancient tradition of nature worship, and that *chinju no mori* constitute a core aspect of this tradition that have significant potential for education, the revitalisation of 'traditional' culture and social mobilisation, has spread both in the shrine world and in Japanese academia. The story of Sakurai Takashi, head priest of Gosho Komataki Jinja and driving force behind the Sennen no Mori no Kai, aptly summarises the paradigm shift: until the late 1990s, his project was frowned upon by most of his colleagues, and he was accused of having communist sympathies because of his interest in environmental issues. In recent years, however, he is increasingly seen as a pioneer, who is regularly invited to talk about his experiences at seminars, and who has received compliments from the Jinja Honchō president for his groundbreaking

work. Significantly, the current president of this powerful umbrella organisation, Tanaka Tsunekiyo, was one of the participants at the Harvard University conference on 'Shinto and Ecology' in 1997 – together with Sakurai, Sonoda, and several prominent Japanese and Anglo-Saxon scholars doing research on Shinto or related topics. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Jinja Honchō has been one of the most prominent religious partner organisations of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, actively involved with the development of a 'religious forestry standard' and a 'green pilgrimage network', both of which have a strongly international and interdenominational character.

As discussed in this study, some commentators have expressed scepticism vis-à-vis Jinja Honchō's alleged concern for environmental issues, suggesting that it is primarily a PR strategy and that *chinju no mori* are embraced as ideological rather than ecological resources (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 207-209; Kalland 2012). This critique is arguably valid – for instance, thus far Jinja Honchō has not mobilised its political lobby organisation to shift its attention away from issues related to Yasukuni Jinja, imperial symbolism and constitutional reform to, say, nuclear power or Japanese involvement with unsustainable logging in Southeast Asia – but also, perhaps, too reductionist. To most Jinja Honchō officials, it is probably not a question of either/or, but of both/and: shrine forest conservation (and, by extension, nature conservation) constitutes a relevant and important contemporary responsibility, as it is necessary for preserving the continuity (cultural, ritual *and* physical) between the ancestral past and the present. In all likelihood, these concerns are not seen as incompatible with issues such as the continuity of the imperial institution, the primacy and nationwide significance of Ise Jingū as the imperial ancestral shrine, and the sacred character of 'the country of the gods', Japan. They are seen as *complementary*, not as *contradictory*. That does not mean actors involved with Jinja Honchō are not genuinely concerned with environmental issues. But the environmental issues the organisation chooses to engage with are those that are immediately relevant to some of its core concerns – the preservation of shrines as central institutions in Japanese society, the socialisation of children into cultural-nationalist ideology, the (sustainable) cultivation of timber for the rebuilding of Ise Jingū, the transformation and legitimisation of shrine pilgrimage practices in accordance with twenty-first century popular concerns – while more abstract and general issues that are not immediately related to shrine issues are by and large ignored.

This is related to another topic, which I would like to briefly discuss in this context: the alleged 'holistic' (or even 'pantheistic') character of Shinto. As discussed in chapter four, it is often argued that 'Eastern' worldviews – whether Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist or Shinto – are characterised by holism, stressing the fundamental interdependence, interconnectedness and unity of all beings. Indeed, representatives of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm such as Sonoda Minoru have explicitly stated that Shinto has a holistic or pantheistic character, and associated it with the philosophy of 'deep ecology' (e.g., Sonoda 2007; cf. M. Ueda 2004a, 21-23). Such notions may be influential on an abstract theological level, but when we look at actual shrine practices – worship practices as well as activities related to nature conservation – a very different picture emerges. As Worldmate founder and

ISF sponsor Fukami Tōshū has argued, the notion that Shinto worships nature as a whole as sacred is a great misunderstanding:

> Truly, Shinto doesn't respect all of nature. (…) Shinto discerns what is sacred and what is not sacred. This is important. We feel that a certain mountain is [a] sacred mountain; we preserve a forest, a natural circumstance [*sic*], environment. If we feel, we discern. And if a mountain is not sacred, we exploit it for our daily needs. This is Shinto's way of thinking. (…) A second misunderstanding is that Shinto is a kind of nature worship. Shinto doesn't worship mountains, rivers and lakes. Shinto worships deities. The deities like to live in holy mountains, holy lakes, beautiful lakes and rivers. So we respect the area. But we don't pray to or worship natural phenomena (2000, 33).

Although he essentialises Shinto and overlooks the diversity of views and practices the concept encompasses, Fukami certainly has a point. Shrine priests may have set up movements to protect *chinju no mori* and plant trees, but that does not generally prevent them from conducting purification rituals for companies responsible for environmental destruction and pollution. Nor, indeed, has the much-lauded Japanese 'civilisation of the forest', of which Shinto is seen as the quintessential expression, prevented state-backed Japanese companies from causing widespread deforestation in Southeast Asia by stimulating large-scale unsustainable logging (Dauvergne 1997). Contrary to what popular literature may lead one to believe, then, 'Shinto' notions of nature as sacred are often not holistic at all, but highly particularistic indeed. Likewise, with the possible exception of 'sectarian Shinto' organisations influenced by modern Christian theology and 'Western esotericism' (Hanegraaff 1998), Shinto worldviews are not usually pantheistic or panentheistic; that is, they do not equate all of nature with God, nor do they see a divine presence in Creation/Nature as a whole.

On the contrary, as Fukami rightly points out, it is only particular designated places and natural objects (shrine forests, mountains, rivers, individual trees and rocks) that are set apart as sacred, while other places are seen as insignificant. Shrine-related conservation practices therefore nearly always have a small-scale character, focusing on particular demarcated areas rather than large-scale issues such as nationwide pollution problems, climate change, or deforestation abroad. This is not surprising: historically, the vast majority of all shrines have had a strong local, place-based character, and this is still the case today. After all, a few noteworthy exceptions notwithstanding, *kami* are generally associated with physical landscapes and localities in *the country Japan* – not with, say, tropical rainforests in Borneo. It does mean, however, that Shinto worldviews can be employed not only to argue for the preservation of particular designated areas, but also for legitimising the exploitation of other, 'non-sacred' areas, and for turning a blind eye to abstract environmental issues that transcend local particularities. In brief, *chinju no mori* have come to symbolise ecological and cultural continuity, and become the focal points of various conservation practices; but they are without exception bounded, demarcated, and comparatively small. Sakurai's statement that most *chinju no mori*-related conservation projects make the mistake of overlooking the surrounding environment (and

the larger ecosystem, of which the shrine forest is only a part) perfectly illustrates the local particularism characteristic of most Shinto-environmentalist practices.

This brings me to the other three themes I addressed in this study. As said, *chinju no mori* constitute the core topic, but my discussion of *chinju no mori* was informed by and grounded in examinations of these other themes. First, this is a study of 'Shinto', examining and comparing different ways in which this tradition has been conceptualised and defined in modern Japan. I have distinguished between historical-constructivist and essentialist accounts of 'Shinto'. The former, I have argued, deny the popular axiom that Shinto is the 'indigenous', pre-Buddhist worship tradition of Japan, and look at historical processes of 'Shintoisation' (i.e., the construction of various types of 'Shinto' at different periods in history). The latter, by contrast, do prescribe to the aforementioned axiom, and assert that Shinto has a core essence (hence my choice to call them 'essentialist') that goes back to primordial times, transcending historical particularities and change. However, instead of one single essentialist conceptualisation of Shinto there are several different ones, which differ with regard to what is considered to be the core essence. I have referred to the various templates according to which Shinto has been conceptualised and defined (in the modern and contemporary period, that is) as 'paradigms', and I have distinguished between the imperial paradigm, the ethnic paradigm, the universal paradigm, the local paradigm and the spiritual paradigm.

In recent decades, I have argued, a sixth paradigm has emerged, which I have referred to as the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm'. This last paradigm is based on elements from the other essentialist paradigms – in particular, I would suggest, the local paradigm – as well as the global association between 'religion' and environmental issues, which Poul Pedersen (1995) has referred to as the 'religious environmentalist paradigm'. As Arne Kalland has made clear (2008), contemporary religious-environmentalist discourse is characterised by two binary sets: the opposition between 'the West' (associated with 'monotheism', anthropocentrism, and the desire to 'control' and 'exploit' nature) and 'the East' (supposedly characterised by holism and/or pantheism, and an awareness of the fundamental interdependence of all beings); and the opposition between 'the West' and 'indigenous people' (e.g., Native Americans or Ainu), who supposedly possess 'ancient ecological knowledge' and are believed to live in harmony with nature. The latter stereotype, Kalland has argued, is a contemporary version of the classical 'noble savage' trope (2008, 95). One of the things that is interesting about the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, in my opinion, is that both these dichotomies are combined: on the one hand, Shinto is seen as an expression of the 'Oriental' spirit of holism and [hu]man-nature harmony and interdependence; on the other, it is commonly defined as one of the world's very few remaining 'primal religions', and perhaps the only one that has not only survived but even thrived in a modern society.

Second, this is a study of sacred space. I have explored various theories of sacred space – including some popular Japanese ones – and asked the question to what extent the notion of sacred space is still useful as an analytical category. I have suggested that it may still be relevant as a way of

approaching certain places that are *set apart* from the ordinary (the classical Durkheimian understanding), that are experienced as possessing certain *non-negotiable* qualities, and that possess significant symbolic capital and are therefore intimately intertwined with collective memory and identity. However, I have argued for an approach that moves beyond an understanding of sacredness as an intrinsic quality of certain places (or objects, or texts) and looks at sacredness as something that is attributed, produced, contested and (re)appropriated. Rather than asking the question whether a given place *is* sacred, I am interested in the question as to how it *is made* sacred. That is, rather than sacredness *per se*, I suggest focusing on processes of *sacralisation*.

Clearly, sacredness is produced discursively – as any meaning that is attributed to something (Hall 2001) – but I would argue that it is not solely a discursive construct. Accordingly, sacralisation is not merely a discursive process, although discursive practices arguably constitute an integral aspect of any attempt at sacralisation. Sacredness is produced by means of a variety of practices, including, importantly, spatial practices: landscape design, architecture, physical demarcation, plant cultivation, human movement in space, ritual performance and so on. Although discursively embedded, none of these activities are intrinsically verbal: instead, they are spatial, as well as physical. Hence, I have suggested approaching the topic of sacred space from a different theoretical angle, one that does not conceive of space as an *a priori* given but that takes into consideration the historicity of space, as well as the fact that space can be a product that is contingent upon power relations.

For this, I have suggested using the theories of Henri Lefebvre, which I believe can offer many important insights concerning physical configurations of space, mental constructions of space, and the various ways in which social relations shape and take shape in space. I have made some tentative attempts to interpret today's *chinju no mori* from this theoretical perspective, arguing that spatial practices such as landscape design (e.g., at both Kamo shrines and at Meiji Jingū) are intertwined with idealised notions of 'traditional Japanese' space and of the nation, all of which have social implications. Needless to say, these theoretical reflections were of an exploratory rather than definitive character, and I hope to continue exploring them in the future – including other potentially significant recent theories of space, which I have only briefly touched upon in this study, and which I believe may give way to interesting new ways of approaching 'sacred space' (e.g., Ingold 2000; 2011; Soja 1996).

Fourth, this is a study of 'nature' and the 'environment'. As stated in the introduction, this is a topic to which I am personally committed – which is probably one of the reasons why I was interested in notions of Shinto as a 'nature religion' in the first place. As this study illustrates, however, 'nature' is by no means a singular, universal given. Anna Tsing (2005) has convincingly demonstrated that 'universals' are glocally embedded as much as they are historically contingent, and understandings of what counts as 'universal' differ from place to place and from period to period. That applies to 'nature' as much as it applies to 'God'. What is interesting about nature, however, is that it is widely seen – in modern epistemic configurations, at least – as something primary to, and ontologically opposed to, human culture, society and politics. In this scheme, nature is *a priori*: it is a pre-given,

constituting the realm of things not made by human beings. Hence, as Roland Barthes (1957) has suggested, the naturalisation of historical constructs (i.e., historically contingent beliefs and symbols that are turned into 'nature' by being presented as eternal and self-evident) is an important, widely-employed strategy for depoliticisation. Consequently, one historical construction that is depoliticised and dehistoricised is the category 'nature' itself.

This applies to modern Japanese conceptualisations of 'nature' as well. In academic discourse, it has often been argued that 'the Japanese' have traditionally had a different way of understanding 'nature' from 'Westerners', as the concept 'nature' – *shizen* – can also mean 'spontaneous', and is intimately connected with notions of 'the self' (Berque 1992; Eisenstadt 1995; Tellenbach & Kimura 1989). Arguably, however, interpreting the term *shizen* (or *jinen*, as it used to be pronounced) in premodern discourse as an expression of a particular understanding of nature is anachronistic, as in pre-Meiji Japan there was no such thing as 'nature' (i.e., a central epistemic category covering a range of phenomena, opposed to the realm of 'culture'), just as there was no such thing as 'religion'. That said, in Meiji-period and subsequent discourse, the modern category 'nature' (*shizen*) soon came to play an important part in national ideology (see Thomas 2001), and mythical notions of 'the Japanese experience of nature' supposedly characterised by love and harmony – which, not surprisingly, was described as opposed to 'Western' ways of relating to nature – took centre stage in discursive constructions of Japanese national identity, often founded on environmental determinism (e.g., Watsuji Tetsurō's *fūdo* theory). Many of these notions continue to be expressed today, influencing popular understandings of Japanese culture, art, and religion. Moreover, they have been associated with environmental issues, leading to the assumption that Japanese traditional culture contains various invaluable solutions for overcoming today's environmental crisis (e.g., Brown 2009; Kagawa-Fox 2010; Murota 1985; Watanabe 1974) – including, it has been suggested, the spirit of 'animism' supposedly best preserved in Shinto (Yasuda 1990; Umehara 1989). Unfortunately, few of these authors have come up with concrete examples of ways in which 'traditional Japanese' practices and beliefs have contributed to solving environmental problems in the twentieth or twenty-first century. Nevertheless, these superficial yet popular understandings of 'the Japanese experience of nature' have also exercised significant influence on the development of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm.

As far as I am aware, this dissertation constitutes the first attempt to examine the development and genealogy of the Shinto environmentalist paradigm, and explore the various discursive associations and spatial practices pertaining to one of today's Shinto's core concepts, *chinju no mori*. As such, it is inevitably incomplete. I have discussed certain foundational texts, but probably overlooked others; I have discussed a number of interesting case studies, but missed others. I could have written about the forest histories of Fushimi Inari Taisha, Kasuga Taisha or Kashihara Jingū, all of which are interesting, for different reasons. And I could have written about shrine forest projects developed at Tsurugaoka Hachimangū, Mukō Jinja or elsewhere, which are not necessarily less relevant or representative than the cases discussed in this study. That said, I simply did not have the

time or space to discuss all shrine forest projects in Japan, nor do I believe that would have been necessary. I can only express my hope that the texts and cases I have discussed give an adequate, fairly representative image of contemporary discursive, spatial and institutional practices related to *chinju no mori*, as well as of recent conceptualisations of 'Shinto'. And I do hope that this study will constitute a first step towards more research on this topic. Possible future research projects related to the topics I have discussed include, but are not limited to, examinations of 'nature' and environmentalism in some of the so-called 'Shinto-derived new religions' such as Ōmoto, Seichō no Ie and Sekai Kyūseikyō; explorations of *satoyama* and *mori-zukuri* landscape practices and ways in which these relate to contemporary notions of national identity; in-depth studies of particular shrines and shrine forest projects, based on extended periods of fieldwork at a particular shrine; and research on the various ways in which 'Shinto' and shrine practices are redefined and popularised as 'national heritage', 'traditional culture' and so on – including cultural festivals, tourism practices, 'powerspot' pilgrimage, theatre performances, *machi-zukuri* projects and so on. These are things I have only briefly touched upon in this study, which would all constitute interesting future research projects.

Finally, as discussed in chapter eleven, a last topic that requires more in-depth investigation in years to come is the issue of natural disasters, and ways in which they relate to (and transform) cultural traditions, worship practices and ideology. Some research has already been conducted on this topic (e.g., Bernardi-Morel 2012; Marmignon 2012; McLaughlin 2011a; Rots forthcoming; Smits 2012; Starrs forthcoming), and more will undoubtedly follow. As I have written, the disasters of 2011 appear to have affected contemporary Shinto institutions and ideology in at least three ways. First, they have influenced institutional practices, both in the affected areas (where shrine reconstruction is an immediate concern, as well as community cohesion and spiritual care) and elsewhere in the country. At various shrines throughout Japan, priests and volunteers have engaged in various activities for the purpose of fundraising and symbolically contributing to reconstruction work (e.g., by collecting and planting acorns that will be used for building a 'forest wall' along the coast of Tohoku). The disasters may have also given rise to a renewed interest in shrine-related cultural and devotional practices such as *matsuri*, but this is an early observation that needs further investigation. Second, the nuclear crisis following the tsunami has led to a sudden interest in energy issues (Hiroi 2011; 2012), possibly contributing to some shrine priests moving beyond the arguably one-sided focus on shrine forest conservation and becoming interested in larger-scale environmental issues as well. It remains to be seen, however, whether or not these discussions will materialise (for instance, by more shrines installing solar panels or windmills), and whether or not such a general environmentalist orientation will be widely shared among shrine priests.

Third, the disasters have challenged popular, widely-shared notions of nature as 'beneficial' and 'abundant', and of human-nature relations as characterised by harmony, balance and mutual dependence. They have demonstrated nature's lethal force, and led to the rediscovery of concepts such as *tatari*, *tenbatsu* and *magagoto*, which are based on the notion that disaster and suffering can be a

punishment for – or, at least, a consequence of – human deeds. While many are reluctant to use the word 'punishment', I have talked to a number of shrine priests and volunteers who suggested that the earthquake and tsunami were a divinely ordained reaction to human mistakes, such as environmental pollution and moral degradation. Similar opinions have been expressed in recent literature, sometimes combined with the suggestion that the tsunami was a divine act of purification that paves the way for a new age, in which 'Shinto' may serve as a guiding principle (e.g., Kamata 2011; Yamamura 2011). Clearly, such types of theodicy have a strongly millenarian character, combining notions of apocalyptic violence with (national) rebirth and a peaceful, harmonious new society. It is a narrative similar to the final scenes of *Princess Mononoke*: the forest and its god may be destroyed, but new flowers will grow and bloom nevertheless.

Again, this is a topic that needs further exploration in the future, but I do believe that such millenarian expectations constitute a powerful sub-current in contemporary Japanese (religious) ideology. They are not the whole story, however. Throughout Japan, a new generation of shrine priests, scholars and volunteers is now becoming active. They are not particularly interested in grand millenarian schemes, nor in cultural-essentialist notions of Japanese national identity. They simply want to contribute to improving the local environment – by organising social activities, maintaining or constructing small *satoyama* areas, cleaning litter, and (re)planting broad-leaved forests. To what extent these activities will transform shrine Shinto as a whole remains to be seen. In any case, *chinju no mori* are now becoming the focal points of a range of social, cultural and conservationist activities, which inevitably affect local environments and communities. In twenty-first century Japan, the forests of the gods have great symbolic significance.

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Aike Peter Rots
August 25, 2013
Oslo

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GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE TERMS

Abemaki	アベマキ	*Quercus variabilis*
Afuhi	葵・あふひ	Old reading of *aoi*
Anime	アニメ	Japanese animation films
Animizumu	アニミズム	Animism
Aoi	葵・アオイ	See *futaba aoi*
Aoi matsuri	葵祭	Aoi festival (famous Kyoto *matsuri*)
Arakashi	アラカシ	*Quercus glauca*
Arigatō	ありがとう	Thank you
Asobi	遊び	Play
Au	会う・合う	To meet
Ba	場	Place
Betsugū	別宮	Auxiliary shrine (Ise Jingū)
Bonsai	盆栽	Japanese art of cultivating miniature trees
Buna	ブナ	Beech; *Fugus*
Bungaku	文学	Literature
Bunka	文化	Culture
Bunkaka	文化化	'Culturalisation'
Bunmei	文明	Civilisation
Butsudan	仏壇	'Buddhist' family altar
Chiiki shakai	地域社会	Local society
Chiisana inochi o hagukumu	小さな命を育む	To raise small life
Chinju	鎮守	Local protective deity
Chinjugami	鎮守神	Local protective deity
Chinju no mori	鎮守の森・鎮守の社・鎮守の杜	Shrine forest; sacred forest
Chokkan shūkyō	直感宗教	Intuitive religion
Chōwa	調和	Harmony
Daiichi kyūikirin	第一宮域林	'First sanctuary forest'
Daijōsai	大嘗祭	Imperial enthronement ceremony
Daini kyūikirin	第二宮域林	'Second sanctuary forest'
Daisengū	大遷宮	Rebuilding of Izumo Taisha
Daishizen	大自然	'Great nature'
Danka seido	檀家制度	Edo-period temple registration system
Dentō bunka	伝統文化	Traditional culture
Dentōteki na kūkan	伝統的な空間	Traditional space
Donguri	どんぐり	Acorn
Donguri chiimu	どんぐりチーム	'Acorn team' (NPO Hibiki)
Eien ni tsuzuku chinju no mori	永遠に続く鎮守の森	Ever-lasting *chinju no mori*
Eirinbu	営林部	Forestry department (at Ise Jingū)
Ema	絵馬	Wooden prayer plaques
En-musubi	縁結び	Establishing social relations; finding a partner

Ennichi	縁日	Local cultural festival; shrine or temple bazaar
Enoki	エノキ・榎	*Celtis sinensis*
En o musubu shōchō	縁を結ぶ象徴	A symbol of establishing social relations
Fūdo	風土	Climate, environment, milieu
Furusato	ふるさと・故郷・古里	Native village, hometown
Futaba aoi	双葉葵・二葉葵・フタバアオイ	*Asarum caulescens* (two-leaved)
Gaikokujin	外国人	Foreigner; non-Japanese person
Genji monogatari	源氏物語	*Tale of Genji*: eleventh-century literary classic
Genfūkei	原風景	Primordial landscape; *Urlandschaft*
Genseirin	原生林	Primeval forest
Genshi shūkyō	原始宗教	Primal religion
Genze riyaku	現世利益	'This-worldly benefits'
Gishiki	儀式	Ritual, ceremony
Gion matsuri	祇園祭	Gion festival (famous Kyoto *matsuri*)
Gonden	権殿	Copy of *honden*, standing next to it (Kamigamo Jinja)
Gongen	権現	Local incarnations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas
Go-riyaku	ご利益	See *genze riyaku*
Go-ryō	御陵	Imperial tomb
Goshōden	御正殿	Central shrine hall (Ise Jingū)
Gū	宮	Shrine
Gūji	宮司	Head priest
Gyoen	御苑	Imperial garden
Haiden	拝殿	Worship hall (usually in front of the *honden*)
Haiku	俳句	Short poem with reference to nature
Hakiyasan	はきやさん	People employed by Meiji Jingū to work in the forest
Hanshizenteki na mori	半自然的な森	Semi-natural forest
Happyō	発表	Presentation
Harae	祓	Ritual purification
Hatsumōde	初詣	First shrine visit of the new year
Hayashi	林	Forest, wood
Hayasu	生やす	To cultivate
Heichirin	平地林	Lowland forest
Heiwa no mori kōen	平和の森公園	Peace Forest Park (Nakano ward, Tokyo)
Himorogi	神籬	Small piece of land, set apart as sacred
Hinoki	ヒノキ・檜	*Chamaecyparis obtusa*; Japanese cypress
Hōjōki	方丈記	Thirteenth-century text on human suffering
Honden	本殿	Main hall (in a shrine)
Honmono no Nihon	本物の日本	Real Japan
Honrai no shizenrin no sugata	本来の自然林の姿	The original shape of a natural forest
Hotaru	蛍・ホタル	Firefly
Hotaru no machi/sato	ホタルの町・里	'Firefly town/village'
Hotoke	仏	Buddha; ancestral spirit
Ichi	市	Market

Ichii	イチイ	*Taxus cuspidata*; Japanese yew
Ie	家	House(hold), family
Ikebana	いけばな・生け花	Japanese art of flower arrangement
In	院	Buddhist temple
Inishie	古	Ancient times
Inori	祈り	Prayer
Iomante	イオマンテ	Ainu ceremony, centred on bear sacrifice
Irazu no mori	入らずの森	'The forest you do not enter'; 'forbidden forest'
Iyashi kūkan	癒し空間	Healing space
Ji	寺	Buddhist temple
Jidai matsuri	時代祭	Jidai festival (famous Kyoto *matsuri*)
Jimoto no hitotachi	地元の人達	'Local people'
Jindō	神道	Old reading of *shintō*
Jinen	自然	Old reading of *shizen*
Jingi	神祇	Classical imperial cult
Jingū	神宮	Shrine (with imperial connotations)
Jinja	神社	Shrine
Jinja gappei	神社合併	Shrine merger policy (1906)
Jinja gōshi	神社合祀	See *jinja gappei*
Jinja meisaichō	神社明細帳	Official shrine records, produced in the Meiji period
Jinja no mori	神社の森	Shrine forest
Jinjarin	神社林	Shrine forest
Jinja shinpō	神社新報	Weekly shrine newspaper
Jinja shintō	神社神道	Shrine Shinto
Jinja to midori	神社と緑	'Shrines and green [space]'
Jōmin	常民	Common folk; ordinary people
Joseishi	女性誌	Women's magazines
Kaede	カエデ・楓	Maple; *Acer*
Kagura	神楽	Ritual dance
Kaihatsu	開発	Development
Kakuremino	カクレミノ	*Dendropanax trifidus*
Kami	神	God(s), deities (either singular or plural)
Kamidana	神棚	'Gods' shelf'; 'Shinto' altar at home
Kamigami	神々	Gods, deities (plural)
Kamigami no mori	神々の森	Forest of the gods
Kami no kuni	神の国	Country of the gods
Kamisama	神様	God (with honorific suffix)
Kana	かな	Phonetic writing (*hiragana* or *katakana*)
Kanji	漢字	Chinese characters
Kappa	河童	Mythical green water creature
Kashi	カシ・樫	Evergreen oak; *Quercus*
Kashi-no-naga-kikuimushi	カシノナガキクイムシ	*Platypus quercivorus* (parasitic beetle)
Katsura	カツラ・桂	*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*

Kawaii	かわいい	Cute, pretty
Keidai	境内	Shrine precincts
Keyaki	ケヤキ・欅	*Zelkova serrata*
Ki	気	*Qi*; spiritual energy, life force
Kihonteki na kokoro	基本的な心	The essential spirit
Kinsokuchi	禁足地	Confined forbidden area
Kōdō	公道	Public road
Kōeki zaidan hōjin	公益財団法人	'Public interest incorporated foundation' (legal term)
Kōen	公園	Park
Kofun	古墳	Ancient tomb
Kojiki	古事記	Eighth-century mytho-historical chronicle
Kokka shintō	国家神道	'State Shinto'
Kokoro	心・こころ	Heart, mind, spirit
Kokugaku	国学	Edo-period 'national learning' and ideology
Kokumin	国民	Nation
Kokusai bunka kōryū chiimu	国際文化交流チーム	'International cultural exchange team'
Kokusaika	国際化	Internationalisation
Komyunitii	コミュニティー	Community
Komyunitii-zukuri	コミュニティーづくり	'Community-making'
Konara	コナラ	*Quercus serrata*
Koshintō	古神道	'Ancient Shinto' (esoteric term)
Koyū shinkō	固有信仰	Native faith
Kūki o kiyomeru	空気を清める	To purify the air
Kunugi	クヌギ・椚	*Quercus acutissima*; sawtooth oak
Kusunoki	クスノキ・楠	*Cinnamomum camphora*; camphor tree
Kuzu	クズ	*Pueraria lobata*; kudzu
Kyō	教	Teaching, doctrine
Kyōdōtai	共同体	Collective body; community
Kyōgen	狂言	Traditional Japanese theatre (comedy)
Kyōha shintō	教派神道	'Sect Shinto'; Shinto-derived 'new religions'
Kyōiku chokugo	教育勅語	Imperial Rescript on Education (1890)
Kyōkai	教会	Church
Kyōsei	共生	Symbiosis; coexistence
Kyōzon	共存	Coexistence
Kyūikirin	宮域林	'Sanctuary forest'; the forest of Ise Jingū
Machi	町・街	Town, neighbourhood
Machi-zukuri	まちづくり	'Town-making'
Magagoto	禍事	Misfortune as a consequence of 'bad deeds'
Mamoru	守る	To protect
Manga	漫画	Japanese comic books
Man'yōshū	万葉集	Eighth-century poetry anthology
Mappō	末法	'The end of the Law' (in Buddhism)
Massha	末社	Subshrine (Ise Jingū)

Matsu	マツ・松	Pine tree; *Pinus*
Matsuri	祭・祭り・祀り	Shrine festival; ritual worship
Matsurigoto	政	Shrine rituals and political governance
Meguri au hi	巡り合う日	The day of an encounter
Meibutsu	名物	Local (culinary) speciality
Miagata no kami	御県神	Deities associated with agriculture
Miare-sai	御阿礼祭	Ritual ceremony at Kamigamo Jinja (May 12)
Michi	道	Way; road
Mikage-sai	御蔭祭	Ritual ceremony at Shimogamo Jinja (May 12)
Miko	巫女	Shrine maiden
Mikoshi	神輿	Portable shrine, used during a *matsuri*
Mikumari no kami	水分神	Deities associated with water
Minzoku	民族	People, nation (*Volk*)
Minzokugaku	民俗学 ・民族学	Folklore studies; ethnology
Minzoku shūkyō	民族宗教	Ethnic religion
Misogi	禊	Ascetic practice; ritual purification (in water)
Misomayama	御杣山	'Timber mountain'; old name of *kyūikirin*
Mitsuba aoi	三つ葉葵	Three-leaved *aoi*
Miya	宮	Shrine
Miya no mori	宮の森	Shrine forest
Mizukara	自ら	Self; personally
Mochinoki	モチノキ	*Ilex integra*
Mokkoku	モッコク	*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*
Momiji	モミジ・椛	*Acer palmatum;* Japanese maple
Mono	物・者・モノ	Things; people; spirit
Monogaku	モノ学	The interdisciplinary study of *mono*
Mono no aware	物の哀れ	'The pathos of things'
Mori	森・杜	Forest
Mori no naka no ofisu	森の中のオフィス	'The office in the forest' (Seichō no Ie)
Mori-zukuri	森づくり	'Forest-making'
Muen shakai	無縁社会	Society without social ties
Mukunoki	ムクノキ	*Aphanante aspera*
Munamochi-bashira	棟持柱	Wooden pillar, part of *goshōden* (Ise Jingū)
Mura matsuri	村祭	Village festival
Mura no chinju	村の鎮守	'The god of the village'
Mushūkyō	無宗教	Non-religious
Nama no shizen	生の自然	'Raw nature'
Namazu	鯰・ナマズ	Catfish; *Siluriformes*
Nara	ナラ・楢	Oak; *Quercus*
Narasu	馴らす	To tame
Nihonjinron	日本人論	Pseudo-scientific theories on Japan's uniqueness
Nihon no mori no genfūkei	日本の森の原風景	Japan's primordial forest landscape
Nihon no yamatokotoba	日本の大和言葉	Ancient Japanese language

Nihon Shoki	日本書紀	Eighth-century mytho-historical chronicle
Niji no raiburarii	にじのライブラリー	'Rainbow library'
Niwa	庭	Garden
Nō	能	Traditional Japanese theatre
Norito	祝詞	Shrine prayers, recited during ritual ceremonies
NPO hōjin	NPO法人	Non-profit organisation (legal term)
Ōbako	オオバコ	*Plantago asiatica*; Chinese plantain
O-fuda	お札	Talisman
Okuyama	奥山	Deep mountain; faraway mountain
O-mamori	お守り	Protective amulet
Ōmu	王蟲・オーム	Large isopod-like creatures (Miyazaki)
Onbashira matsuri	御柱祭	Famous festival, held at Suwa Taisha
Onozukara	自ずから	Naturally, spontaneously
Ōruri	オオルリ	Blue-and-white flycatcher; *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*
Oyagami	祖神	Ancestral deity
Ōyake	公	Public
Pawāsupotto	パワースポット	'Powerspot'; site believed to have spiritual power
Reiryoku	霊力	Spiritual power
Reisei	霊性	Spirituality
Reiseiteki chishikijin	霊性的知識人	'Spiritual intellectuals'
Renriboku	連理木	Two entwined trees; double *shinboku* (see *en-musubi*)
Ritsuryō	律令	Ritual-legal system in the 7th and 8th century
Ryōbu shintō	両部神道	Buddhist (Shingon) *kami* worship tradition
Ryōsai kenbo	良妻賢母	'Good wife, wise mother'
Saiin	斎院	Imperial princess; priestess at Kamo shrine
Sakaki	サカキ・榊	*Cleyera japonica*; sacred tree, used in shrine worship
Sakura	桜・サクラ	Cherry blossom; cherry tree (*Prunus*)
Sandō	参道	Road or path leading to a shrine
Sankōchō	サンコウチョウ	J. paradise flycatcher; *Terpsiphone atrocaudata*
Sanrin	山林	Mountain forest
Sanshu no shinki/jingi	三種の神器	The three imperial regalia (mirror, sword and jewel)
Sasa	ササ・笹	*Sasa*; a type of bamboo
Satomiya	里宮	Village shrine
Satoyama	里山	The 'traditional', hybrid rural landscape of Japan
Sawara	サワラ	*Chamaecyparis pisifera*
Seichi	聖地	Sacred place
Seichi junrei	聖地巡礼	Pilgrimage to a sacred place
Seiki	精気	Spiritual energy
Sei naru basho	聖なる場所	Sacred place
Sei naru jurin	聖なる樹林	Sacred forest
Sei naru yama	聖なる山	Sacred mountain
Seinenkai	青年会	Young persons' association
Seishin	精神	Spirituality

Seitaichi	生態智	Ecological wisdom; 'ecosophy'
Seiyōjin	西洋人	'Westerner'
Sekai no kankyō	世界の環境	World environment
Sennen-mori-zukuri	千年森づくり	Making a thousand-year forest
Sessha	摂社	Subshrine (Ise Jingū)
Sezoku	世俗	Secular
Shaden	社殿	Shrine buildings
Shajirin	社寺林	Shrine-temple forest
Shakai	社会	Society
Shāmanizumu	シャーマニズム	Shamanism
Shasō	社叢	Sacred forest; sacred grove
Shasōgaku	社叢学	'Sacred forest studies'
Shasōrin	社叢林	Sacred forest; sacred grove
Shichi-go-san	七五三	'Seven-five-three': Shinto rite of passage for children
Shidarezakura	枝垂桜・シダレザクラ	*Prunus subhirtella*; weeping cherry
Shii	シイ・椎	Chinkapin; *Castanopsis*
Shikinen sengū	式年遷宮	Periodical rebuilding of Ise (or other) shrines
Shimenawa	注連縄	Special rope used to demarcate sacred space
Shimin shokujusai	市民植樹祭	'Citizens' tree-planting ceremony'
Shinbatsu	神罰	Divine punishment
Shinboku	神木	Sacred tree
Shinbun	新聞	Newspaper
Shinbutsu	神仏	Buddhas and *kami*
Shinbutsu bunri	神仏分離	Separation of Shinto and Buddhism (1868)
Shinbutsu shūgō	神仏習合	Combined worship of Buddhas and *kami*
Shinden	神殿	See *honden*
Shinden	神田	Rice paddy belonging to a shrine
Shin'en	神苑	Sacred garden; shrine garden
Shin'iki	神域	Sacred area
Shinkansen	新幹線	Bullet train
Shinkō	信仰	Faith, belief
Shinkoku	神国	'Land of the gods'; divine country
Shinkōshūkyō	新興宗教	'New religion'; 'cult'
Shinrin	森林	Forest
Shinrin	神林	Divine forest
Shinrin seitaigaku	森林生態学	Forest ecology
Shinrin serapii	森林セラピー	'Forest therapy'
Shinrin yoku	森林浴	'Forest bath', 'forest therapy'
Shinsei na mori	神聖な森	Sacred forest
Shinsenden	神饌田	Rice paddy belonging to a shrine
Shinshūkyō	新宗教	'New religion'
Shintai	神体	Sacred object; 'deity's body'
Shintaizan	神体山	Sacred mountain; 'deity's body'

Shintō	神道	Shinto
Shintō bunka	神道文化	Shinto culture
Shintōkei shinshūkyō	神道系新宗教	'Shinto-derived new religions'
Shinwateki jikan	神話的時間	Mythical time; sacred time
Shiroyama	城山	Castle mountain
Shizen	自然	Nature
Shizen kankyō	自然環境	Natural environment
Shizen ni	自然に	Naturally, spontaneously
Shizen no mama no mono	自然のままのもの	Things in their natural state
Shizensei	自然性	Sense of nature
Shizumeru	鎮める	To pacify, to appease
Shōgun	将軍	Military ruler of Japan during the Tokugawa period
Shokubutsu shakai	植物社会	Plant society
Shōwa no hi	昭和の日	National holiday to commemorate the former emperor
Shōyōjurin	照葉樹林	Evergreen broad-leaved forest; laurel forest
Shugendō	修験道	Mountain asceticism, based on *shinbutsu shūgō*
Shugyō	修行	Ascetic practices
Shūha shintō	宗派神道	See *kyōha shintō*
Shūkyō	宗教	Religion
Shūkyō fūdo	宗教風土	'Religioscape'
Shūkyōgaku	宗教学	Religious studies
Shūkyō hōjin	宗教法人	Religious juridical person (legal term)
Shuro	シュロ	*Trachycarpus fortunei*; a species of palm tree
Shūzoku	習俗	Customs, manners
Sōmoku no atsumari	草木の集まり	Gathering of plants and trees
Sōzō	創造	Creation
Sudajii	スダジイ	*Castanopsis sieboldii*
Sugi	杉・スギ	*Cryptomeria japonica*, 'Japanese cedar'
Supirichuariti	スピリチュアリティ	Spirituality
Tachi aoi	タチアオイ	*Alcaea roseai*, a species of hollyhock
Taiken	体験	Experience
Taisha	大社	(Large) shrine
Tamiya	田宮	Rice paddy shrine
Tanbo chiimu	田んぼチーム	'Rice paddy team' (NPO Hibiki)
Tanuki	狸・タヌキ	Raccoon dog; *Nyctereutes procyonoides*
Tatari	祟り	Divine wrath; punishment
Tatesuna	立砂	Small sand hills
Teikoku kenpō	帝国憲法	Imperial Constitution (1889)
Temizuya	手水舎	A place to wash one's hands at a shrine entrance
Ten	天	Heaven
Tenbatsu	天罰	Heavenly punishment
Tengu	天狗	Spiritual creatures with long noses
Tennen	天然	Nature

Tennen shigen	天然資源	Natural resources
Tennen shizen no mori	天然自然の森	Natural forest
Tera	寺	Buddhist temple
Tetsugaku	哲学	Philosophy
Tōhoku rokkonsai	東北六魂祭	Tohoku Six-Soul Festival (post-disaster *matsuri*)
Tonbo	トンボ	Dragonfly
Torii	鳥居	Shrine gate
Toshirin	都市林	Urban forest
Totoro	トトロ	Large teddybear-like deity (Miyazaki)
Tsuburajii	ツブラジイ	*Castanopsis cuspidata*
Tsuchi no kami	土の神	God of the land
Tsuga	ツガ・栂	*Tsuga sieboldii*
Tsuka	塚	Burial mound
Tsuka no kodachi	塚の木立	Grove on a burial mound
Tsukurareta mori	作られた森	Constructed forest
Ubusunanokami	産土神	Deity associated with one's place of birth
Uchū	宇宙	Cosmos
Ujigami	氏神	Ancestral deity
Ujiko	氏子	Shrine community; parish
Utaki	ウタキ・御嶽	Okinawan sacred groves
Utaki saihen	御嶽再編	'Reorganisation' (Shintoisation) of *utaki* (1940)
Waza	ワザ・技・業	Skill; art; performance
Yabu	藪	Thicket; bush
Yabusame	流鏑馬	Horseback archery
Yabutsubaki	ヤブツバキ	*Camellia japonica*; Japanese camellia
Yamaguchi	山口	'Mountain gate'; the foot of a mountain
Yamaguchi no kami	山口神	Deities associated with mountains
Yamamiya	山宮	Mountain shrine
Yamato bonchi	大和盆地	Yamato basin (Nara prefecture)
Yaoyorozu no kamigami	八百万の神々	The myriad deities (lit. 8 million deities)
Yashiro	社	Shrine; sacred grove
Yatagarasu	八咫烏	Mythical three-legged crow
Yōkai	妖怪	Ghost; monster
Yonaoshi	世直し	World renewal
Yudaya-kyō	ユダヤ教	Judaism
Yuta	ユタ	Okinawan mediums; 'shamans'
Yutaka	豊か	Abundance
Zōkibayashi	雑木林	Mixed forest

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SAMMENDRAG PÅ NORSK

I de siste årene har forestillingen om shinto som en gammel naturtilbedelsestradisjon, som tilbyr løsninger på dagens miljøproblemer, oppnådd paradigmatisk status i akademia og blant shintoinstitusjoner. Dette har ført til store endringer i måten shintoinstitusjoner definerer seg selv på, og også i praksiser ved helligdommer. Likevel har utviklingen av dette «shinto-miljøparadigmet» ennå ikke vært gjenstand for systematisk og grundig forskning; det er dette jeg forsøker i denne avhandlingen. Avhandlingen består av fire deler. Den første delen inneholder en mer teoretisk diskusjon knyttet til «religion i Japan», sekulariserings- og sakraliseringsprosesser, og begrepet «det hellige rom». Den andre delen utforsker utviklingen av «shinto-miljøparadigmet». Jeg argumenterer at dette paradigmet hviler på tre pilarer: forestillinger om «den japanske opplevelsen av naturen», som har vært en del av det moderne nasjonsbyggingsprosjekt siden Meiji-perioden; eksisterende forestillinger om shinto som «japanernes» opprinnelige rituelle tradisjon; og den globale trenden hvor religion relateres til miljøspørsmål. I den tredje delen beskriver og analyserer jeg nyere diskurser om «hellige skogholt» (*chinju no mori*) og drøfter hvordan disse forholder seg til populære forestillinger om Japans kultur og naturlandskap. Den fjerde og siste delen beskriver hvordan abstrakte ideer om shinto, natur og hellige skogholt gis en konkret form og blir gjenstand for forhandling ved helligdommer i dag. Denne delen er basert på feltarbeid i Japan. Jeg diskuterer fire helligdommer som engasjerer seg i skogvern, etterfulgt av fire eksempler som omhandler kulturelle og pedagogiske praksiser knyttet til helligdommers hellige skogholt. Jeg argumenterer for at betydningen av *chinju no mori* går langt utover økologiske spørsmål: skogholtene representerer kontinuitet mellom (fjern) fortid, nåtid og fremtid og fungerer som verdifull symbolsk kapital. Skogholtene har blitt knutepunkter for ulike diskursive og romlige praksiser, med formål som varierer fra miljøvern til nasjonal gjenreisning.