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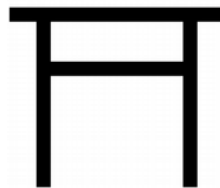
Master of Arts (MA) in
Foundations and Practices of Sustainability

Shinto & Ecology

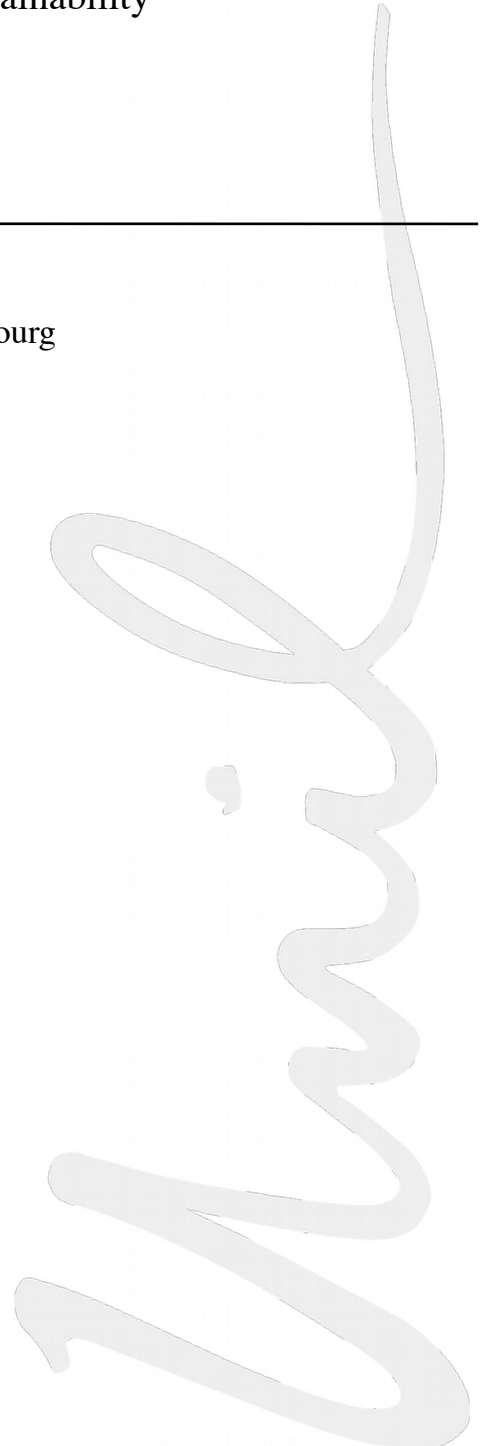
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Abstract

When speaking of a global ecological crisis, diverse mutually interacting factors are being pointed at. Next to resource depletion and the progressive saturation of Earth's charging capacities, potentially endangering the very habitability of the planet, social and economical aspects of the crisis equally need to be investigated upon. Technological supremacy coupled with pure profit orientation, as well as a predatory and indifferent stance towards the non-human Nature, characteristic of modern Western and Westernized societies, constitute a detrimental precondition in maintaining an unviable status quo of continuous environmental degradation and global social inequalities. Path dependency on an inherently unsustainable debt-based and growth-orientated capitalistic economics, falsely assuming an infinite Earth, makes it in that respect difficult to escape the prevailing paradigm. The crisis is being framed as a spiritual crisis in the sense that spirituality of modern societies can be both described by their alienated relationship towards Nature and their limited idea of human accomplishment of materialistic and consumerist nature. Thorough reflexion upon the spiritual foundations of modern societies is hence being advocated in order to find responses to the ills of the so-called technocratic paradigm. A globally disenchanting worldview, rendering Nature a mere commodity, which has been brought forth during the history of Western civilization is regarded as pivotal in generating the 'modern Western spirituality' which is oftentimes opposed to Eastern spiritual or animistic traditions. Endeavors of operating paradigm shifts by adopting tenets of such traditions, for instance Buddhism, appear pertinent on a surface level, yet raise questions in terms of applicabilities and misunderstandings. Against this backdrop the Japanese belief system Shinto, oftentimes described as a Nature-worship religion, is being scrutinized upon its relevance in providing spiritual resources as to responding to the ecological crisis. Yet, especially in view of the many environmental degradations Japan has witnessed, precipitate ecological discourses based on Shinto are being discarded as untruthful and idealistic. This being said the belief system, as well as the population itself has undergone an array of transformations, notably during the modernization process of Japan, providing explanations for the weakening of Nature concern. Even though definitions of Shinto remain vague to this date, it has been observed through a comparative study of literature and field-work, that there exists a presumable core meaning of the underlying belief of Shinto, which is regaining popularity in recent times and which harbors a set of principles which may satisfy requirements of Ecology & Spirituality endeavors. Be it historically accurate or not, it is the inherent vagueness of Shinto which permits latter to incorporate, informed by past inconsistencies, a contemporary discourse linking ecological preoccupation and spiritual development, in order to do justice to its ascribed Nature-message. Particular attention is in this regard being put on Shinto shrines, which constitute publicly accessible, location specific institutions, epitomizing culture, Nature and sacredness and potentially provide entry points to efforts of re-sacralizing modern worldviews and reattributing the recognition of intrinsic value of Nature as a whole.

Resumé

Lorsqu'on parle d'une crise écologique mondiale, divers facteurs en interaction mutuelle sont mis en évidence. Outre l'épuisement des ressources et la saturation progressive des capacités de charge de la Terre, mettant potentiellement en danger l'habitabilité même de la planète, il convient également d'examiner les aspects sociaux et économiques de la crise. La suprématie technologique associée à une orientation purement lucrative, ainsi qu'une attitude prédatrice et indifférente à l'égard de la Nature non-humaine, caractéristique des sociétés modernes occidentales et occidentalisées, constituent une condition préjudiciable au maintien d'un statu quo non viable de dégradation continue de l'environnement et d'inégalités sociales globales. La dépendance de trajectoire à une économie capitaliste basée sur la dette et orientée vers la croissance, intrinsèquement insoutenable, supposant à tort une Terre infinie, rend de ce fait difficile d'échapper au paradigme dominant. La crise est considérée comme une crise spirituelle dans le sens où la spiritualité des sociétés modernes peut être décrite à la fois par leur relation aliénée envers la Nature et par leur idée limitée de l'accomplissement humain de nature matérialiste et consumériste. Une réflexion approfondie sur les fondements spirituels des sociétés modernes est donc préconisée afin de trouver des réponses aux maux du paradigme technocratique. Une vision du monde globalement désenchantée, faisant de la Nature une simple marchandise, mise au point au cours de l'histoire de la civilisation occidentale, est considérée comme cardinale pour avoir généré une « spiritualité occidentale moderne » souvent opposée aux traditions spirituelles orientales ou animistes. Les efforts déployés pour changer de paradigme en adoptant les principes de telles traditions, par exemple du bouddhisme, semblent pertinents en surface, mais soulèvent des questions quant aux possibilités d'application et aux malentendus. Dans ce contexte, le système de croyance japonais, le shinto, souvent décrit comme une religion vénérant la Nature, est examiné de près pour déterminer s'il est possible d'y trouver des ressources spirituelles pour faire face à la crise écologique. Cependant, compte tenu en particulier des nombreuses dégradations de l'environnement observées au Japon, les discours écologiques hâtifs fondés sur le shintoïsme sont écartés pour être considérés comme mensongers et idéalistes. Cela étant dit, le système de croyances, de même que la population elle-même, a subi de nombreuses transformations, notamment au cours du processus de modernisation du Japon, fournissant des explications pour l'affaiblissement de la préoccupation liée à la Nature. Bien que les définitions du shinto restent floues à ce jour, une étude comparative de la littérature et une étude de terrain a montré qu'il existait probablement une signification fondamentale de la croyance sous-jacente du shinto, qui regagne en popularité ces derniers temps et qui abrite un ensemble de principes pouvant satisfaire aux exigences d'une « éco-spiritualité ». Qu'il soit historiquement exact ou non, c'est le flou inhérent au shinto qui permet à celui-ci d'incorporer, informé par les erreurs du passé, un discours contemporain reliant préoccupation écologique et développement spirituel, afin de rendre justice au message écologique qui lui est attribué. À cet égard, une attention particulière est accordée aux sanctuaires shintoïstes, qui constituent des institutions accessibles au public et

localisées, incarnant culture, Nature et sacralité et offrant potentiellement des points de départ aux efforts visant à re-sacraliser les visions du monde modernes et à réaffirmer la reconnaissance de la valeur intrinsèque de la Nature dans son ensemble.

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Table of contents

Introduction and research objectives	1
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Research design.....	3
Part I: Review of literature	6
1. Context of ecological crisis and dead ends of modernity	7
1.1. Ecological crisis.....	7
1.1.1. Scientific findings.....	7
1.1.2. Responsibilities.....	9
1.2. Dead ends of modernity and the call for transitions..	9
1.2.1. Neoliberalism and neoclassical economics.....	10
1.2.2. Discrepancy between wealth and well-being.....	12
1.2.3. Transition and disruption.....	13
2. Socio-religious drivers of the ecological crisis	15
2.1. Spirituality and Religion in the West.	15
2.1.1. Spirituality: Premodern and universal usage	15
2.1.2. Spirituality: Discursive shift and new contemporary signification.....	16
2.1.3. Religion: Definition and implications	17
2.2. Christianity and Secularization.....	18
2.2.1. Role of Christianity in Western civilization	18
2.2.2. Secularization and Disenchantment of the West.....	20
2.3. Western consciousness and ecological crisis.	22
2.3.1. Technoscience and Western spirituality.....	23
2.3.2. Debate on the economic agent within Western spirituality.....	25
3. Ecology & Spirituality: Approaches and precautions	28
3.1. Advocacies and approaches.....	28
3.1.1. Advocacies and reconsideration of Christianity.....	28
3.1.2. Eco-spirituality: A Western approach on paradigm shifting.....	30
3.1.3. Indigenous traditions and animism... ..	31
3.2. Questioning the secularization theory	33
3.3. East-West dichotomies.....	34
3.3.1. Buddhism and idealization.....	34
3.3.2. Intercultural understanding... ..	35
4. Shinto & Ecology	36
4.1. Basic framework.....	36
4.1.1. Generalities... ..	36
4.1.2. Kami and Jinja.....	38
4.1.3. Historicity.....	42
4.1.4. Japanese belief systems and the meaning of religion	47
4.2. Contemporary secular trends.	48
4.2.1. Secular Shinto	48
4.2.2. Loss of faith... ..	49
4.3. ‘Original Shinto spirituality’ and Japanese culture... ..	51
4.3.1. Inconsistencies.....	51
4.3.2. Ethical implications and metaphysics	52
4.4. Discussion: Shinto ecological discourse.....	53
4.4.1. Environmental preoccupation and destruction.....	53

4.4.2.	Dismantling the eco-discourse.....	55
4.5.	Ecological implications in contemporary trends of Shinto.....	57
4.5.1.	'Environmental paradigm' in Shrine Shinto and globalization.....	57
4.5.2.	New Religious Movements identifying with Shinto.....	58
4.5.3.	Rediscovery of Shinto shrines and 'Powerspot Boom'.....	60
Part II: Fieldwork.....		64
5. Methodology.....		65
5.1.	Endeavor.....	65
5.2.	Data collection procedures.....	67
5.3.	Challenges.....	68
5.4.	Persons and regions.. ..	70
6. Identified topics.....		71
6.1.	Discourses on Shinto, Kami and Jinja.....	71
6.1.1.	'General population' and ' <i>Jinja Mairi</i> '.....	71
6.1.2.	Loss of belief.	73
6.1.3.	Contemporary trends and evolutions	74
6.1.4.	Shinto spirituality.....	75
6.1.5.	Divergent insiders' and experts' view on Shinto.....	80
6.2.	Shinto & Ecology.....	81
6.2.1.	Viability of a Shinto ecological discourse in Japan... ..	81
6.2.2.	Environmental action on shrine grounds.....	82
6.2.3.	Kami-awareness and ecological consciousness.....	83
6.2.4.	Ritualistic ecological paradigm.....	84
6.2.5.	Great Eastern Earthquake and spirituality.....	85
7. Discussion of results.....		86
7.1.	Preliminary remarks.....	86
7.2.	Discussion and verification of postulate and hypothesis.....	87
7.2.1.	Verification of postulate.....	87
7.2.2.	Verification of hypothesis 1 (Application conceptual framework).....	89
7.2.3.	Verification of hypothesis 2.....	94
Conclusion.....		96
Bibliography.....		98
Appendix.....		104
1.	Interview Grids.....	104
1.1.	Shrine visitors and ordinary people... ..	104
1.2.	Experts.....	105
1.3.	Priests.....	106
2.	Persons and regions... ..	107
3.	Transcriptions of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations.....	108
4.	Presentation for SPIEM, University of Tokyo.....	126

Introduction and research problem

1 Introduction

Based on a vast number of studies, observations and experiences, it is undeniable that our planet is facing an ever increasing number of ecological issues. At this very moment, climate conditions are becoming ever more unstable, already having considerable, disastrous repercussions in different areas of the world, and more generally speaking the diverse Earth's charging capacities, sometimes referred to as the 'Nine Planetary Boundaries' (cf. Chapter 1.2), are being threatened to be transgressed or are already being transgressed, endangering the very habitability of our planet. At the same time the planet's resources (groundwater, forest, fishing resources, metals etc.) are being unstopably plundered in a ruthless manner. Major research programs, such as the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment underline the importance of considering the so-called ecological crisis under its systemic character and suggest investigating upon all relevant factors which contribute in maintaining the current, alarming state of the planet. Pope Francis speaks, for instance, of a 'global socio-environmental crisis', which implies that environmental issues, as well as social, political and economical issues are all aspects of the same crisis. All things considered, it is clear that the human civilization is responsible in inflicting pervasive, damaging impacts onto the Earth. Since the great acceleration in the 1950s these impacts have become sufficiently pronounced in order for human civilization itself to be considered as a geological force.

Responsibilities of the current state of affairs are above all to be sought within the neoliberal framework of modern Western and Westernized societies which are based on growth orientated capitalistic/neoclassical economics, and which are excessively focalized on economic profitability on behalf of all other considerations, be it global disparities or ecological issues. It has been repeatedly proven, that the inherent dynamics of a growth orientated economy, which demands perpetually increasing production and consumption, thus perpetual resource extraction, as well as waste production, is not viable on the long run. In a sense, modern Western and Westernized societies are being held hostage of their very own economic model and there is little to none willingness of transitioning to a more sustainable model.

This leads to questioning, on a deeper level, if there is a sort of dysfunction within modern consciousness which is taking place that globally decreases the chances of escaping the current economic system or provoking ecological consideration out of intrinsic motivation. The core of the problem lies in a 'technocratic paradigm', as denounced by Pope Francis, which has progressively emerged during the modernization of Western civilization and which has, as of today, virtually spread over the whole planet. The technocratic paradigm goes hand in hand with several issues, such as neoclassical economics, anthropocentrism, technological innovation as a means of resolving all ecological issues, predatory dominance towards natural resources, 'discriminating ethos' towards everything which is not economically profitable including human beings, as well as excessive

rationality. Factors that may have led to this modern paradigm are diverse, however it can be said that the medieval agricultural revolution, the protestant reformation, the age of enlightenment and the subsequent industrial revolution, secularization and disenchantment, as well as the deliberate propagation of capitalistic economics have played an important role. Furthermore, historian Lynn White (1967) argues, that the way in which the Genesis creation narrative has been interpreted, has led to anchoring into the Western consciousness an anthropocentric, dominating stance towards Nature from which the human being is essentially seen as separated. Nature is in this regard viewed as a mere supply of resources that may be exploited. These historic events thus are said to have had an impact as to shaping a modern Western spirituality, which eventually through their resulting ramifications led to what is being called today an ecological crisis. In this sense, Lynn White, as well as many other authors claim, that the ecological crisis is in its essence a spiritual crisis, and that responses of spiritual or religious nature need to be given amongst others. Indeed, the technocratic paradigm which results from these diverse historic turning points, hints at the very spirituality, or anthropologic foundation, of Western civilization as a whole, which has been criticized as being dysfunctional. The term spirituality, invoked in this context will be outlined in the present essay since its usage is oftentimes debatable and it may refer to different meanings.

Since the publication of Lynn White's theory, it has been stated, that efforts in the emerging, diffuse field of ecology and spirituality have been invested, either seeking responses of spiritual nature to the ecological crisis, highlighting the close relation there exists between the fields ecology and spirituality, or seeking resources in religious or spiritual traditions, which may foster an ecological ethics or discourse. Tenets of so-called 'eco-spiritual' movements generally assume, that a paradigm shift needs to take place in order to replace the Western technocratic paradigm, and implement an ecologically operational worldview. Theologian and sociologist Michel Maxime Egger, for instance, claims that it is important to develop and refine a 'spiritual intelligence', which lies beyond rational intelligence, in order to be able to attune oneself to sacredness which exists in Nature. He states that the perception of sacredness is a pivotal experience out of which truthful ecological acting can emerge, while simultaneously deploring the desacralization that Western civilization has witnessed. Nonetheless it needs to be mentioned, that such paradigm shifts need not only efforts of spiritual nature but are also based on education and institutional support on a political level.

There exists a tendency to seek resources in oriental traditions as to fostering an ecological ethics, for instance Buddhism, which is, sometimes fallaciously, seen as the 'holistic alternative' to Christianity. As to Buddhism in particular, it needs to be elucidated, that it is a sensitive task to seek out resources whose understanding may be compromised through insufficient intercultural understanding and communication. Acculturated belief systems are commonly observed, and their effectiveness may be subject to debate. Another common assumption in this field consists in viewing pantheistic or animistic belief systems as offering worldviews of significant ecological value, in that the Nature is seen as pervaded by divinities or spiritual forces, a perception which

may foster the attribution of intrinsic value to natural elements or preservation through sacralization. However, such eco-spiritual arguments have also been heavily criticized on numerous occasions for their idealistic nature. Eco-spiritual authors are oftentimes being blamed for selectively considering literature and examples which would corroborate their points of view and drawing ‘eco-idealistic’ conclusions. There exist indeed as many authors who deny the significance of ecology and spirituality movements as to contributing to lasting environmental changes and considerations.

In recent decades, the Japanese belief system Shinto has received a growing attention worldwide for its presumable deep connection to Nature it maintains through nature-worship. According to dominant ecological discourses, this view fosters a stance of reverence and admiration towards Nature. Many Japanese authors claim, oftentimes in contrast to historians, that Shinto has emerged from a uniquely indigenous Japanese culture which harbored local folk beliefs of ancestor worship, revering Nature and of natural elements inhabited by so-called *Kamis*, invisible, divine beings, that are “not part of the ordinary” (Ueshima, 2009: 59). Shinto is thus the belief where one worships the inhabiting *Kamis* of natural elements, phenomena and objects, as well as the *Kamis* of ascended ancestors and persons. The Japanese people perceive anything as *Kami* that belongs to the extraordinary which is beyond oneself and faces these invisible forces or beings with fear and reverence (ibid). It has been claimed, that Shinto involves a practical response to the ecological crisis, in that it bears through its spirituality and worldview an ethical implication of taking care and preserving the environment. It is thus argued that Shinto may serve as a viable model for promoting sustainability. This type of discourse has been framed as the ‘Shinto environmentalist paradigm’ (Rots, 2015a, 2017a), which is increasingly becoming popular on a national and international scale. Foreseeably, precipitate Shinto eco-discourses tend to be dismantled and realistic applicabilities of Shinto for ecological means remain subject to debate.

2 Research design

The present essay situates itself in the wake of above stated efforts and precautions within the field of Ecology&Spirituality, while investigating the Japanese belief system ‘Shinto’ upon its ecological relevance. It addresses the central research question: **How can ‘contemporary Shinto’ respond to the ecological crisis?**

Four main objectives ensue from the question. 1) The term ecological crisis will be qualified. 2) It has been decided, that the underlying framework of Ecology&Spirituality will be outlined, in order to provide an understanding of the relevance of the research question in a Western context. 3) The multifaceted term of ‘contemporary Shinto’ will be qualified, partially drawing on its historical aspects. Given the topicality of the ecological crisis, the term contemporary Shinto has been chosen, in order to focus the attention to actually existing trends within the belief system and investigating if

ecological discourses can be either built upon these strands or derived from them. 4) Diverse ecological and environmental discourses will be mapped out and discussed, which have been identified in different strands of ‘contemporary Shinto’.

The present essay is divided into two main parts. Objectives 1) and 2) are solely sought to be matched within part I, whereas objectives 3) and 4) will be sought to be matched within both part I and II.

• Part I establishes the theoretical framework responding to the 4 above stated objectives, based on a literature review. Chapter 1 ‘Context of ecological crisis and dead-ends of modernity’ will qualify the notion of the ecological crisis, while stressing in particular on its systemic and interdependent characteristic. Different facets of the ecological crisis will be written on such as its biogeochemical, societal, political and economical aspects. The focus will be placed upon the issues deriving from modern Western (and Westernized) societies. Chapter 2 ‘Socio-religious drivers of the ecological crisis’ will cover historical and religious-spiritual aspects of the ecological crisis within Western civilization. After qualifying the terms spirituality and religion, the Christian heritage in shaping modern consciousness will be elucidated and a link between spirituality and the ecological crisis will be established. It will then proceed to a characterization of Western spirituality. Lastly, it will be seen how an excessive economical logic is being anchored within Western civilization. Chapter 3 ‘Ecology & Spirituality: Approaches and precautions’ will begin with citing advocacies which have been brought forth by different authors, as to considering responses of spiritual or religious nature to the ecological crisis. Likewise, it will be mapped out, how Ecology & Spirituality movements aim to respond to the crisis. A few examples of endeavors in this field will be given by depicting for instance the framework of ‘Eco-spirituality’. Subsequently the notions of sacrality and animism will be written on which commonly figure amongst such endeavors. The controversial notions of New Age Spirituality will then be shortly discussed since their content may overlap with certain aspects of the idea of Ecology & Spirituality. Lastly in this chapter, through the example of Buddhism, it will be elucidated what sort of precautions need to be taken when considering oriental traditions as sources of inspiration for ecological awareness. In chapter 4 ‘Shinto & Ecology’, a shortened but synthetic description of what is to be understood by the notion of Shinto will be undertaken. Its historical aspects and the meaning of religion within a Japanese context will be outlined, before qualifying the contemporary evolutions of Shinto and its role played within an essentially secular nation. Subsequently, inconsistencies as to its ‘traditional’ meaning will be pointed out and it will be seen if there is a so-called ‘Shinto spirituality’ from which ethical implications can be deducted. Lastly, diverse environmental or ecological discourses will be investigated which can be found within and around this belief system, and their viability and applicability will be discussed.

• Part II will be dedicated to a fieldwork which has been conducted in Japan between 7th August 2018 and 3rd September 2018. In order to prepare the Fieldwork, 1 postulate and 2 working hypotheses have been deduced from objectives 3) and 4) which ensued from the research question:

- Postulate: A growing part of the population is reclaiming an ‘original meaning’ of Shinto.
- Hypothesis 1: Core ideas of an ‘original Shinto belief’, which are to be identified during the literature review and fieldwork, can respond to the eco-spiritual project in its diverse requirements.
- Hypothesis 2: Shinto is an embedded belief: the principal place where it is practiced can serve as a place for promoting ecological awareness in two ways. Jinjas (Shinto shrines) can serve for such ends:
 - 2.1. Through the specific experiences made in those places, which promote an enlarged consciousness of the world.
 - 2.2. Through environmental education on natural sites where environmental preservation is being achieved.

Chapter 5 will cover methodological aspects of the fieldwork. Next to describing data collection methods and encountered challenges, it will be exposed how the working hypotheses have been established. Chapter 6 will then synthesize the diverse and recurrent topics which have been gained from the interactions on site. Subsequently in chapter 7 the postulate and the hypotheses will be discussed and verified. The conceptual framework of ‘Eco-spirituality’, as defined by Michel Maxime Egger (2012) will be applied in order to test the first hypothesis.

Part I: Review of literature

Ecology
Spirituality
Shinto

Chapter 1: Context of ecological crisis and dead ends of modernity

1.1 Ecological crisis

Our planet is facing a vast array of considerable ecological challenges with a rising tendency, that may endanger its very inhabitability. Their essential aspects need to be elucidated in order to grasp the urgency in which measures need to be undertaken. It is however not the primary aim of this essay to discuss all the aspects of ecological issues in detail. Taken together, these issues are oftentimes referred to as a so-called ecological crisis. Yet, a crisis may refer to a temporary condition of anomaly that is initiated in a short time-span and which returns to its original state once it is finished (Bourg, 2013). Hence, the term ecological crisis, according to this definition, is not appropriate, even though its expression helps to remind the severity of issues that are taking place on a global scale. The changes on Earth which are being referred to as an ecological crisis, or crises, allude to progressive transformation processes which are taking place now and which will be continuing for centuries to come as well as whose return to an original 'status quo ante' is not realistically foreseeable (Bourg, 2013; Foster, 1998). However, its definition as a time of intense difficulty or intense danger ("Crisis", def.1) is indeed applicable. The term ecological crisis will be, for matters of simplicity, further employed in this essay.

1.1.1 Scientific findings

Ecological issues are related on one hand to resource depletion of the planet, such as the depletion of groundwater, fishing resources, precious and semi-precious metals, as well as massive deforestation¹. On the other hand they imply the saturation of Earth's charging capacities (Bourg, 2013), which are being referred to as the "Nine Planetary Boundaries" by the Stockholm Resilience Center of the University of Stockholm (Rockström *et al.*, 2009). Amongst these boundaries, three have already been transgressed: loss of biodiversity in terms of genetic diversity and the alteration of biogeochemical flow (nitrogen and phosphorus flows) mainly as a result of industrial and agricultural processes. Other boundaries that are subject to a great deal of uncertainty comprise climate change or stratospheric ozone depletion, whose transgression may have disastrous consequences.

Comprehensive analyses of ecological issues have been operated under the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA or MA), a research program led under the auspice of the United Nation Environmental Program between 2001 and 2005 hosting an international collaboration of more than 2000 scientists, experts and authors. Based on qualitative modeling techniques and quantitative trends, the MEA assesses key drivers of ecosystem changes and their impact on human

¹ More than 50 % of global forest resources have been destroyed in the 20th century and every second a forest area the size of 2 football fields is being destroyed (Reeves, 2005).

well-being. As framed by the MEA, “an ecosystem is a dynamic complex of plant, animal, and microorganism communities and the nonliving environment interacting as a functional unit” (MEA, 2005). By pointing out their interdependence and thus describing the ecological crisis as a complex phenomenon, impacts are being scrutinized upon all relevant interacting domains, including socioeconomic, demographic, scientific, technological, institutional, cultural and spiritual matters as well as poverty issues and ecosystem services (MEA, 2005; Mooney *et al.*, 2004). The MEA provides a scientific basis upon which decision-makers can operate towards promoting sustainability goals in a delicate context of uncertainty where ecological aspects are interconnected (MEA, 2005; Rockström *et al.*, 2009, 2015). Likewise, astrophysicist Hubert Reeves (2005) signals the interconnected nature of the global ecological crisis by alluding, next to its biogeochemical aspect, to issues deriving from considerable disparity of wealth underlying the North-South gap. Moreover he describes global-warming as well as famine and poverty affecting Southern countries as the major threats of our time. By invoking the term ‘integral ecology’, Pope Francis (2015) refers to the inherent interconnectedness of the ‘global socio-environmental crisis’, where environmental issues go hand-in-hand with economical and societal issues. He invites to reflect upon all subjacent dimensions. The following chapters will be based on such a systemic understanding of the ecological crisis. This understanding is needed in order to satisfy requirements of an appropriate ecological preoccupation, in other words a genuine concern as to ecosystem integrity as a functional – and moral – unit. This implies more than merely an extension of the framework of thinking on the environmental field but literally a shifting of paradigm (Bourg & Papaux, 2015).

In 2017, rising sea levels and severe monsoon floods as a result of climate change have forced millions of individuals living in coastal regions of Bangladesh into precarious situations, many of whom having been obliged to abandon their homes. Other extreme meteorological events such as tropical cyclones, droughts are being observed and their magnitude and frequency will keep rising as stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Further ramifications of deregulated climate may result in desertification of the inferior latitudes and continued inundation of coastal regions triggering massive so-called ecological migrations due to restricted habitable surfaces (McNamara & Gibson, 2012; Reeves, 2005).

Amongst its main findings, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment states that over the past 50 years, human intervention in ecosystems have been significant and ever growing, leading to diverse and substantial loss of diversity of life on earth (MEA, 2005). By emphasizing the human intervention upon the Earth’s biogeochemical processes, chemist and Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen has proposed the term of the Anthropocene Era. The term implies that the symptoms of the ecological crisis are inherently related to human activity on Earth (Foster, 1998). The Anthropocene started approximatively at the beginning of the Great acceleration in the 1950s where diverse transformative and extractive processes have gained unrestricted and exponential growth. It is unofficially assimilated to a geological epoch by considering human’s pervasive tendency of transformation as a geological force: 83% of non-glacial terrestrial surface is under human

influence, combined with increased urban spreading or intervention in river flows (Bourg, 2018). It is an epoch that warns human beings from our own immoderation and forces us to consider the possibility of an Earth without us (Eckersley, 2015).

1.1.2 Responsibilities

The ‘Boomerang effect’ of the Anthropocene era implies that the transformative and extractive activities exerted by humans on the natural environment return back on us in form of environmental hazards which may endanger or restrict the very inhabitability of the Earth (Bourg, 2018). In this process, southern developing countries are oftentimes far less capable of coping with these difficulties than modern, industrialized countries (Reeves, 2005). This is despite the fact that these countries are usually far more implicated in increasing material and energetic flux by transforming and extracting planet’s resources for their interests. Moreover, they possess an inequitable part of wealth and material abundance mostly on behalf of the global south and are thus violating tenets of global justice as well as of ecosystem integrity (Meadows & Randers, 2012). Such asymmetric impacts on developing countries raise effectively moral questions as to distributive justice. Wealthy, ‘greenhouse gas producing’ countries bear indeed great responsibilities as to remediating and preventing ecological degradation, as well as moral obligations towards those countries that are most affected (Keith & Horton, 2016; Reeves, 2005). Inclusion of affected populations into decisions-making process is certainly relevant (Preston, 2013) as well as a reorientation of values, attitudes and aspirations. Responsibilities of industrial societies can be said to lie as well in the deliberate choice of adopting an economic model which exalts growth on behalf of all underlying issues² (Bourg *et al.*, 2016; Meadows & Randers, 2012).

1.2 Dead ends of modernity and the call for a transition

Without further diving into the theoretical framework of modernity as a historical epoch, one could argue that the English industrial revolution was the major turning point in modern world history, as well as understand the industrialization process as the most crucial feature of national modernization (Goldfrank, 1990). Some further key-characteristics will be elucidated in the following lines. The term can be invoked to describe commercial, industrial societies based on a growth-orientated capitalist economy as well as characterized by their alienation from Nature as part of their spirituality³. In this sense, modernity is said to be pervaded by a ‘technocratic paradigm’ (Francis, 2015), a worldview which is excessively anthropocentric and glorifying

² More of these issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

³ Spiritual aspects of modern societies will be elucidated in chapter 2.3.1 ‘Technoscience and Western spirituality’.

technology as a means of controlling and even dominating Nature. Impacts of modernity on societies and the environment reveal themselves as unviable.

1.2.1 Neoliberalism and neoclassical economics

Ever increasing resource demands due to the very concept of neoclassical economics⁴ based on the necessity of perpetual growth are fundamentally contradictory⁵ to the ecological issues stated above which are first and foremost bound together by their finitude (Bourg, 2013). On the basis of a ‘disembedded’ conception of economic activities, as labeled by Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi in his book ‘The Great Transformation’, infinite material accumulation associated to economic growth is being falsely imagined as realistically pursuable (Arnsperger, 2017), or even imagined ‘ad absurdum’ (Bourg & Hess, 2016). Furthermore, it can be said that pervasive scientific reductionism, which is understood as the possibility of grasping a complex phenomenon through a unique scientific facet (ibid), as an inherent property of modernity, has enabled the reduction of all modalities of decisions to the single economical and thus monetary judging. In other words, nested within a neoliberal framework, the economic logic is being considered as the primary valid criterium of decision-making in modern Western societies⁶, where all other concerns come second, if at all. This is despite the fact that interconnectedness of all domains underlying the ecological crisis is scientifically proven as well as the urgency of action, based on this knowledge, is being required as to preserving ecosystem integrity (MEA, 2005; Rockström *et al.*, 2009). As an illustration, from an economic vantage point, all ethical considerations set aside, instrumental value attributed to a forest has far more significance than its intrinsic or esthetic values (Eckersley, 2015).

At an institutional level, regulatory ideals of decision-making processes are not capable of conciliating ecological sustainability and economic imperatives even though liberal democracies enable and even promote environmentally orientated negotiations (Eckersley, 2006). Constant pressure of competition as to economic survival, naturally pushes away ecological concerns or forces decision-makers to evaluate environmental action in monetary terms, despite its downright dangerous implications down the cause-and-effect chain (Bourg, 2018). On this occasion, the implementation of the precautionary principle⁷ as a means of achieving sustainability goals, is oftentimes being weakened or sidelined. Besides, accumulation of capital, in itself unsustainable, is required for subventing environmental protection programs, which in turn are seeking economic

4 Understood as the mainstream economics of modern societies. Further terms such as modern economics, capitalist economy, growth orientated economy are being used to hint at the same phenomenon, as well as economic science as the science underlying neoclassical economics.

5 Demographic growth obviously contributes to this contradiction, although provisions have been made as to its stabilization at approximately 9 billions habitants of Earth due to a progressive deterioration of planet’s living conditions (Reeves, 2005).

6 The term Western societies, understood as a heritage of the greco-roman civilization, mainly describing modern industrial societies, may include non-Western societies such as Japan.

7 The precautionary principle states, that measures of prevention and protection against potential harms need to be taken despite the lack of scientific certitude.

profitability. As an example, efforts for mitigating climate change, have become inseparable from developing dedicated market instruments and thus from being economically productive (Felli, 2014). This phenomenon, labeled ‘sustainability paradox’, is an illustration of why ecological crisis cannot be solved from within capitalism (Eckersley, 2015). In addition, speaking of institutional obstacles, short-termed electoral cycles stand oftentimes in contradiction to long-term orientated environmental actions (Reeves, 2005).

The phenomenon of climate change denial can be cited to illustrate another facet of the neoliberal ‘imperialism of the market’: Despite the fact that scientific consensus on climate change is being achieved by efforts of the IPCC, powerful mineral oil corporations, on account of economic concerns, are being actively involved in suppressing research on environmental hazards or spreading false scientific informations by financing designated think tanks, campaigns or fake popular movements (Oreskes *et al.*, 2012). The liberty implicated in the idea of neoliberalism hints to the liberty exerted by Western economic agents in their strive of unhindered capital or material accumulation and consumption while neglecting, in reality, the non-freedom of injustices being imposed on transnational victims, future generations or non-human beings. On this occasion, these negative ramifications of such economic activities are being referred to as so-called ‘invisible transfers of environmental impacts’ (Eckersley, 2015; Bourg, 2018).

Dead ends of the modern monetary system and hence of neoclassical economics, are being already witnessed with the financial crisis of 2008, whose solutions are in reality palliative measures which merely postpone further financial crises into the future. This is in spite the fact that modern economics have been criticized since the turning of the 20th century. By invoking the second law of thermodynamics, the entropy principle, obstacles of neoclassical economics have again been highlighted in the 1970s, notably by insights of Romanian economist Nicola Georgescu-Roegen (Cleveland, 1987). In this context, entropy implies, that in order to maintain a certain productivity level, as required by economic imperatives, there needs to be a steady input of high-quality (low-entropy) raw resources into the economic process that can be transformed into usable material and energy. For every monetary flux in the economy there is an associated energetic flux that implies additional extraction of resources in order to generate, at the end of the chain, goods and services. During the many transformation stages of this process, initial resources are being degraded into waste and waste-heat. However, neoclassical economics is based on the assumption of perpetual growth and infinite abundance and thus being fallaciously imagined as a cyclic, ever-lasting model. Contemporary scientific findings as to the main ecological issues, resource depletion and saturation of ecosystem charging capacity, are thus in direct contradiction with this assumption. The entropy principle indicates that the economic process is unidirectional, unlike the cyclic character of the modern monetary system (Cleveland, 1987). In the article ‘Limits to Growth’ published by the Club of Rome in 1972, as well as in it’s sequel 20 years later, entitled ‘Beyond the Limits’, the unviability of growth orientation within modern economy in relation to carrying capacities of the Earth as well as social equalities was already being identified. While this observation is not recent,

economy has failed to fulfill requirements of offsetting growth to this date. In fact, positive feedback loops reinforce and sustain exponential growth in the economy.

In conclusion, the perpetual growth, required by a capitalist economy has become, by reversal of its original blessings, an obstacle and dead-end of modernity. Next to the above-stated fallacious assumptions of economical science, debt-based monetary system reveals itself as a key-driver in fueling exponential growth and insidiously forcing economic agents of modern societies into frantic competitions. Growth, in its traditional sense, implies an improvement by transformation of primary and intermediary elements into a more useful final structure (Arnsperger, 2015, 2017). Yet, Latouche (2004) states that today, economic growth is being operated on behalf of future generations, our health, the environment, working conditions and social equality on a global scale and therefore there is a strong urgency to adopt an economic system that is respectful of diverse ecosystem limits. By criticizing economic growth as an end in itself, where the individual becomes a mere instrument for economic purposes, he calls for a restriction of the dynamic of capitalistic accumulation and raises the question of an appropriate societal framework in which such a change can take place. This implies amongst others a reconsideration of individual and societal attitudes, values and aspirations. Ethical and spiritual aspects as to satisfying such requirements will be partially discussed in the coming chapters.

1.2.2 Discrepancy between wealth and well-being

In the 1970s, discrepancy between increased GDP and felt happiness in affluent societies have been statistically observed, phenomenon which has been labeled ‘The Easterlin paradox of happiness’ (Arnsperger, 2015, 2017). The paradox implies, that beyond a certain threshold, material richness is not substantially contributing to well-being and in some cases can even induce the opposite effect. The contribution of rapid technological innovation to our well-being, next to increasing full-time employment and elimination of social inequalities, has been diminishing, although such beneficial effects were effectively perceptible during the 30 glorious years, the post-World War II economic expansion. This equation is indeed not viable anymore today (Bourg *et al.*, 2016).

Economic growth can be said to be artificially maintained by creating ever new needs, mostly so-called relative needs and desires through continuous technological innovation (Bourg, 2010), which are far beyond human’s basic needs. The modern individual is constantly sought by a vast array of incentives, notably targeted marketing mechanisms, as to satisfying these relative needs. Besides, due to the very dynamics of modern economics, it is required that consumption rate as well as waste production are steadily increasing (Latouche, 2004). Allegedly, but probably falsely, this contributes to a happier existence. The consumer, in turn, and due to his ‘psychology of lack’⁸ (Arnsperger, 2015), is demanding for his part perpetual innovation on the market. By playing

⁸ This phenomenon will be further elucidated in chapter 2.3.2 ‘Debate on the economic agent within Western spirituality’.

along these dynamics, economic growth is being maintained and the inherently unsustainable ‘project of modernity’ is being fueled.

The economic agent of tomorrow will not be a neoclassical one, as most of us are today, especially when everyday hustle and a feeling of helplessness towards looming ecological menaces restrict our willingness of ecological preoccupation. In contrast he shall have a holistic and ‘holographic’ way of acting in the world, which means that every decision is implicitly “conscious of the ecologic totality” (Arnsperger, 2016). The question remains open as to where the individual draws well-being when basic needs are to a certain extent satisfied.

1.2.3 Transition and disruption

With regard to above mentioned challenges and obstacles, it is clear that the current state of affairs will undergo disruptive transitions towards an essentially uncertain future. Tenets of sustainable development as formulated in the Brundtland Commission Report in 1987 are in reality not viable on the long run, since it regards a transition process in continuity with the current world, in particular with the prevailing economic logic. This means, that sustainable development considers itself as fundamentally compatible with the idea of economic growth as stated above. Serge Latouche (2004) argues that critique on economic growth is mostly missing in environmentalist discourse, due to the lack of willingness to decrease production and consumption, and despite the fact that challenges of ecological issues are being recognized.

It has been stated that the world can face ecological issues in three different ways (Meadows & Randers, 2012). Firstly it can disguise, sideline or even deny relevant indicators of ecological issues and continue business as usual. Secondly it can aim to offset ecological issues by employing technological innovations. In its radical form these innovations can take the form of geoengineering, notably understood as the technological intervention into Earth’s biogeochemical process, and whose consideration can imply severe moral issues, such as incentives, here again, to continue business as usual (Gardiner & Fragnière, 2016). Less radical forms are indeed effective in mitigating negative ramifications of our acting upon the environment. This case applies to what Eckersley (2006) describes as a simple modernization process, also referred to as ‘ecological modernization’ (Zaccal, 2015) and which is certainly effective on a surface level but does not question the roots of ecological issues. It is based on a credo that techno-scientific innovation can indeed overshadow any environmental issue. Likewise, as stated by Pope Francis, the ‘ecological culture’ can not simply propose partial and urgent solutions to the apparent environmental degradation. Critique on simple modernization can be assimilated with the issues of sustainable development, even though latter takes into account equity questions: They do not question the inherent unsustainability of neoclassic economics. Thirdly it can seek to understand the roots of the Earth’s ecological crisis, the heading of our World towards a collapse and thus conceive and operate

a transition process that is disruptive towards the current state of affairs while being respectful of a systemic understanding of the Earth as a complex and interdependent ecosystem. Thus a 'reflexive modernization' bears in mind genuine considerations about ecological issues or distributive consequences on world's population (Eckersley, 2006). In this process, basic axioms of neoclassical theory need to be reinvestigated alongside the questioning of the modern individual's insatiable desire to control and transform its surroundings and the related illusion of finding a solution to all problems inherent to this attitude (Bourg, 2018).

Besides, a discriminating ethos in Western societies that is both applicable to the dignity of the environment as well as of human beings is being denounced by Pope Francis. He observes a behavior that tends to depreciate anything, human or non-human, that is not of economic value and through chains of consequences generate environmental issues as well as social inequities. While criticizing our 'culture of waste' or 'throwaway culture' by referring to his integral ecology, he invites to profoundly rethink Western, consumerist lifestyles, in particular by pointing at the technocratic paradigm underlying this attitude. A genuinely ecological culture needs thus to overcome this paradigm by proposing and adopting a new way thinking. Equally, Latouche (2004) indicates, by proposing a conceptual framework (entitled 'décroissance') for operating a transition towards a post-capitalistic society, that modern consumer society is at loss of core values and a healthy sense of relation towards Nature. Furthermore, he argues that a key component of modern society's 'toxico-dependency' to growth and consumption lies in the very anthropological foundations of neoclassical economics, while strongly advocating to question these foundations as a means of reevaluating these modern lifestyles, as well as values and aspirations. In turn, our anthropologic, or spiritual foundation can be said to be conditioning the relationship we maintain to the outer world, other beings as well as to ourselves (Bourg, 2016). In this respect a transition of an attitude of domination towards a harmonic insertion within Nature is being demanded.

The systemic and interdependent characteristics of ecological crises will be mentioned again. Ecological issues, intra- and international social inequalities, economical and institutional dead-ends, as well as loss of core values in our spiritual or anthropological foundations are all facets of a systemic crisis. It will be elucidated in the next chapter that the ecological crisis has, on its root level, a spiritual essence, as well as why or to which extent the ecological crisis can be called a spiritual crisis (Egger, 2012; White, 1967).

Chapter 2: Socio-religious drivers of the ecological crisis

2.1 Spirituality and Religion in the West

Despite the systemic character of the ecological crisis, at its core level it has been repeatedly called as a spiritual crisis. Before beginning to explicit to what extent religious-spiritual drivers have led to the ecological crisis, the terms religion and spirituality, based on diverse sources, will be briefly introduced, in order to enable a better understanding of the coming chapters.

2.1.1 Spirituality: Premodern and universal usage

Definitions of the term ‘spirituality’ are loose, ambivalent and oftentimes open-ended. It has been stated that the term has undergone a fundamental discursive shift in the modern and post-modern era (Huss, 2014; King, 1996). Divergent qualifications will thus be mapped out in the following lines.

Originally the term derived from the Latin noun ‘spiritus’, standing for ‘breath’, which has been regarded as a divine element in the New Testament. In the Middle-Age and early modernity, spirituality was closely related to the usage within a theological and ecclesiastical context. While being inextricably linked to religion, it suggested an inherent dichotomy between the religious-spiritual and the material realm. Spirituality constituted an umbrella term for proper Christian conduct and religious devotion and was also seen as “[T]hat which belongs to the church”, or the “essence of true religion” (Huss, 2014: 48).

According to Huss (2014), following another, modern definition, spirituality, as well as religion, are oftentimes regarded as universal phenomena which can be invoked in order to analytically describe human social behaviors from the standpoint of an observer. In this sense, spirituality is perceived as an intrinsic trait of humanity, rooted in its biological and psychological conditions. Spirituality is not necessarily shared amongst individuals, nor linked to any institutions, in contrast to the characteristics of religion, hence referring to the personal component of religiosity, somewhat similar to piety. This notwithstanding, it has been used to qualify entire societies or civilizations, such as the ‘Western spirituality’, similar to the idea of an underlying consciousness. Spirituality may be predicated on the existence of (a) supernatural force(s), as well as refer to being religious, without it being necessarily the case, and being even applicable to non-religiosity (Bruce, 2017; King, 1996; Sponsel, 2012).

Under its universal meaning, inherent to all societies, spirituality has been maintained as holding two interdependent functions, or senses, which are both related to an exteriority, although distinct in both cases (Bourg, 2018). Its first sense refers to the anthropological foundation which conditions the way individuals of a given society perceive and relate to their environment,

encompassing the natural, as well as modified environment. This foundation itself is being shaped by the given natural and cultural circumstances of a society in question, historically and geographically confined, also understood as the ‘transcendental’, which then gives way to how the relationship towards Nature is being perceived (ibid). The second sense of spirituality in this context relates to the aspirations and ideas of human self-realization, in terms of finality, societies hold and which thus belong to a more intimate and internal level. Bourg (2018: 75) states that “there exists no society that does not hold one or several ideals of accomplishment of our humanity”, while suggesting that such an accomplishment is akin to the surpassing of oneself. This is illustrated by the quest of enlightenment of a Buddhist or the oftentimes materialistic finalities of Western or Westernized societies⁹. The transcendental in this context is thus the ideal of human accomplishment towards which individuals converge (Bourg, 2018).

The two functions of spirituality taken together have been framed as a ‘function of exteriority’, which are hence being situated at the interface of a given society and its exterior. Spirituality is in this respect not perceived as an independent social unit, such as the economical, political or scientific sphere but concerns all spheres (ibid). If this is so, actions within all spheres of a given society are preceded by the spiritual dimension, whether they are in favor of the ecosystem or not. Spiritualities in their both senses are interdependent and mutually reinforcing themselves, but generally speaking the second sense is being conditioned by the first sense. The reception of the environment gives way to how individuals of a society relate to it and thus ideas of accomplishment are being shaped. Nonetheless, the two functions of spirituality have been stated to be mostly overlapping in certain indigenous oral traditions, where the accomplishment itself can only be made possible when in close communion with a given natural environment (ibid). Similar to the universal meaning of spirituality, the notion of ‘social imaginary’ has been discussed by Eaton (2009), as being the set of ideas, visions and perceptions of the Nature that are anchored in our cultural subconscious.

2.1.2 Spirituality: Discursive shift and new contemporary signification

There is an ongoing claim that the meaning of spirituality has undergone a fundamental discursive shift in the modern and post-modern era (Huss, 2014; King, 1996). It has re-emerged as a newly constructed cultural category in the late 20th century with rising popularity, whose definition and uses have altered. It is henceforth largely existing outside of religiosity and in contrast to its premodern usage oftentimes conciliable with the material realm. Moreover, it has been stated, that the contemporary usage of spirituality questions and invalidates the former dichotomy between the religious and the secular that had been taken for granted (Huss, 2014). New social practices and lifestyles have emerged which belong to neither of these categories. Indeed many people consider

⁹ Further discussion on Western spirituality in chapter 2.3.1 ‘Technoscience and Western spirituality’.

themselves as spiritual without being religious in Western or Westernized societies, a frequently heard statement (Huss, 2014; King, 1996). Its usage is still related to Christian spirituality in the original, biblical sense, to a certain degree, however it has largely evolved beyond these boundaries. It has been said that contemporary spirituality has received many ideas from Oriental cultures since the end of 19th century which were perceived as being more genuinely religious and spiritual than their secular and materialistic Western counterpart. Huss (2014: 49) states that in the modern era, “[s]pirituality was connected to the religious, metaphysical, moral, subjective, private and experiential realms of life”. Under this new ‘contemporary signification’, spirituality is assimilated to a personal quest, intimately linked with personal growth and development, as well as a source of values and transcendental meaning beyond oneself, resulting in a sense of completion or wholeness. Further accounts observe, that spirituality hints to the “intuitive, non-rational meditative side of ourselves, [...] that strive for inner and outer connection [...]”, as well as “[...] an ultimate or immaterial reality; an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of their being; or the ‘deepest values and meanings by which people live’ [...]” (Forman, 2004: 48). Such Eastern-inspired contemporary spirituality tends to emphasize the subjective and individual core of universal religiosity. In this context, it needs to be pointed out that it has oftentimes been criticized for such features as being overly individualistic and self-regarding, as well as being inherently conciliable with capitalistic dynamic and thus merely being a neoliberal byproduct ¹⁰ (Bruce, 2017).

2.1.3 Religion: Definition and implications

Religion has been defined as “the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death [which] are expressed in terms of one’s relationship with or attitude toward gods or spirits [...]” (“Religion”, def.1). Yet, there exists a vast number of diverse ‘religions’ in the world, most of which are very distinct in their traditions and complexity. It is thus difficult to exactly define the meaning behind this term. As understood in the West, religion can be regarded as a socially shared and organized set of beliefs which is inseparable from certain dedicated, usually hierarchically organized institutions. These beliefs are based on the assumption that some invisible, supernatural being, force or agency exists. Moreover, they induce a moral judgement within the follower, who wants to placate this supernatural force by doing certain things and refraining from doing other things. The performance of ritualistic practices, prayer and meditation, participation in religious institution, right belief and moral conduct constitute amongst others inherent features of religion (Bourg, 2018; Bruce, 2017; “Religion”, def.1). In this form, they constitute late inventions in the course of human evolution, which are essentially historically contingent and fluctuant (Eaton, 2009).

¹⁰ Further discussion on the topic of New Age Spirituality will be held in Chapter 3.2 ‘Questioning the secularization theory’, especially on the much criticized ‘subjective turn’ that these spiritualities have undergone (Partridge, 2004).

They mostly assume *a priori* a spirituality from it's follower and are therefore said to be less universal and fundamental. This notwithstanding, the social imaginary, mentioned above, is being conditioned in many cultures by prevailing beliefs systems or religions. Such an example will be seen in the next chapter's outline as to how Christian religion has had substantial influence in shaping Western spirituality. In this sense, the role of religion may be significant as to shaping a social imaginary that is potentially conciliable with, for instance, genuine ecological preoccupation, thus bringing forth or inducing changes in both of the senses of spirituality discussed above. Nevertheless, it is admitted that many religions entail too rigid and specific doctrines in order to bring forth a social imaginary which is sufficiently concerned with ecological issues in present days. Arguably most religions have been constructed in an epoch where these preoccupations were not yet existent, this being particularly applicable to monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam, due to their anthropocentric component that tends to highly value human beings over other living forms (Eaton, 2009).

2.2 Christianity and Secularization

2.2.1 Role of Christianity in Western civilization

Central to the proposition that there exists an inherent link between the ecological crisis and an anthropocentric worldview promoted by the Genesis creation narrative has been Lynn White Jr's essay entitled 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' which was published in 1967¹¹. In the article, Western Christianity has been accused for having interpreted the Genesis in a 'despotic' manner, meaning that God has allegedly created the natural world in order for human beings to exploit it for their satisfactions and pleasures and presumably ordered them to dominate over the Earth and all creatures. Human beings have been created as 'imago dei' who are thus, like God, external and alien to the natural world. An inherently dualistic worldview separating human from Nature, being referred to as 'naturalism'¹² by Philippe Descola, has been brought forth by Christianity which then generates the assumption that human beings do not belong to the natural community (Sponsel, 2012). A dominating, predacious but also indifferent stance towards the environment, henceforth perceived as a mere commodity whose value is thus merely instrumental, would have been the anthropological, or the 'first sense spiritual' consequence for Western civilization. Moreover, Christian axioms comprise perpetual progress, unchallenged confidence in technology and an exaltation of the individual (White, 1967). Christianity, in this context, has been described by White as the most anthropocentric religion that has ever existed. In addition, vereneration of the Nature as being pervaded by spirits or the sacred has been replaced by the

11 In 1867, John Muir had already concluded that Christianity held some responsibility in environmental degradation by promoting an anthropocentric worldview potentially harmful towards the environment. Equally Aldo Leopold, 50 years later, claimed that religions like Christianity constitute obstacles towards a biocentric ethic, formulated by himself, that tends to preserve the biotic community.

12 By 'naturalizing' the non-human world and framing it as 'Nature'.

monotheistic belief and veneration of the saint, who resides thereafter in the celestial sphere, disconnected from the natural environment. Natural elements, in particular former sacred forests or places, have therefore lost much of their sacrality.

White concludes thus, that upon such a worldview the emergence of an ecological crisis has been enabled, coupled with excessive rationalization and deployment of technology and science by the Western civilization. The crisis bears in its roots an anthropological or spiritual dysfunction, that is inherently destructive towards the environment (Sponsel, 2012). Human beings behave towards the environment following what they believe about their relationship towards latter. This relationship, as well as individuals' aspirations are in that regard being conditioned by their religious belief. Hence, White proposes that responses to the ecological crisis must necessarily be of spiritual or religious nature, which presupposes thorough reflexion upon our anthropological roots. It has been argued that the ecological crisis is a crisis where the civilization has lost its sacred vision of the cosmos. Nevertheless, given the fact that the crisis is a global eco-systemic crisis, as mentioned above, a sole reconsideration of Western spirituality will obviously not be a sufficient answer (Egger, 2009, 2012). Political, economical and technological and scientific preoccupations will naturally be part of a multidisciplinary answer. Nevertheless, the aim in this chapter is to show that the spiritual component does constitute a crucial question when dealing with ecological issues which have previously been stated to be taking place on a systemic scale.

White's thesis, while not unanimously being found compelling by everyone, has largely contributed to the emergence of a vast array of controversies and debates on the role of religion as well as of studies upon the emerging field of Ecology and Spirituality (Sponsel, 2012). Yet, White's radical proposition oftentimes, and somewhat misleadingly, lead to the perception that Christianity is the villain that singularly provoked the eco-crisis, however this assertion needs to be differentiated. In this context it is important to point out, that a radically anthropocentric worldview considering Nature as a commodity constitutes merely one possible interpretation of the Genesis, namely the 'despotic' interpretation, as framed by Callicott (2011), a way of understanding the Creation narrative that is being heavily criticized by an array of authors (Eaton, 2009; Francis, 2015). Indeed, alternative 'intendant' or 'citizen' interpretations allude to the idea that the Creation has been provided by a 'loving God' to mankind in order to be taken care of, instead of being exploited. The human being, rather than being attributed special privileges, is henceforth subject to an array of responsibilities, which annihilates anthropocentric worldviews. In the citizen interpretation, there is moreover a strong emphasis being put on Franciscan ethics and which thus bears additional implications as to frugal lifestyles and brotherhood amongst living beings (Bourg, 2018; Callicott, 2011). Such alternative understandings naturally may have substantial consequences upon relationships towards the natural environment, if the hypothesis is being maintained that Christianity is central in shaping Western civilization's consciousness. It is held, that the Eastern Orthodox Church or other Eastern Christian trends have adopted different tenets that have progressively distanced themselves from their Western counterpart during the schism of

mid 11th century. Strong allusions to such alternative interpretations are actually being found in Eastern Christianity (Egger, 2009, 2012).

It has been claimed that desacralization, the expulsion of sacredness from the natural world, has played a pivotal role for the unhealthy relationship that Western civilization maintains towards the environment and which eventually lead to multiple ecological issues. Even though Christianity can be said to have largely contributed in shaping a consciousness that was likely to provoke a crisis on the long run, other key factors need to be considered in order to understand that an entangling of social, economical and religious forces have equally constituted important drivers in shaping the modern Western culture. In order to better situate the socio-historical emergence of the ecological crisis, light will be shed in the following chapters on major principles that may have led to the forthcoming of techno-scientific supremacy, as well as the expulsion of sacrality.

2.2.2 Secularization and Disenchantment of the West

It will be seen in the following lines, how the secularization and disenchantment theory somewhat applies to what has been called a desacralization. The disenchanted worldview, dominant amongst Western spirituality, has been a term coined by Max Weber (1864-1920), by referring to ‘die Entzauberung der Welt’, standing for the disenchantment of the world. According to Weber, “an increasing intellectualization and rationalization [would have led to assumption], that everything can be known anytime if one wished to. Hence there would not anymore exist any mysterious unpredictable forces [...], and that all things would be controllable by calculation.”. In other words, interpretations of natural phenomena would, through increasing rationalization, a key characteristic of modernization according to Weber, not rely on myths, superstition and magic anymore, but on a rational-cognitive approach, hence the disenchantment. This evolution would fuel at the same time humans beings’ dependence on economical logic and technology. Disenchantment can be assimilated to desacralization, through the assertion that Western civilization does indeed not know anymore what sacredness means. In this context, secularization, can traditionally be seen as a central element of the disenchantment theory (Ott, 2016; Partridge, 2004).

In broad lines secularization has been characterized by Bryan Wilson (1926-2004) as the fact that Christian religion has lost its influence at the societal, institutional and individual level (Dobbelaere, 2006). This stands in contrast to the medieval period where social order was being controlled and prescribed by the Church. Secularization has also been framed, in a shortened version, as the mere absence of the religious or spiritual (Bruce, 2017). Yet, it needs to be pointed out that secularization is not a universally qualifiable historical process but much more an expression to point at a historically and geographically specific set of changes that has occurred to Western religion since the Reformation and which can be regarded as an “in-motion and irreversible process” (Partridge, 2004: 8) whose definition is ambivalent. Following secularization theories,

there exist different types of secularization, most of which are however not mutually exclusive, ranging from the claim of a total disappearing of religious understanding of the world within Western civilization to claims that the influence has merely decreased or lost its significance in the public sphere while staying active in private life (Partridge, 2004).

While the Protestant Reformation can be seen as a significant watershed as to understanding the proliferation of secularization, it has been stated that the origins of secularization processes have their roots in the very creation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, inherited by the Semitic people and its monotheistic cosmology, coupled with the influence of hellenistic science which already at that epoch dismissed supernatural interpretations of natural phenomena (Ott, 2016).

It has been held that monotheism constituted a powerful driving force as to shaping the Hebrew as well as later on Christian cultural consciousness, whose consequences were two sided (Partridge, 2004). On one hand monotheism was able to endow civilization with solid religiosity, thanks to the absence of “competing, capricious deities, spirits and entities” (Partridge, 2004: 10), where worshippers were obliged to obey henceforth a single God, who could not be manipulated by ritualistic means. On the other hand the monotheistic belief system has come to establish a dichotomy within the fundamental consciousness of Judaism and Christianity between the sacred and the profane, the religious and secular (Partridge, 2004). Unlike deities of polytheistic belief systems, the Judaeo-Christian monotheistic God resides in a transcendental celestial sphere and is thus clearly separated from any natural elements. Magico-religious components of ancient polytheistic beliefs lost their significance, while spirits and gods were evacuated from the natural world (White, 1967), rendering latter, even though created by a ‘loving God’, an arena of pure physicality. The clear distinction between the sacred and the profane residing in the Christian cosmology since its beginning has constituted a pivotal precondition, as well as framework under which secularization was likely to happen. Nevertheless, such secular tendencies were also striven to be suppressed by the Catholic Church in the medieval period, by seeking to reinforce and spread a purely theological understanding of the universe. Indeed, religion has been pervasive at all levels of society and institutions of the medieval Western civilization, such as politics, economy or education in pre-modern times (Bruce, 2017).

Moreover, it needs to be pointed out that secularization is not an inevitable result of the maturation of human civilization as an expression of the denial of ‘primitive beliefs’ in an age of scientific knowledge. Sophistication, intelligence and the increase of knowledge within Western civilization do not necessarily lead towards secular worldviews. Such transformations are attributable to an entangling of “social, political and psychological processes” (Partridge, 2004: 12). During the advent of modernity, social fragmentation and the autonomization of different social units have made the implementation of scientific rationality a necessity where consequences of actions needed to be predictable by calculation, while petitionary prayers of religious beliefs have increasingly become an absurdity. The degree of rationalization that the civilization has taken up is sometimes being measured by the degree to which supernatural elements are evacuated from the

world (Dobbelaere, 2006). By opposing community to society, it has been maintained that the complexity of societal organization was not anymore controllable based on supernatural concepts or religious conceptions, but increasingly requiring technological innovation. Individualization, bureaucratization and delocalization of activities have progressively invalidated the original sense of community in which ideas and visions are shared and lives were lived under the protective influence of a community Church at their center (Ott, 2016; Partridge, 2004). Besides, societalization has been framed by Wilson as an inherent characteristic of modernity, whereas secularization can be seen as happening concomitant to the decline of community (Dobbelaere, 2006).

The Protestant Reformation, as well as later on the Age of Enlightenment have constituted major turning points towards a progressive detachment from purely supernaturalistic worldviews, bringing forth again the suppressed secular components within Christianity. On this occasion, Christianity was notably subject to internal secularization of its own institutions and populations. Elimination of mystical and sacred components of religious belief have in this context particularly been operated within the framework of Protestantism (Dobbelaere, 2006). The secularization process has then greatly accelerated during the industrial revolution leading up to modernity where the size and social power of Christian church has steadily been declining amongst Western societies (Bruce, 2017). Following this understanding, Christianity was itself faulty of its own decline.

Descriptions of disenchantment are assimilable to secularization in the loss of the enchanted perception of Nature as being pervaded by spiritual and magical forces. Besides, religion is not anymore consulted for legitimations when interfering with the natural environment. Unexplainable phenomena no longer belong to the domain of mystery but become henceforth unsolved problems for science. Religion has lost its significance in explaining or interpreting the world, since all explanations must now necessarily be of scientific nature. Ever present rationalism, social fragmentation and specialization of modern civilization, decline of community as well as the prevailing economical dynamics, are all traits of a henceforth disenchanted world.

2.3 Western consciousness and ecological crisis

While in the previous two chapters, light was shed on historical elements, with focus on religious-spiritual aspects, that led to the ecological crisis, the present chapter (2.3) deals with the Western consciousness itself and how it is maintaining diverse ecological issues. What has been framed as the ‘technocratic paradigm’ by Pope Francis (2015) can be seen as the devastating intertwining between technoscience and a stance of domination towards Nature, characteristic of Western spirituality. It will thus be seen how these two components are mutually reinforcing themselves. The following chapter will then be dedicated on understanding to what extent the growth-orientated economical logic in Western civilization is reducible to its very spirituality.

2.3.1 ‘Technoscience’ and Western spirituality

‘Exosomatization’ is being referred to as the exteriorization of human capacities through the usage of tools, which has arguably been inseparable from human history (Bourg, 2018). Early forms of such delegations consisted in the usage of the alphabet which enabled the exteriorization of cognitive capacities, whereas in modern times a striking example would constitute transport technologies which replace human capacities of mobility. In its radical forms, it has already become the expression of artificial intelligence. Since the invention of the greek alphabet, such exteriorizations constitute the history of the progressive detachment from Nature (ibid). Equally the breakthrough of the heavy plough during the european medieval agricultural revolution around the year 1000 has been invoked as a milestone in the process where technology has begun to be systematically used for the control and domination of the Earth, as well as major scientific progress since the 16th century. Since the loosening of frontiers between social classes due to democratization in the 19th century, the combination of scientific research and industrial production of technology as ‘technoscience’¹³ was largely rendered possible, science having henceforth a pragmatismal implication (White, 1967). In addition, technoscience conveys the implication that all products are being created in order to be economically profitable (Bourg, 2018). It has been stated that “contemporary technoscience [...] fulfills the ‘project of modernity’¹⁴: man makes himself master and possessor of nature. But at the same time contemporary technoscience profoundly destabilizes that project [...]” (Hottois, 2018: 124). This mainly represents the observation that such technology was capable of inflicting for the first time transformations to Nature of significant damaging dimensions, which through its ramification fall back on civilization itself, hence the term’s contemporary usage may have a critical undertone (Barnebeck *et al.*, 2016; Hottois, 2018; White, 1967).

In present days this exosomatization has gained unrestricted expansion, to the point that modern civilization puts unreasonable confidence into technological achievement as a means of resolving all kinds of difficulties. Coupled with ‘scientific arrogance’ it can henceforth manage and cure diseases, and more generally control anything through technology or technoscience, instead of turning to God through prayer (Bruce, 2017). In a secular civilization, where rationality and predictability are decisive, the role of science as a base of producing technology has become far more important than creating belief systems, because of the diminishing need of the supernatural. It has been held that Western culture, due to its achievements, is endowed with a high degree of self-esteem or self-importance. In addition, the meaning of technology has undergone a fundamental transformation¹⁵, from being a means for serving human needs and constituting a “basic

13 It is said that J.F. Lyotard and B. Latour mainly disseminated the term in the 1980s, which suggested by its usage a criticism on modernity and capitalism (Hottois, 2018).

14 The project of modernity constitutes generally speaking the philosophic movement leading up to modernity, under which key figures such as Francis Bacon, René Descartes or Galileo Galilei have figured.

15 In this context it needs to be pointed out, that at the start of the 21st century one cannot anymore simply speak of ‘Western technoscience’. In other words, the techno-scientific supremacy is not anymore solely attributable to the

requirement of social progress” (Bonnett, 2004: 164), it has become a means of completely compelling the natural environment as well as somewhat striving to make up for all human imperfections (Bourg, 2010, 2018).

From the vantage point of universal spirituality it has been maintained that Western civilization harbors a somewhat defective spirituality in its both senses (Bourg, 2018). Constant seeking and needing of environmental transformation, an excessive credo in technology and capitalism as to resolving all problems and being viable on the long run, an indifference towards the environmental degradation and exploitation, an exaltation of the individual and belief in self-actualization through consumption and capital accumulation are all expressions of such a spirituality. Even though this qualification is to some extent an exaggerated generalization, the investigation on Western spirituality still provides relevant insights as to understanding why there is an inherent link between latter and eco-crises. Some of these points may thus explain the underlying reasons of issues discussed in chapter 1.2 ‘Dead ends of modernity and the call for a transition’.

As for the first sense of spirituality, it has been held that Western societies perceive the natural environment as unworthy in itself. In other words an intrinsic value is not being recognized in and attributed to it, which stands in contrast with many indigenous populations or pre-modern societies. Bourg (2018: 140) speaks of a “denying ontology” in this context, which leads to the above stated compulsive need of persistently modifying the natural environment.

Regarding its second sense, the model of aspiration and accomplishment, ideas of self-actualization are mostly related to consumerist practices, while the finality consists in transcending oneself’s own finitude of mortality by infinitely accumulating goods and capital. Under this secular, second sense of Western spirituality, the transcendental, exterior dimension towards which society’s aspiration points, is in reality located within society itself, namely in form of secular goods and services (Bourg, 2018). In contrast, other societies receive strong implications towards a voluntary moderation of their consumption due to the very ideas of human accomplishment they possess, which lie beyond the pursuit of accomplishment through consumption, inside the societal boundaries (ibid).

2.3.2 Debate on the economic agent within Western spirituality

Christian Arnsperger (2017) has given an account on the topic of economic anthropology, as to explaining the forthcoming of material and consumption orientation as a means of accomplishment within modern Western civilization. In order to do so, an array of key concepts have been outlined, which will briefly be elucidated in the following lines, as these harbor relevant insights in relation to human aspiration. Basic tenets of this account comprise the idea that two antagonistic types of archetypical human beings (See Figure 1) have emerged during the advent of modern civilization

West. East Asia has largely replaced Western countries in this role (Bonnett, 2004).

out of an original archetypical individual, which represents the initial human condition, driven by two major forces that seek to be placated: Firstly the strive for overcoming death by surviving on a biophysical level. This underlying force has been labeled as the ‘existential fearful energy’, in other terms the fear of death and “the dread of abjection and of animality” (Arnsperger, 2017: IV/2). Secondly the so-called ‘internal force of Ghandian desire’, which is akin to the desire of fulfilling human’s ‘infinite nature’ while satisfying its transcendental aspiration, hence comparable to the second sense of spirituality discussed in chapter ‘2.1.1 ‘Spirituality: Premodern and universal definition’. The account then advances the hypothesis that the two subsequent individuals are fundamentally different due to a divergent interpretation of the placation of these two forces, while both individuals are seeking for ways to “quench their thirst for infinity” (Arnsperger, 2017: V/3). The first kind is the ‘Smithian individual’, acting upon rationality and economic logic, which is the ideal archetype for describing the Western ‘commercial society’ and representative of the Western spirituality discussed in the previous chapter. The second archetype is the ‘Sahlinsian individual’¹⁶ which has been stated as being a more reflexive type of human being that may be more compatible with the ecosystem. Central to Arnsperger’s argumentation is the assertion that the ‘Smithian individual’ within Western and Westernized spirituality of modern civilization needs to undergo a fundamental transformation in order to converge towards a ‘Sahlinsian individual’ through a thorough reassessment of its spirituality on an individual scale as well as through institutional support on a political level.

As for the ‘Smithian individual’, it is believed that enlightenment economist and philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790) has had significant influence on the proliferation of the ‘economic individual’, based on the belief that the economical trait is intrinsic in the human psychological condition. His efforts were driven by the need of contributing to the establishment of a prospering, capitalistic Western civilization that sets itself apart from the pre-modern era, characterized by illness, scarcity, insalubrity and lack of social security. Proliferation of rationality and predictability as seen in the disenchantment and secularization theories, as well as legitimacy obtained through a despotic interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative as to the free and indifferent exploitation of Earth’s resources constituted the ideal framework under which these efforts could have been made possible. Besides, Smith and contemporary enlightenment philosophers maintained that the commercial society was inevitably bound to arrive due to this inherent psychological trait, thus denying the contingency of modern Western spirituality. The economic agent, acting thereafter as a firm part of a capitalistic society, is the archetypical representative of Western spirituality. It has been stated that the Smithian individual is seeking accomplishment by pursuing a quest of infinity of accumulative and materialistic nature. In this context, the difference between relative and absolute needs, discussed in chapter 1.2.2 ‘Discrepancy

16 Although in the account it is stated that the Sahlinsian represents a too radical lifestyle, in order to be viable in a modern society. A subsequent ‘Illichian individual’ derives from latter, which is thus more adapted, representing the so-called ‘convivial counter-culture’. The aim of this chapter is however to show the fundamental differences between the two archetypes and investigating the initial human condition, rather than discussing in detail ideas of the counter-culture.

between wealth and well-being', will be considered once more. Capitalistic dynamic has been presumably implemented in order to overcome material scarcity or lack of social security. However, due to a reversal of its original finality, consumerist-productive logic of capitalistic culture has been applied to the placation of human desire (See Figure 1). Yet, it has been maintained, that consumerism-productivity, while providing an array of sensory satisfactions or pleasures that may temporarily, through overstimulation, numb the internal force of desire, does not adequately and purposefully do justice to this specific human aspiration. This leads to the conclusion that consumerism, despite at the expense of a lifestyle that is not sustainable from an ecosystem vantage point, is to a certain extent capable of blurring, if not dissimulating adequate ways of responding to human's spiritual aspiration. This notwithstanding, Arnsperger claims, that the Smithian individual is relentlessly crossed by a 'psychology of lack', ever seeking to quench his desire, which is due to the fact that consumerism cannot provide a genuine satisfaction of the above stated aspiration. In this context, the consequences of a continuous growth-orientated consumerist-productive culture upon the ecosystem have been mapped out in chapter 1.

Regarding the 'Sahlinsian individual', whose name has been inspired by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, it can be stated, in outline, that he is marked by a lifestyle of moderation and a critical stance towards consumerist-productivity culture. In order to fulfill his internal force of Ghandian desire he expresses his transcendental aspiration through appropriate practices and activities. His value orientation can be said to be intrinsically orientated, thus seeking self-actualization through intrinsic means, while extrinsic value orientation, characteristic of Smithian individuals, constitutes self-accomplishment through material goods and social acceptance such as fame and popularity (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000). Arnsperger (2017: V/3) argues, that the Western archetypical human being, the Smithian 'homo oeconomicus crescens', the 'growing economic human', or 'growth orientated economic human', is "choosing the wrong infinity, so to speak, by projecting his spiritual aspiration of personal expansion into certain domains – notably the domain of material goods but also the domain of affective relationships – where [in reality] this aspiration cannot be matched.". He then states that "only when the human being realizes this 'mistake on infinity' and voluntarily agrees on a bio-psychic autolimitation [he can] live like a 'real infinity', and not an auto-mutilation [...]". In this sense, capitalistic growth orientation is in itself already crossed by a spiritual dimension, even though oftentimes unnoticeably.

Religions can give to a certain extent insights as to the meaning of the transcendental aspiration, for instance by encouraging to seek salvation within Christianity or enlightenment within Buddhism (Bourg, 2018). Nevertheless, in modern Western civilization the meaning behind such aspirations remains largely unquestioned and undiscovered. The two original forces of the human condition which ideally require distinct approaches are combined in a single consumerist-productive answer. Western spirituality can thus be accused of not being able to distinguish between these two fundamental drivers. Which concepts and practices may do justice to the internal force of Ghandian desire, the placation of the aspiration within the second sense of spirituality, and thus

enable “the growth-orientated human being to agree voluntarily on a bio-psychic autolimitation” (Arnsperger, 2017: V/5), thus progressively adopting lifestyles that are ecosphere-compatible, remain yet to be discussed in the coming chapters.

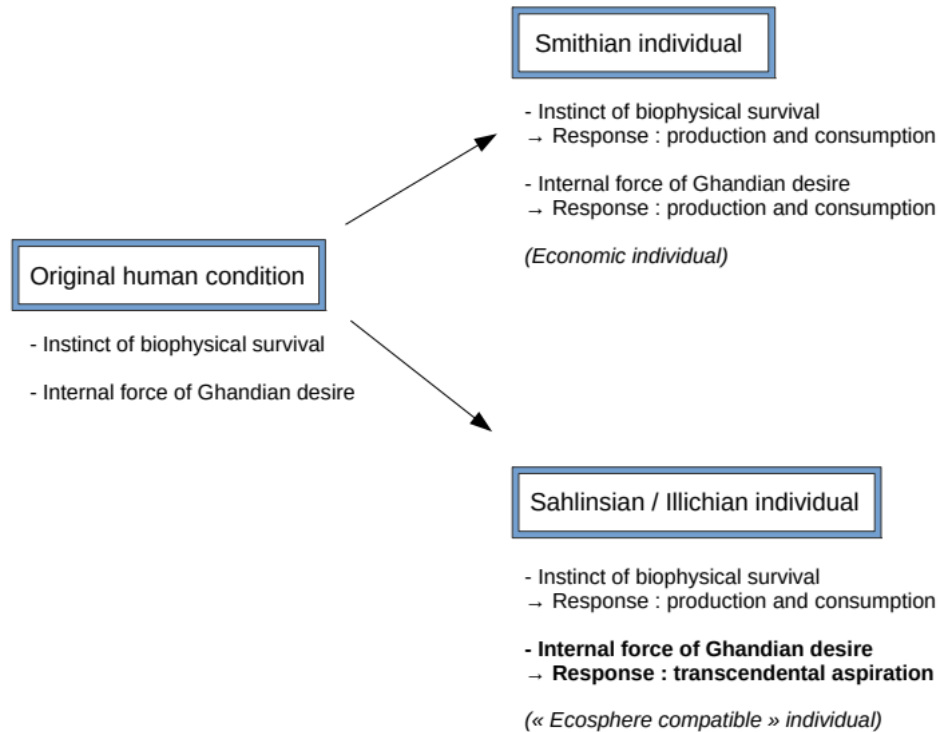


Figure 1: Smithian and Sahlinsian individuals (simplified¹⁷)

17 This representation does not include all key concepts discussed in the original account given on the emergence of the two archetypal individuals, such as the ‘Terror Management Theory’ which has been the original explanation of fundamental forces the human condition is crossed by.

Chapter 3: Ecology & Spirituality: Approaches and precautions

This chapter's aim is to provide on one hand a brief overview of advocacies and approaches that have been made by authors who endorse the role of religion or spirituality when dealing with ecological matters. Certain key concepts that are being evoked in the diverse advocacies will be further outlined. It will then briefly qualify the contemporary phenomenon of New Age Spirituality, and subsequently discuss potential objections that arise against it. Lastly, arising fallacies and idealisms due to misconceptions of foreign, in particular Eastern, traditions as well as difficulties of intercultural understandings will be discussed, since 1) there is a common tendency to refer to Eastern spiritual traditions when advocating contemporary forms of spirituality (King, 1996) and 2) this essay will devote its second part to an Eastern belief-system, Shinto, thus preliminary considerations will be relevant.

3.1 Advocacies and approaches

3.1.1 Advocacies and reconsideration of Christianity

Numerous authors do indeed stress the importance and even urgency that resides in responses of religious-spiritual nature towards the ecological crisis. Lynn White's above cited article of 1967 (c.f. Chapter 2.2.1 'Role of Christianity in Western civilization') is said to have ignited an array debates, in which the role of religion was to be reconsidered, including the possibility of adopting tenets of foreign religions. In other cases the possibility to attach environmental themes to traditional belief-systems where these themes were lacking, was considered. White (1967: 24) thereby advocates, that remedies to the ecological crisis have to be "essentially religious, if one may call it as such or not". A variety of movements have emerged as a response to the necessity of reforming obsolete anthropocentric world-views and in order to reflect upon a new type of nature-based spirituality.

Some found that spiritual core-ideas which are more in alignment with an ecosystem understanding of the Earth could be found in contemporary animistic and pagan spiritualities, where humans are considered as kin with non-human beings (Sponsel, 2012: 10). Such efforts draw inspiration from a series indigenous cultures as well as diverse religious and spiritual traditions found across the globe. Amongst them are to be mentioned the 'Dark Green Religion' (which is more an environmental movement that values certain spiritual principles rather than a religion), by Bron Taylor, as well as the 'Spiritual Ecology Movement' founded by Hawaiian professor emeritus Leslie Sponsel which is a relatively young movement. Such movements usually have a number of common denominators, which comprise the overcoming of dualistic and reductionist world-views, a spiritual development closely related to Nature, feelings of kinship with all living beings, as well as a re-awakening of inherent feelings of belonging to Nature (ibid: 11).

Similarly, Heather Eaton (2009), advocated the pivotal role that can be played by religions, provided that they are devoid from their oftentimes too rigid and specific doctrines which may not be able to bring forth an operational ecological ‘social imaginary’, as she frames. Moreover, she estimates that the anthropocentric Western Christian spirituality needs to be reevaluated, in order to better take into consideration Nature as an essentially interdependent phenomenon which comprises the human being (ibid: 132). In this context she pushes for a new form of religion, or a ‘common spirituality’, which is capable of responding to socio-ecological problems, and thus capable of generating a ‘social imaginary’ which has an ecological consciousness in its roots. Eaton (ibid: 142) states, however, that notably religions need in this endeavor to overcome their assertions of maintaining the unique truth.

In the same vein, Pope Francis (2015), well aware of the accusation that Christianity has been subject to, as well as informed about diverse ecological matters, proposes a fundamental reconsideration of his own religion in his encyclical letter ‘Laudato Si’, advocating a Franciscan worldview of universal kinship amongst all living beings, as had already been endorsed by White (1967). Equally, Michel Maxime Egger (2012), who will be talked upon in the following chapter, a pious follower of Christian Orthodox tradition, has striven to find an array of responses to the ecological crisis within Christianity, or better said, a redefinition of Christianity.

By stressing the role of ethics, John Baird Callicott has invested an effort in inventorying a large array of world belief-systems in his book ‘Earth’s Insights’ (1994) while analyzing them upon relevant resources that could foster an ‘eco-centric environmental ethics’ that is aware of the eco-sphere in a holistic or ‘holographic’ way. Environmental ethics represent for him an ideal of human comportment to strive after. Central to Callicott’s approach is the investigation upon elements that may enable the attribution of an intrinsic value to Nature in its integrity, latter being framed as the (personal translation) “most sensitive problem of secular, non anthropocentric ethics” (Callicott, 2011: 54). In this context, he insists upon the absence of an “axiological reference, independent of the human consciousness” (ibid: 55), if there was no divine reference. By referring to his ‘Judaeo-Christian environmental ethics of stewardship’ he thus states that “God intervenes in order to fill this axiological void.” (ibid). It is thus through the divine attribution that all Natural elements are perceived as possessing an intrinsic value.

The aim is here to show through some of these examples the relevance of reflecting upon religious-spiritual topics, rather than inventorying in detail all the endeavors that have been undertaking over the course of history in the field of Ecology and Spirituality. Therefore many authors, concepts and actors have without a doubt been omitted here which are greatly contributing to the advances in this domain. Nevertheless, it is hoped that legitimacy may be obtained as to studying in the second part of this essay the Eastern belief system ‘Shinto’ in search of resources that may foster an ecological awareness.

3.1.2 Eco-spirituality: A Western approach of paradigm shifting

The Swiss sociologist and eco-theologian Michel Maxime Egger has been deeply involved in the field of Ecology and Spirituality. As an engaged actor he has substantially contributed, amongst others, to the framework of a so-called 'Eco-spirituality'. An Eco-spirituality perceives both domains, ecology and spirituality, as inextricably linked to each other. A central notion within this approach is the 'meta-noia', implying a veritable "spiritual metamorphosis" (Egger, 2012: 233), alluding thus to the transformational endeavor of the eco-spirituality project. He advocates in this context an "evolution of spiritual nature" (ibid: 21) towards a new "level of being and of consciousness" (ibid), in order to live within a "new alliance between human and Nature." (ibid). The purpose of a paradigm shift, as well as the objective of the eco-spirituality project would be the achievement of a so-called 'integral ecology' (Egger, 2012: 17), distinct from Pope Francis' eponymous concept mentioned in chapter 1.1.1 'Scientific findings', despite their common concern for truthful ecological preoccupation. An 'integral ecology' is the combination of the henceforth distinctly regarded, but inherently intertwined 'external' and 'internal' ecology. External ecology implies environmental action on political and ethical levels such as certification mechanisms, international agreements, as well as on a practical level eco-friendly everyday gestures, bioclimatic architecture, eco-friendly transport systems as well as agro-ecological farming systems (ibid: 15). In contrast, internal ecology concerns aspects of the human consciousness. The internal ecology both refers to a 'paradigm' through which the Nature or other human beings are perceived, as well as value systems, attitudes or ideas of self-actualization on an individual as well as societal scale, and constitutes a key driver for the 'external' side (ibid: 17). The concept of integral ecology indicates that genuine action within the diverse fields of the external ecology can only take place, if necessary transformations have taken place on the 'internal' side, where then the ecological preoccupation can arise out of intrinsic motivations. Eco-spirituality advocates the interdependent union between internal and external ecology, by claiming that it is neither a project of "simply adding a spiritual dimension to ecological commitment or adding an ecological dimension to a spiritual path" (ibid: 18-19). Yet, its efforts can be seen as focused on the internal ecology, seeking to provide a response of spiritual nature to the 'spiritual crisis' within the systemic eco-crisis. Its discourse thus situates itself in the wake of the movements that arose from debates following Lynn White's article of 1967, henceforth associating religion and Nature or spirituality and ecology.

Egger (2012: 17-22) asserts that much of the deficiencies in Western spirituality and its unbalanced relationship towards the natural environment derive from the fact that Western civilization has lost a sacred vision of the cosmos and thus urgently calls out for a reconnection with this aspect. According to him, the sacred has to be "found again or reinvented as the divine presence within creation" (ibid: 18), which can subsequently provide "a foundation and deeper meaning to the ecological commitment." (ibid). Yet, much like the terms of spirituality and religion, the term sacrality remains vague in its definition. The idea of the sacred of Mircea Eliade has been

influenced, for instance, by the perception of the subliminal in the environment, thus environments or elements which are particularly significant from an esthetical point of view (Rousseleau, February 2nd, 2018, personal communication). However, the attributed sacrality, is said to be essentially subjective in nature, and reveals itself to the person which is “prepared by their personal experience and their religious background to recognize it as such. To others [...] it does not exist; in fact it remains concealed in mundane objects and events.” (Rennie, 2007: 76). A stone, for instance remains essentially a physical object from a profane point of view, but for the person who perceives it as sacred, “its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality.” (ibid).

Despite the subjectivity of these perceptions, Egger has pointed out the importance of reclaiming a sense for the sacred, in order to operate paradigm shift towards an integral ecological consciousness. He has given a personal account on the sacred dimension in Nature and its ecological implications at a workshop for the “Work that reconnects”¹⁸, in April 2017, held in French¹⁹ (personal translation):

“[...] I firstly need to create an inner space, where then a kind of breath or light arises within myself. For myself I use prayer in order to establish contact with this other dimension within Nature. When one has such an experience, it becomes possible to establish a link with the all-encompassing dimension that exists in the whole Creation. It isn't myself who can get in contact with this dimension through a concentrated effort of developing diverse aptitudes. It is much more a work on our capacity of letting go, of listening and opening ourself up. It is through prayer and other practices that one can start to perceive and get in contact with this other dimension of Nature [...] and which enables to develop this sensibility and receptivity. One has to open oneself up to this presence. This presence is within us but one has to learn to perceive it. I will refer to the word of Pope Francis: it is the discovery of this presence which will enable the development of the ecological morality [...].”

3.1.3 Indigenous traditions and animism

Initially, the term animism has been coined by Edward B. Tylor in 1871 in order to describe a belief that admits the existence of a spiritual essence within Natural elements, including human beings, animals, plants, minerals as well as meteorological phenomenons such as wind, rain or thunders. Alternatively, Nature is conceived as being pervaded by a spiritual energy or conscience. Inhabited by such a vision, it is said, that an attitude of reverence, adoration as well as fear towards the supernatural residing in Nature has been ever present. Human beings are in that regard seen as participating in an all-encompassing network of kinship between all natural elements (Sponsel,

18 Joanna Macy – ‘The works that reconnects’ is an approach that situates itself in the wake of Ecology & Spirituality movements.

19 The communication can be consulted on <https://soundcloud.com/user-494362478/michel-maxime-egger-le-sacre-dans-la-nature>

2012: 14). Animism has in this context been described as the oldest belief system known to humanity existing on the whole globe and allegedly has been “the common substratum of all religions” (ibid). Many contemporary religions contain elements of animism to more or less strong degrees. In local declinations of Hinduism, for instance, it is common to admit that certain trees or objects, usually in the context of sacred groves, may receive specific deities, without it necessarily being the case. Yet, the fear and reverence towards the supernatural sphere has been, at least traditionally, assimilable to an animistic conception of Nature (Freeman, 2002). Indigenous, so-called oral traditions²⁰, which are at first glance characterized by a unique proximity towards Nature, are commonly described as possessing an animistic belief system which is at the same time an integral element of their daily lives (Sponsel, 2012: 10). In this context, shamans oftentimes stand at the interface between the humans, the physical and spiritual Nature, resorting to diverse trance or meditation induced altered states of consciousness in order to be able to communicate with the spiritual world (ibid: 15).

A renewed definition of animism has been impuled notably by anthropologists such as Phillippe Descola and later on Eduardo Kohn. Rather than defining it as a worldview that sees Nature as pervaded by either distinct spiritual entities or a spiritual force, the renewed definition qualifies animism through a certain type of relationship that is being held by human beings towards non-human elements, namely the attribution of an interiority of equal moral status as humans to all natural elements. In this regard, the idea of an interior continuity of souls amongst all beings is being opposed to a discontinuous relationship characteristic of Western dualism. For an animist, the non-human world is animate, it is considered as being “soul-possessing, signifying, [and having] intentional selves” (Kohn, 2013a: 93). The renewed definition has emerged, in contrast to the initial definition, as an advocacy to overcome a taken for granted dichotomy between Nature and the human culture, while criticizing a common tendency of the West to understand foreign cultures out of a ‘naturalistic’²¹ view, as well as its mechanistic representation of Nature (ibid). Furthermore, Kohn (2013b) states that it is not only a question of asking “how humans come to treat nonhumans as animate”, but also to realize that the other entity, in his example the puma or the forest as a reunification of entities, in reality also represents the human, as a thinking self. In other words, he points to the realization that the non-human Nature itself is thinking and communicating.

“Thinking with and not just about the forest’s thoughts can help us rethink a way to be human, by destabilizing what we mean by thinking”

Another form of relating and representing, he states, will be at the core of learning how to overcome the Nature-human dualism. He then claims (2013a: 94) that this extended thinking of animism “gets

20 In its common acceptionation the term points at cultures or populations existing in present times or have existed in the past and may have today evolved into modern civilizations, whose worldview and cosmology have essentially been passed on by oral means.

21 Dichotomous worldview of humans as separated from Nature.

at something more far reaching about the properties of the world” for which reason animism is “central for an anthropology beyond the human”.

Worldviews conveyed by animism, such as its emphasis on interdependence and universal kinship with other beings, have been described as harboring significant value for Ecology and Spirituality movements in that they inspire a re-enchantment of largely disenchanted views upon Nature within modern Western and Westernized societies. Indigenous traditions in this context tend to be idealized as being “ideal spiritual ecologists”, however it has to be kept in mind that they are not necessarily always living in pure symbiosis with the environment either (Sponsel, 2012: 19). The fallacy of spotlighting only certain aspects of such cultures which coincide with a certain ecological ideal, as well as arbitrarily deducting false cultural values and attitudes needs to be avoided. Freeman (2002) speaks in this regard of the phenomenon of cultural denaturation.

In Chapter 4, it will be seen that the diverse definitions of animism much apply to the worldviews conveyed by the Japanese belief system ‘Shinto’ in its ‘essential form’²² (Dougill, n.d.; Yamada, 1996), even though it has been stated that it is at the same time an animistic as well as an ancestor worship belief system (Dougill, n.d.).

3.2. Questioning the secularization theory

Above stated advocacies may lead to the conclusion that within Western civilization, a spirituality has been completely lost due to secularization, which now, or at least since the emergence of Ecology and Spirituality movements, needs to be rediscovered. Yet, secularization theory has been challenged on numerous occasions, against precipitate assertions of an entirely de-spiritualized Western world. Secularization pertinently points at the loss of influence of the Christian Church and its religious authorities upon the society, such as the loss of its authority as to defining people’s beliefs, practices and ethical values. Moreover, secularization implies the loss of interest and adherence to traditional forms of “social organizations [representing] a faith” (Bruce, 2017). However, on an individual level, there is no certitude as to the decline of belief and piety. The emergence of contemporary spirituality as a new cultural category may indeed invalidate secularization theory, since it brings forth, as already mentioned, new adaptations of religiosity which oftentimes situate themselves beyond the dichotomy of the secular and religious (Huss, 2014). Several authors, such as Bruce or Dobbelaere, claim the existence of an ongoing individual religiousness amongst many Westerners. Similarly, a “constantly evolving religio-cultural milieu” (Partridge, 2004: 2) is growing in scope, which has been stated to be far more significant than oftentimes assumed. Partridge (ibid) speaks in this context of a “confluence of secularization and a sacralization” in the West.

²² It will be elucidated in the coming chapters, why it is a delicate task to speak of an ‘essential’ or ‘original’ form of Shinto. First and foremost it will be stated that there is a lack of accurate historical sources.

Spirituality, may it be called as such or not, is largely present amongst Western civilization, which under its contemporary form is sometimes referred to as 'New Age Spirituality'. Partridge (2004) states that it has been frequently accused of taking an excessive 'subjective turn', largely concerned with personal well-being or personal spiritual 'enlightenment' and 'awakening', while at the same time being seamlessly conciliable with economic logic. He claims however that there is a large, rising tendency of genuine, contemporary spirituality, that certainly sets itself apart from the ephemerality and superficiality which contemporary spiritual trends have oftentimes accusingly been endowed with (ibid). He states that "[a]lthough it is true that *chosen* spirituality, understood as a *bricolage* project, would be a weakness in traditional, hierarchical religion, maybe it is a *strength* within the new subjective milieu" (Partridge, 2005: 9). He thus challenges the frequent claim, that such 'religions' tend to be weaker than religions taken up by fate, because the individual is aware of the fact that "he chose the gods". Religion in this respect becomes relegated from the social to the individual sphere but the commitment to the henceforth personal spirituality has not necessarily become weaker. Moreover, chosen spirituality is not necessarily synonymous to selfishness. As Partridge (2005: 12) states, "while spirituality is about *me, my wellbeing, my personal journey*, and the fulfillment of *my potential*, this is very often not a *selfish* path. [...] Rather, it tends to be a path that encourages individual responsibility."

3.3 East-West dichotomies

3.3.1 Buddhism and idealization

It has been stated that Eastern spiritualities have had great influence on the above stated contemporary forms of spirituality (King, 1996). A prominent example in this context constitutes Buddhism, which has been adopted all over the world. A considerable number of Western publications concerning environmentalism have indeed been inspired by Buddhist teachings. Nevertheless careful consideration needs to be given as to the appropriateness of instrumentalizing Buddhist precepts for environmental purposes (Sponsel, 2012: 37). Western attempts of coupling contemporary ecological concern with academic interpretation of ancient texts and teachings, while extracting latter from it's original context, sometimes referred to as 'Ecobuddhism', may distort and in some cases discredit their very core principles (Falcombello & Egger, 2017). Moreover, idealizing Buddhism against Christianity by framing it as a more environment-friendly alternative is dichotomizing and can simply not be held for true (ibid: 11). Besides, it also needs to be pointed out that some Buddhist countries suffer considerable environmental problems (Sponsel, 2012: 39). Certain core concepts reveal themselves not necessarily ecologically compatible, among others given the fact that Buddhism has emerged in a time where environmental preoccupation was inexistent and no particular value was being ascribed to wild Nature (Falcombello & Egger: 36-50).

Equally, the idea of Nature as being permeated by sacredness, sometimes affirmed by Buddhist protagonists, is alien to its original tenets (ibid: 61).

Yet, bearing above-mentioned precautions in mind, creative and tactful interpretations of Buddhist teachings, such as operated by the Dalai Lama may indeed prove themselves fruitful in tackling contemporary ecological challenges, by targeting to overcome anthropocentric worldviews as well as promote the recognition of interconnectedness and intrinsic value in Nature (ibid: 22). However a rigorous analysis will be necessary in order to prevent Ecobuddhism from becoming a “pleasant but not necessarily exact” version of Buddhism (ibid: 24). On the other hand a certain degree of acculturation, such as the Westernization of Buddhism, is inevitable and sometimes even necessary when considering the importation of foreign concepts in order to make them intelligible (ibid: 31).

3.3.2 Intercultural understanding

It has been stated that especially when considering foreign cultures which do not share the same cosmology or worldviews, deep understandings of the respective narratives are essential (Ackermann, 2006). Christianity and Japan, as an example, represent two distinct frames of reference in which ideas have evolved in different ways. Each culture draws from a different pool of explanations and justifications in order to express thoughts in relation to material, social and spiritual life (ibid). Thus for intercultural understanding, a thorough acknowledgement of the mutual narratives is crucial, instead of imposing a dichotomous thinking *a priori*, or trying to read the foreign culture through an own set of values. It has been stated, that such understandings are necessarily preceded by great amounts of efforts in order enable intercultural communication (ibid). Besides, it needs to be taken into consideration that concepts and notions which are obvious and commonplace in one culture do not necessarily exist in the other culture (King, 1996). In Japan, for example, this is typically the case with notions such as spirituality or religion. Even though translations have been made during their ‘importation’ from the West, they remain inaccurate and have entailed an array of misunderstandings, as it will be seen in the coming chapters.

Chapter 4: Shinto & Ecology

In this chapter, the Japanese belief system Shinto will be investigated. Some basic facts will be covered to begin with, in order to provide a general understanding including key concepts, its historical aspects as well as the meaning of the term religion in Japan. A closer look will then be taken at the transformations it has undergone since the 19th century, which will give insight as to how Japan has become an essentially secular nation despite its strong presence of religion. It shall also be discussed what significance Shinto harbors for understanding the Japanese culture and if there exists something which may be qualified as an essence of Shinto. These considerations may contribute to critically assessing diverse ecological discourses around Shinto which will be mapped out thereafter. Shinto indeed appears to be considered as a model for environmental preservation through the Nature-worship it promotes. Such environmental stances are being integrated by international online platforms and literature regarding Shinto ‘from the outside’ as well as by internal discourses within Shinto. Yet, especially in view of the many environmental degradations Japan has witnessed, but also in terms of unclarity of their applicability, precipitate ecological discourses tend to be dismissed as being idealistic or unrealistic. This being said, the belief system is experiencing continuous transformations. In recent years, several ‘booming’ phenomena have widely spread amongst the Japanese people known as the ‘*Powerspot*’²³ and ‘*Goshuin*’²⁴ boom, which have contributed to a substantial upsurge in popularity of Shinto shrines. May it for these ‘booms’ or not, in present times the *Kami-belief*²⁵ is likely to be considered in a renewed light. Upon this understanding it is hoped that a new operational ecological discourse can be established.

4.1 Basic framework

4.1.1 Generalities

Shinto has been described and used in many different ways over the course of Japanese history, without ever having been subject to a unanimous definition. Some maintain that Shinto is much more an umbrella term to point at an array of widely varying religious practices and aspects than the expression of a unified specific religion and many Japanese do indeed not know how to relate to this term (Bocking, 1995; Kuroda, 1981). For instance, Bocking (1995: viii) claims that what is being referred to as Shinto in the Japanese history was mainly a mix between Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and folk religion, as well as elements of Western inspired nationalism. Certain claim that there has existed an ‘essence of Shinto’ long before the arrival of Buddhism to Japan, entailing a qualifiable set of spiritual practices and ideas. Yet it has also been argued, that the idea of Shinto

23 c.f. chapter 4.5.3 ‘Rediscovery of Shinto shrines and ‘Powerspot Boom’’

24 The ‘*Goshuin* boom’ is a recent trend, where specific sacred writings, delivered by Shinto shrines, are being collected in a dedicated notebook.

25 Pointing at Shinto, the term *Kami-belief* is employed here due to the fact, that the term Shinto is almost never used by the Japanese people, and Japanese somewhat feel unfamiliar with it.

as an indigenous tradition harboring such a distinct essence was only proposed in the 17-18 century. Another existing idea about Shinto is that it constitutes merely another word for Daoism which has had influences upon local beliefs and practices in Japan since the first century (Kuroda, 1981: 6). Similar to these uncertainties, vagueness of definition and divergent interpretations are indeed applicable to many aspects which are found within Shinto.

Nonetheless, efforts have been brought forth as to determining a general meaning of this belief system. The defunct orientalist and professor of the university of Geneva Jean Herbert (1897-1980) states, that the core belief behind Shinto consists in the idea that Nature, human beings and the deities, so-called *Kami*, are all descendants from the same source and thus share a kinship. It is a Japanese belief system which is devoted to venerating *Kamis* in dedicated, sacred places. Mostly these are shrines, which are called *Jinja*. Shinto is being characterized by him as being at the same time a pantheistic, polytheistic and in a sense monotheistic belief system (1964: 20). It is maintained, that these characterizations are not mutually exclusive, which is a particularity of the Japanese thinking, where multiple, seemingly divergent ideas can all be held for true (ibid). It is polytheistic in the sense, that the existence of a ‘myriad’ of deities²⁶ is being accepted in essentially all Natural elements, phenomena, as well as in human beings, animals and ascended ancestors, each one having specific names and functions. Despite the distinction of deities in the polytheistic sense, they are all as well regarded as part of the same source. It is pantheistic in the sense that there is no clear distinction made between a celestial divine spirit and the material existence, a divine essence being regarded as permeating the whole universe. Herbert observes (ibid: 42-46) that oftentimes there is an uncertainty but also indifference amongst the Japanese as to which *Kami* is being venerated. Shinto is said to be monotheistic in the sense, that a supreme deity is being admitted, at least since the 19th century²⁷ where Shinto was sought to be reframed following the Christian and Western ideal, yet even this deity is interacting with all the other deities in a non-hierarchical fashion and “consults the opinion of the other *kami* [...]” (McDougall, 2016: 888) and generally it can be held that “[...] there is no absolute deity that is the creator and ruler of all.” (ibid). Another characterization is given by John Dougill, professor at the Ryūkyō university of Kyoto, who mentions (2011) that Shinto is at the same time an animistic and ancestor worship belief system. In this context, he speaks of animism in terms of the worship of ‘Nature spirits’ as *Kami*.

Shinto has neither credo²⁸ nor dogma²⁹ and there exist barely any sacred texts, which depending on different interpretations may not even be considered as such (Herbert, 1964). Amongst these, the most important are the *Kojiki*, followed by *Nihongi* (or *Nihon-Shoki*) both from the beginning of the 8th century, written in bad, ‘Japanized’ Chinese language, essentially dealing with mythological explanations of the creation of the Earth (ibid: 26). The *Engishiki* which are to be mentioned as well, were published in the 10th century and, in contrast to the other texts, were related

26 The concept is being referred to as ‘Yaoyorozu no Kami’ which literally stands for ‘The eight myriads of Kami’, in other words, there is a virtually infinite number of Kami.

27 Further elucidation on the imperial aspect of Shinto in chapter 4.1.3. ‘Historicity’.

28 A statement of the beliefs or aims which guide someone’s actions (“Credo”, def.1).

29 A principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true (“Dogma”, def.1).

to detailed collections of “liturgies which the human presents to the Kami as an offering” (ibid: 32), so called *Norito*'s³⁰ which are above all utilized during seasonal prayers, detailed lists of over 3000 *Kamis* and detailed rules of governmental administration.

Broadly speaking, the Shinto shrine, the so-called *Jinja*, plays a central role in the belief system as a place of worship, purification and rituals. In villages, derived souls (*Wake-Mitama*) of specific *Kamis* are enshrined and worshipped as the local tutelary *Kami* (*Ujigami*) for matters of protection, guidance and fertility on one hand but also for the pacification of their wrath. Each village has at least one *Jinja*, usually on an elevated area surrounded by a sacred grove (*Chinju no Mori*). It is unclear if the Shrine architecture has already existed before the introduction of Buddhism, and it is commonly held that Natural elements, for example mountains, rocks or trees were originally directly addressed in worship practices. Traditionally the *Kami*-worship was strongly linked to the possibility of a harmonious existence within or with Nature. It is only later on that all kinds of other benefits were being sought through the *Kami*-worship. The central notions of *Kami* and *Jinja* will be, due to their importance in the belief system, mapped out in more detail in the following chapter.

4.1.2 Kami and Jinja³¹

Kami

The term Shinto is composed of the two Chinese ideograms 神道 (*shén dào*), where ‘神’ can be read ‘Kami’ or ‘Shin’, and ‘道’ can be read ‘Michi’ or ‘To’, referring to ‘the path’. Taken together Shinto may designate, according to Jean Herbert’s expression (1964:21), “The divine path”, even though the literal translation of the term Shinto would be “The path of Kami”. The notion of Kami, 神, thus central to the idea behind Shinto and commonly referred to as ‘deity’ or ‘divinity’, is in reality hard to grasp. Dougill (n.d.) states, that Kami tend to be “[b]y and large [...] personifications of nature and deification of dead human beings.” Besides, “[...] kami can be understood as manifestations of the life-force flowing through the universe” (ibid). Similarly, Herbert (1964: 39) characterizes Kami as the “deification of the vital force which impregnates all things”. Even though in mythological descriptions, *Kamis* tend to adopt anthropomorphic representations, it has been suggested by McDougall (2016: 888) that “[t]he *kami* do not often appear as personal beings in a conventional sense, Lafcadio Hearn describing ‘a vibration’ rather than anything concrete or graspable to convey a sense of their presence. This implies that the *kami* are rather felt than observed. [...]”. He then mentions (ibid) that “[a]nything we can see or sense that is full of power, mysterious, marvelous, uncontrolled, strange, or simply beyond our abilities of comprehension is what constitutes a *kami*.”.

30 The *Norito* are sacred words of praise which are addressed towards the Kami and which are constituted of sounds which contain “spiritual power of the verb” (Herbert, 1964: 32-33).

31 Due to the frequent occurrence of these two terms, they will be henceforth not anymore written in italic letters. Their plural form, which does not exist in the Japanese language, will be written as ‘*Kamis*’ and ‘*Jinjas*’.

Herbert (1964: 33) mentions that the Kami do not have a form, but merely functions. He describes the Kami as a “sacred entity” (ibid: 40), of which “[...] each one is endowed with divinity and responds to real prayer” (ibid). Thus he qualifies the Kami as “an invisible entity to the human eye on our habitual plane of consciousness, which is capable of exerting an influence on our visible universe and towards which a worship must be offered.” (ibid). Besides, it has been stated, that it is an unclear task of distinguishing between the material object in which this entity is thought to reside and the entity itself, which however does not appear to have a big importance for the worshippers (ibid).

Besides, McDougall (2016: 889) speaks of “moments of *kami* presence”, which are to be distinguished from encounters with an individuated person. These moments imply much more “reminders of our deep embeddedness in the awe-inspiring process” (ibid), as well as an “embodiment of the underlying sense of mystery in existence” (ibid). He refers to the simultaneous embracing of both pantheism and polytheism within Shinto, as mentioned by Jean Herbert, by stating that even if distinct Kamis are being worshiped in each shrine, what matters much more in terms of the belief is the sense of a “web of divine presence” (ibid), and thus the Kamis “embody the ineffable sense of divine presence that is diffused throughout the world.” (ibid).

Due to place constraints, not all specificities of the Kami will be given here. The diverse names which have been attributed to Kamis in the mythological descriptions, notably in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon-Shoki*, as well as the elucidation of the Shinto cosmology from a mythological stance will be omitted in this essay.

However, since further descriptions of the conception of the soul (*Mitama*) of the Kami have on several occasions been referred to during the fieldwork of this essay, they will be shortly written on in the following lines. The notion of *Ichirei-Shikon* (one spirit four souls) refers to the idea, that the soul of the Kami, *Mitama*, is subdivided into 4 distinct souls (Herbert, 1964: 106). Their hierarchy is subject to debate but commonly the *Mitama* is seen as divided into two pairs, 1) “what produces the invisible root of the visible external world”, and 2) “what produces the spiritual source of the internal invisible world” (ibid). The first pair 1), which is more widely known, is composed of ‘*Ara-mitama*’ and ‘*Nigi-mitama*’. ‘*Ara*’ refers to the savage, devastating and furious nature of the soul which manifests in the visible world, whereas ‘*Nigi*’ refers to the peaceful, harmonious, fruitful, sophisticated, elegant side. The Kami-worship, as to these aspects, would result, in a simplified manner, in appeasing the *Ara-mitama* and paying gratitude to the *Nigi-mitama*. The second pair 2), which is less commonly invoked, is composed of ‘*Saki-mitama*’ and ‘*Kushi-mitama*’. ‘*Saki*’ designates the joyful, flourishing and is sometimes referred to as “the great original force of the blessings and riches” (ibid: 109) and ‘*Kushi*’ being the wise, marvelous, hidden, mysterious, or “[...] spirit which provokes mysterious transformations” (ibid). In certain Jinjas which constitute large shrine grounds³², different shrine-buildings are dedicated to different parts of

32 A Jinja can thus equally designate larger sacred areas, which harbor several singular ‘Jinjas’ on its ground.

the divided souls according to the *Ichirei-Shikon* theory, for instance a certain shrine can be solely dedicated to the *Ara-mitama* of a specific Kami.

Jinja



Figure 2: Komagatake Shrine, Yamanashi prefecture; Photo: Eiichi Shimizu (2018)

The Jinja, 神社, ‘the shrine of Kami’, is the most common and widely known term for the dwelling place of the Kami and is thought of a place where “the sacred presence of particular *kami* is manifest” (McDougall, 2016: 891). Other terms are employed for larger sites such as *Jingu*, *Taisha*, as well as *Hokora* for very small shrines. Even though the common usage of the term Jinja oftentimes evokes images of merely the shrine-building, in reality it designates a sacred shrine-ground including all its constitutive elements. The approximately 81’000 Jinjas existing throughout Japan are highly diverse in terms of size, architecture, composition, color and materiality, as well as in terms of the worshiped souls (*Mitama*), derived souls (*Wake-Mitama*) or soul-divisions (i.e. *Ara-Mitama*, or *Nigi-Mitama*) of the Kami. In its most limited form, the Jinja has at least a sacred entry archway, a so-called *Torii*, followed by a sacred ground and a temple, commonly referred to as shrine, in order to distinguish itself from Buddhist temples³³. In some cases, however, even the building is absent and the worship is directly effectuated upon a Natural object, such as a rock, lake, mountain or waterfall. Yet, a typical village Jinja can be seen as containing following elements: a pilgrimage road leading up to the shrine-ground by a stone stairway, stone statues and lanterns, the *Torii* archway, a purification fountain, a shrine office building, the shrine-building composed of 1) a

³³ Inoue (2004) argues, that the convention of using ‘temple’ for Buddhism and ‘shrine’ for Shinto has been likely a consequence of the forced separation of Buddhism and Shinto during the Meiji-restoration. According to its original meaning, the term ‘shrine’ is an inappropriate term for the Shinto Jinja, yet has become the modern English convention.

prayer building, 2) a connecting hallway and 3) a sanctuary building where the soul of the Kami (*Mitama*) is enshrined. The Jinja is traditionally and commonly surrounded by a sacred grove (*Chinju no Mori*), whose boundary in the case of larger forest areas is not defined. Oftentimes smaller auxiliary shrine-buildings devoted to different Kamis, can be found on the Jinja-ground. Particular sacred elements, for instance remarkable trees, are furthermore marked by ropes and folded white papers.

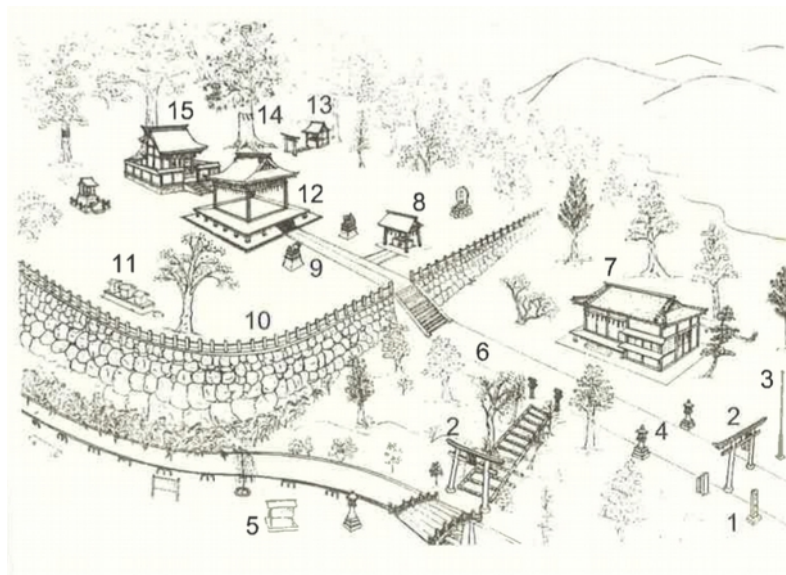


Figure 3: ‘A Typical Jinja’; Hiroko Nakajima (2004), Kokugakuin University

Shrine clergy, *Shin-shoku*, commonly implying priests of different grades, are only active on a regular basis in certain, affluent Jinjas, whereas minor local Jinjas in both urban and rural regions, are only visited by the clergy on particular occasions. Their essential role consists in maintaining harmonious relationships between the human and the divine realms and aiming for their protection and guidance on a material and spiritual level (Herbert, 1964: 209). Traditionally, priests do not serve as spiritual guides for the population and their role consists much more in effectuating divine services (ibid). Most shrine clergy and affluent shrines are affiliated with the National Association of Shrines called *Jinja Honcho*, which has amongst others been associated with the “most influential right-wing political lobby groups in the country” (Rots, 2015: 4). However, the political implication of shrine clergy remains subject to debate, who are oftentimes themselves aware of the controversial history of Shinto³⁴ (Ogasawara, personal communication, August 20th, 2018).

Edward McDougall (2016: 891) states that the shrine is built around a natural place, which has been identified as sacred and subsequently marked off from the ordinary world by the *Torii*-archways. The central point of a Shinto shrine, according to him, is that it is “in some sense every-

³⁴ See chapters 4.1.3 ‘Historicity’, and 4.2.1 ‘Secular Shinto’.

day and natural, but also unique and special” and thus “the pivot [...] to experience the transformative nature of sacrality interconnected with secularity.” (ibid). Indeed, the Jinja is a commonplace phenomenon within the Japanese culture and yet it is a place where “the sacred is allowed to be present within the everyday, while at the same time [providing] a setting for what Heidegger calls dwelling, meaning the cultivation of a deep relationship between humans, the natural setting, and the presence of the sacred” (ibid: 892). He also quotes Thomas Kasulis, scholar of Japanese philosophy and religion, about the role of shrines, who states, that when visiting these places, “the person’s holographic relationship to all reality becomes manifest” (ibid). In a similar manner, Jean Herbert (1964: 155) writes about the Jinja (personal translation):

“More than once I have entered the boundaries of a large Shinto shrine, especially of the Ise Jingu, with groups of foreign visitors who were completely ignorant and were not particularly interested, and yet were to such an extent profoundly seized with emotion by the atmosphere they found, that some could not hold back their tears. The best explanation I could give for this is that the Shinto shrine is a visible manifestation of the consanguinity which exists at all times between the human individual and the entire world, including humanity, living beings, and non-living things, the dead, the entire earth, the celestial bodies and the Gods, whichever name one gives to them. When one enters, one becomes inevitably more or less conscious of this intimate relationship, and one realizes that all feelings of anxiety, adversity, solitude and hopelessness fade away [...]”

4.1.3 Historicity

For matters of clarity, Figure 4 will show in advance the diverse strands of Shinto that have emerged throughout the history, as well as their associated diverse specificities. Categories are hard to define, and the distinctions may not be taken for given as boundaries between divergent categories are oftentimes fluctuant. Also, there exist further strands than the below-mentioned, which will however not all be mapped out.

Designation	Epoch	Remarks
Emergence of ‘Shinto’ as a term	6th century	Most common explanation ; Specific architecture and approximative unified notions and teachings ; Concurrent to official spreading of Buddhism in Japan
Imperial Shinto (Kôshitsu Shinto)	1868-present	Imperial worship system and association with State Shinto during Meiji-government; Imperial worship system already existing since 11 th century
State Shinto (Kokka Shinto)	1868-1945	Secular public Shinto, dissociated from religion, invented during Meiji-restoration
Shrine Shinto (Jinja Shinto)	1882-present	Before WWII it was another name of State Shinto and distinct from religion; Environmentalist discourse is a recent evolution within this strand
Sect Shinto / Shinto derived new religions (Kyôha Shinto)	1868-present	As opposed to State Shinto, Sect Shinto was considered as religion (Shûkyo) and privatized; Today, oftentimes referred to as ‘religion’ in a pejorative way
Ancient Shinto (Ko shinto)	<6th century Reemergence in present times	Also referred to as the ‘essence of Shinto’ by certain ; Ideas undermined during Meiji-restoration; Association with New Age inspired spirituality and certain New religions
Folk Shinto (Minzoku Shinto)	6th century – present	Uninstitutionalized folk belief and practices, demarcation from Shrine Shinto blurry but contains more elements of mythology and folklore; Association with Buddhism, Daoism and Shugendô
Shinto-Buddhist syncretism (Shin-Butsu-Shûgô)	Emergence 8-11 th century Undermined during 1868-1945	Shinto progressively existing within the container of Buddhism; Violently suppressed during Meiji-government
‘New Spiritual Culture’	1980-present	Related to ‘Booming’ phenomena such as (New Age) Spirituality, and ‘Powerspot’, existing loosely within all population classes, organic farming as well as in mainstream medias ; Pronounced Kami-belief, but adherents oftentimes not calling it Shinto

Figure 4: Diverse Shinto strands

It is being commonly held that the very expression of Shinto emerged in the 6th century when Buddhism (*Bukkyô* 仏教), deriving from China and Korea, has been officially introduced³⁵ to Japan. Buddhism represented a unified and written set of philosophical teachings that was highly compatible with the Japanese mentality and thus initially well received (Herbert, 1964). It can be said, that loosely existing, location-specific folk beliefs and practices that were distinct from Buddhism needed to be unified as a consequence of its introduction and were thus referred to as Shinto (Ueshima, 2009). Yet, Kuroda (1981: 8) estimates, that “[...] it is highly unlikely that Shinto was perceived as an independent religion in opposition to Buddhism at this time.” The beliefs were (and are) being referred to as *Shinkô* (belief 信仰) ranging from small local folk-beliefs to more specified forms of *Shinkô* involving rather large numbers of followers, such as the *Kumano-Shinko*³⁶, all of which usually exhibited similar features to what is being referred to as animism. In this sense, it can be held, that Shinto has, roughly speaking³⁷, an animistic essence (ibid: 60).

Religious scholar and anthropologist Keiji Ueshima (ibid: 62) estimates, that ancestor worship, as well as reverence of Nature has been an intrinsic trait of the Japanese people. While the introduced Buddhist principles coincided well with the idea of ancestor worship, there was no real equivalent to animism within its original tenets. It is thus opined that, in order to match their mentality, Japanese people, much alike the adaptation of the Chinese scripture, freely interpreted Buddhism in terms of natural elements such as rocks, mountains or rivers, possessing Buddha nature, and thus having the potential of ‘becoming Buddha’ (*Jôbutsu* 成仏) (ibid: 63).

The Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, referred to as *Shinbutsu-shugô* (神仏習合) is said to have emerged between the 8th and 11th century. It has been stated, that the ideas of Shinto have been progressively absorbed within Buddhism, latter becoming thus a container within which Shinto existed (Kuroda, 1981). Buddhist teachings are said to have been adapted in order to include the whole Shinto cosmology. Different ideas about the Kamis then arose, amongst which figured the view that Kamis are trapped themselves in the *Samsara*³⁸, and seek liberation through the Buddhist teachings. According to the *Honji-suijaku* theory, which is commonly associated with the Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, Buddha is seen as the original divine manifestation, whereas Kami is the this-worldly incarnation of Buddha. Opposing views, claiming the contrary, have equally emerged (Herbert, 1964; Kuroda, 1981: 9).

It has been maintained that in medieval times, the entire religiosity of the Japanese people has been included in the exoteric-esoteric Buddhism (as framed by Kuroda: *Kenmitsu Bukkyô*) where Shinto, Yin-Yang philosophy (*Onmyôkyô*), Daoism (*Dôkyô*) as well as Confucianism (*Ju-*

35 Although it is also being maintained that Buddhism was already present in Japan since the 1st century.

36 The native belief of today’s UNESCO world heritage area ‘Kumano Sanzan’, the 3 sacred mountains of Kumano, as well as location of the famous pilgrimage routes ‘Kumano Kodo’.

37 Since there was also an established ancestor worship, that does not figure within the definition of animism, c.f. chapter 3.1.4. ‘Indigenous traditions and animism’.

38 Buddhist idea of the cycle of reincarnation and suffering.

kyō) have been merely considered as constitutive parts of latter (ibid). As to the Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, there have been frictions throughout history between Shinto and Buddhism, but generally speaking, the co-existence has been harmonious between these two belief systems until the Meiji-era (Ueshima (2009: 63), although it has also been opined that Buddhism has progressively become too pervasive and somewhat arrogant, depriving Shinto priests of their authority (Herbert, 1964: 79). 19th century has been marked by an indignation towards Buddhism and New Shinto sects started to emerge in order to demarcate themselves from latter (ibid: 87-88).

Meiji-era

This era, which officially lasted from 1868 until 1912, represented the time of the abolition of feudal Japan and its Shogunate, where rapid modernization under the emperor (Tennō 天皇) Meiji became a necessity in order to prevent colonization from or unequal trade relations with the West³⁹. It quickly turned out that due to its long isolation, Japan was not ready to successfully modernize under the leadership of the Shogun. Hence, diverse aspects of modernization such as societal organization and the idea of state-nation have been largely influenced by the Western model, but it has at the same time been mentioned, that Japan intentionally sought to dissociate itself from the West (Souyri, 2016). Indeed, Japan has always maintained a rather competitive and ambitious stance towards the West (Ueshima, 2009: 66), which at the time of the so-called Meiji-Restoration was technologically far advanced. In this context it has also been maintained that there was a strong association in the minds of Japanese leaders between modernity and monotheistic religion, notably Christianity (ibid). By striving to adopt a comparable model, the polytheistic-pantheistic aspect of Shinto has been largely undermined in order to be replaced by an imperial worship system⁴⁰, referred to as ‘State Shinto’ with the emperor at its top, representing the incarnation of the henceforth highest deity, the sun-goddess ‘Amaterasu’ (ibid: 60-61; Vallely, 2014). In 1882, by adopting the designation ‘Shrine Shinto’, State Shinto was officially, and curiously, separated from the Western imported category ‘religion’, translated as *Shūkyō*, hinting primarily at Christianity and more generally at monotheistic religions. In other words, despite the ‘imitation’ of Christianity, which was regarded as *Shūkyō*, the newly created interpretation of Shinto was precisely not being categorized as *Shūkyō*, but assigned to the category of the secular, with the exception of so-called Shinto-sects. As the name of State Shinto suggests, Shinto was henceforth heavily associated with the national identity, while losing its ‘religious’ or ‘mystic’ character (Herbert, 1964: 93). The transformations during the Meiji-Restoration have been violent in many aspects. Specifically in relation to belief systems, the established, somewhat harmonious syncretism between Buddhism

39 Premises and drafts of Western-style modernization have already been conducted under former Samurai Ito Hirobumi, who later on became Japan’s first Prime Minister in 1885, as well as numerous other ‘pioneers’. Industrialization processes are said to have already appeared in mid 19th century.

40 This does however not imply, that Shinto did not harbor already in pre-modern times an imperial worship system, but it was a minor strand (Ueshima, 2009 : 61)

and Shinto (*Shinbutsu-shûgô*) has been forcefully prohibited and undermined (*Shinbutsu-bunri rei* 神仏分離令, referring to ‘the order to separate Shinto and Buddhism’), including destructions of Buddhist temples and texts as well as forced reconversions of Buddhist monks to Shinto priests (Herbert, 1964; Tanaka, 2009; Ueshima, 2009). Thereafter, as opposed to Shinto, Buddhism has been attributed to the category *Shûkyô*, alongside Shinto-sects and hence privatized. Shinto in this context has been equally mutilated off an array of its traditional features. All over the nation, sacred Shinto shrine-forests (*Chinju no Mori* 鎮守の森⁴¹), have been destroyed, and as Ueshima (2009: 62) highlights, the esoteric ideas of Ancient Shinto which traditionally underlie all Shinto strands, have been rendered unacceptable. Such unpleasant evolutions have led in some cases even to the suicide of Shinto priests (ibid: 156).

As stated by Teeuwen and Rots (2017: 4), the separation of the secular and the religious played an important role during the modern state formation of Japan. Even though these categories were ‘imported’ from the West, they were by no means imposed and, on the contrary, played a key role in accomplishing the modernization project of the Meiji government, whilst also having had to be interpreted and somewhat redefined according to the already existing practices and organizations (ibid). Shinto in this context played a crucial role as to constituting the ‘this-worldly’ foundation upon which a modern state was able to be projected on.

Post-war era

After the defeat of Japan in 1945, the link between Shinto and the state has been formally suppressed upon the order of the chief commander of the American troops, who reproached State Shinto for having maintained strong nationalistic feelings amongst the Japanese people (Herbert, 1964: 97). The education on Shinto has been banned, much to the indignation of the Japanese, and Shinto shrines have regained their religious status and been privatized. Japan has experienced a substantial decline of adherents of Shinto in the years following its defeat, which has been facilitated by an increasingly secular population, the upsurge of diverse new religions and a loss of confidence towards Shinto (Hardacre, 1989; Godart, 2008). Cut off from any form of government subsidies, in 1953 with the reconstruction of the *Ise-Shrine*⁴² based on donations, Shinto has seen a first sign of renewed confidence of the population. However, despite being henceforth unconstitutional, the link between Shinto and Japanese nationalism has persisted up to this date. After the death of the emperor Hirohito (1901-1989), Vallely (2014) argues, that a new consciousness around Shinto is emerging and parts of population seek progressively to reconnect with the original, depoliticized aspect of the Shinto belief, characterized by its simplicity, piety and veneration of the Nature.

41 鎮守の森 *Chinju no Mori*, can be translated as the forest (*Mori*) of the local Shinto deity (*Chinju*).

42 In present days, the *Ise-Shrine*, or *Ise-Jingu*, located in the city of *Ise*, prefecture of *Mië*, is the most significant place of worship within Shrine-Shinto, where the supreme, female Sun-goddess *Amaterasu* is being enshrined.

4.1.4 Japanese belief systems and the meaning of religion

Large-scale surveys led under the Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs in 1990 have revealed that the majority of Japan's population follow one of the major Japanese religions. In fact, out of the approximately 120 million inhabitants at the time of the survey, more than 112 million people were said to 'follow'⁴³ Shinto, 93 million Buddhism as well as more than 12 million minor religious trends such as Christianity or New Religions, adding up to a total of 218 million people following a religion. These numbers imply that a substantial amount of Japanese people are involved with several religions (Reader *et al.*, 1993: 33). Large parts of the population visit both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples at special occasions such as New Year, as well as regularly turn to these institutions for a number of petitions⁴⁴, such as asking for fertility, academic or economic success, love relationships or protection in traffic. Festivals and ceremonies of explicitly mythological or religious nature take place all over the country and are attended with great passion by all population groups. These customs are not only widely accepted but constitute essential elements of the Japanese culture. Many households possess family-scale altars, either Shinto or Buddhist or, oftentimes in the countryside, both. For such reasons it can be said that some sort of religiosity is deeply anchored in the Japanese mentality (Reader *et al.*, 1993; Somers, 1994).

However, whether the majority of Japanese people genuinely think of themselves as being religious or as having a religion remains unclear to this date, thus the validity of the above stated numbers remains contentious. Somers (1994: 54) maintains that Japanese people usually state about themselves towards Westerners, that they have no religion⁴⁵, but most likely will refrain as well from identifying themselves as being atheist or agnostic.

On one hand it can be said that this uncertainty is due to the fact that the very significance of religion as a Western conception is inconvenient when applied to Japanese forms of belief, (Ibid.: 55). The translation of the term religion into *Shūkyō* (宗教) has originally been driven by the need to oppose an equal concept to Christianity during the Meiji Era. The term stands literally for the 'teachings of a principle' or 'teachings of a sect' and is being commonly perceived as a "combination of an organization and a set of teachings or doctrines" (Josephson, 2011: 200), which does not correspond to the Western definition of religion. Somers (1994: 55) asserts, that "Shinto is not a doctrine which attempts to define a man's place in the universe and his relationship with God. [...] It does not attempt to theorize or standardize; its attitude is emphatically non-intellectual.". Thus a Japanese person may be "indifferent to religion but he is still a Shintoist at heart" (ibid). Shinto has in this context been framed as having the role of conditioning the cultural identity, rather

43 The majority of Japanese people do not consider themselves Shintoists let alone speak of 'following' Shinto. However, Shinto rituals and praying at shrines are common and widespread amongst virtually the whole population.

44 Further discussion on 'benefits' obtained at Shinto shrines will be held in chapter 4.5.3 'Rediscovery of Shinto shrines and 'Powerspot Boom'

45 Even though in some cases opposing assertions have equally been observed, especially when mixed with a desire of reaffirmation of a cultural and religious identity against hasty denunciations of Japanese people as being 'non-religious'.

than being an active belief system that demands faith of its followers, notably due to the absence of doctrines.

4.2 Contemporary secular trends

The terms ‘secular’ and ‘secularization’, already hinted upon previously, may cause confusion since their meaning can be manifold. The usage of secularization can both mean ‘privatization of religion’ or ‘undermining of religious character’ while secular can mean ‘immanent as opposed to religious-transcendental’ (without however implying ‘desacralized’) or ‘devoid of religious character’.

4.2.1 ‘Secular Shinto’

Rots (2017a: 187) states, that State Shinto during the state formation in the Meiji-era, can be mainly framed as a “hybrid Shinto-scientific ideology”, as opposed to a “state religion in disguise” and was perceived as inherently distinct from the category ‘religion’. In this sense Shinto has been forcedly rendered secular (in the sense of ‘devoid of religious character’), without however depriving it of its shrines, symbols and ritual practices (yet entailing the destruction of many sacred forests). While maintaining a henceforth ‘secular sacrality’, State Shinto, during its process of becoming an imperial worship system, has been stripped of its popular devotional activities and has become largely associated with science and modernity. While State Shinto has been made public and secular, Shinto Sects and mainly Buddhism were privatized and thus categorized as *Shûkyô* (religion). Moreover, it is argued, that Shinto allegedly harbored already in the premodern period premisses of becoming the secular, ‘this-worldly’ fundament of modern Japan (ibid). In this sense it has been regarded as the ‘this-worldly’ counterpart of a transcendental Buddhism.

Thereafter, it has been maintained, that post-war Japan has operated a constitutional distinction between the religious and secular, in which the dominant Shrine Shinto strand has been privatized (Rots, 2017b), hence becoming ‘*Shûkyô*’. Shinto shrines have thereby become private ‘religious’ institutions, so to speak. However, it needs to be pointed out that the categories of religious and secular (in the sense of ‘immanent’) as understood in West do not necessarily apply, since the diverse religious ceremonies and practices taking place in an around Shrines remain public. These practices are not considered as religious by the Japanese people. In other words, even if certain practices are considered as religious from a Western viewpoint, such as people praying in front of shrines, they are in reality not. Following a Western understanding, in Shinto shrines, the distinction between private-religious and public-secular is thus blurred.

Contemporary Shrine Shinto actors are said to endeavor de-privatizing Shinto and, drawing on the ideas of the secular character of the State Shinto, rendering it public again. In this context,

Rots (2017a: 189) speaks of a ‘secular resacralization’, by referring to it as the “reproduction of the sacred in public” and the “reestablish[ment of] imperial symbolism in the public sphere”, efforts notably conducted by rightwing lobbies in association with *Jinja Honchô*. It is the effort of de-privatizing certain sacred symbols for nationalistic means, rather than the de-privatization of religion in itself. In other words it is the political striving of restoring Shinto, with the *Ise*-shrine at its center, as a nationalistic symbol by overcoming the state-religion separation and by reintroducing sacred symbols in the public space. A prominent example of the endeavor of conservative Shrine Shinto actors in this context is the ongoing worshipping at the controversial *Yasukuni* Jinja located in Tokyo, which was built in 1869 as a place of worship for the war-dead between 1868 and 1951, and which has become emblematic for Japanese nationalism⁴⁶ (Hardacre, 1989). Shinto, in the process of a nationalistic deprivatization-sacralization would be reframed as Japanese tradition rather than religion. Indeed the characterization of Shinto as *Shûkyo* is then on its way of disappearing again, being henceforth associated with “culture, tradition and nature rather than religion” (Rots, 2017a: 191), and thus public. In doing so, Aike Rots argues, that contemporary Shrine Shinto actors are “contributing to the discursive secularization of their tradition” (ibid). Whereas for now, the nationalistic stance of Shrine Shinto actors has been predominantly underlined, it will be later seen in chapter 4.5.1 ‘Environmentalist paradigm in Shrine Shinto and globalization’, that within the same process of ‘discursive secularization’, a more optimistic evolution can potentially be expected.

4.2.2 Loss of faith

In contemporary Japan, the very expression of Shinto is sometimes perceived with suspicion and many regular Shinto shrine visitors do not necessarily refer to them as Shintoists or followers of Shinto. In the same manner an only small percentage of the Japanese population considers itself as religiously devoted (Somers, 1993). In this context, it may be argued, that the forced secularization (in the sense of ‘undermining religious character’) of the public State Shinto and its association with science and modernity during the Meiji-restoration, as well as its subsequent, forced dissolution in 1945, within a Western influenced, industrialized and modern nation, somewhat undermined original meanings of an ancestral kind of ‘Shinto spirituality’⁴⁷. Arguably, the interdiction of religious education after the defeat of WW2 leading to a ‘deplorable’ breakdown of ethical and moral values constituted another reason for this evolution (Herbert, 1964: 97). Buddhist monk Riten Tanaka claimed during an interview with Ueshima (2009: 112-113) (personal translation):

46 Its visit by government official is to this date perceived as a provocative political statement towards notably China. Chinese diplomates contest the sacralization of the Yasukuni shrine which is amongst other related with controversial rewriting of Japanese history and the denial of war-crimes such as the Nanking-massacre entailing the killing of 200’000 and 300’000 Chinese persons during the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-38.

47 This notion will be discussed on in the next chapter.

“[...] the sense of religiosity of the Japanese people, or better said the root part of piety (宗教心 meaning roughly ‘the intuition or heart of religion’), has been somewhat broken. Moreover, I feel, that ever since the separation of Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, the Japanese have distanced themselves, or have been pulled away from their every-day, ordinary relation towards Kami or Buddha. Due to the ideology of State Shinto, Shinto has been forcefully rendered into one unified, independent religion⁴⁸, which can be seen as detrimental. But then, this very State Shinto has been dissolved after the defeat of world war II. Thus, the Japanese people have twice undergone deeply unfortunate experiences. It seems as if the Japanese culture has undergone a fundamental transformation. [...] “

In this regard, the disenchantment that has occurred during the secularization process within Western civilization is somewhat akin to the decline of piety of modern Japan, despite not having taken place coincidentally. McDougall (2016: 890) states, that “the *kami* are still seen as present in modernity, although the attunement to their presence may be endangered by Japan’s development along Western technocratic lines”.

In present times, very few estimate that religious experiences can become a significant source of happiness in life (Somers, 1993.: 54). In this context, it is being held, that, much like the religious landscape of contemporary Western countries, that having a religion is by far not synonymous to having faith (Bruce, 2017; Somers, 1994). Reader *et al.* (1993: 34) state, that “[for] [m]odern Japanese, [...] religion in Japan has always been more a matter of participation in religious rituals than a matter of holding specific beliefs”. Similarly, it has been stated that in present days most Japanese people have lost sight of the original meaning behind Shinto (de Leeuw, 2006; Yamakage, 2006). As already mentioned, most of them regularly visit sanctuaries and participate in diverse Shinto rites and ceremonies but generally few Japanese actually believe in Shinto as an expression of faith, neither do they have a profound knowledge about this belief (ibid). Paul de Leeuw (2006: 16) states, that spirituality in contemporary Japan has become largely a taboo subject and even in the most important sanctuaries, such as the *Ise*-Shrine in the prefecture of Mië, religious practices such as prayer have oftentimes been devoid of their spiritual meaning. It has been said, that priests oftentimes have extensive knowledge about diverse mythological and ritualistic aspects of Shinto, but they do not dare speaking of sensitive subjects such as spiritual experiences out of fear of being stigmatized and ridiculed (ibid). Young priests that were traditionally supposed to fulfill roles of guidance⁴⁹ have thus been accused of being merely “opportunists reflecting the [modern] epoch, rather than confronting it” (ibid: 31), as well as of somewhat looking down on the spiritual dimension of Shinto, while being “simple administrators in charge of the maintenance of sanctuaries and marriage ceremonies” (ibid: 32).

48 State Shinto is being referred to as religion here, but it points to the non-religious, secular character as mapped out in the previous chapter.

49 It is admitted, that this fact stands in contrast to Jean Herbert’s affirmation about the role of priests. The vagueness of definition of Shinto practices will be recalled.

Several authors estimate, that especially amongst young people, there is a growing desire of rediscovering a greater meaning of life as well as “an important drive for self-actualization beyond material accumulation” (Somers, 1994: 57), but oftentimes there is a lack of institutions in which this desire can be satisfied appropriately, including many Shinto sanctuaries, whose religious personal oftentimes is stripped away of its faith (Tanaka, 2009; Ueshima, 2009; Yamakage, 2006). However, in this context, it has been stated that there is a danger to adhere to dubious occult sects, due to a lack of information, the *Aum Shinrikyô* sect being an emblematic example, whose members are prosecuted for having committed deadly crimes in public spaces. The *Aum Shinrikyô* incident of 1995⁵⁰, is furthermore regarded as the pivotal event of modern days where confidence in any religious topics has been pervasively shattered (Horie, 2009).

4.3 ‘Original Shinto spirituality’ and Japanese culture

4.3.1 Inconsistencies

In the same way as there is no unified definition of Shinto, it is an unclear task to speak of one defined Shinto spirituality. Rots (2014: 6-32) maintains the following assertion:

“Most historians [...] deny that there is any transhistorical essence to Shinto (i.e., something that defines ‘Shintoness’). This is different from most insiders’ interpretations and from most popular introductions to Shinto, which usually assert that Shinto is *the* indigenous religious tradition of Japan – singular, ancient, uniquely Japanese, and with an unchanging core essence. [...] In most *emic* discourses, Shinto and the Japanese nation are seen as deeply interconnected.”

Indeed, different Shinto derived new religions as well as Jinja Honcho, the head organization of Shrine Shinto tend to claim both that they harbor the true essence of Shinto however different the content may be (ibid: 37). In a personal communication (July 16th, 2018), Rots has stated, that it is downright not possible to speak of any unified idea of Shinto spirituality, which stands in contrast to what Yamakage (n.d.: 3) maintains that there exists a ‘fountain-head’, an essence of Shinto so to speak, which would have permitted the development of all divergent branches that can be observed throughout history. Furthermore, he states (2006: 21) that “Shinto is the consciousness that underlies the Japanese mentality as well as the foundation of Japanese culture and values”. In a similar way, Jean Herbert opines (1964:12), that “Shinto is at the same time source and heart of the Japanese people. Thanks to Shinto, the Japanese are what they are and it would be in vain to understand them without a sufficient knowledge of Shinto”. Even though nowadays most Japanese

50 The New Religious Movement ‘Aum Shinrikyô’ committed a deliberate act of bio-terrorism in the Tokyo subway in 1995, where the deadly sarin gas has been released, entailing dozens of dead and thousands of injured.

people are also fervent Buddhists, in their hearts they are Shintoists and also act accordingly (ibid: 99).

Yet, with regard to the Japanese mentality, not all authors agree on the fact that it is uniquely, or partially, a result of an ancestral spiritual tradition. Knight (2004:10) mentions, by quoting the Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji (1889-1960) that the Japanese people have a so-called ‘monsoon mentality’, referring to the unpredictable, at times harsh meteorological conditions they are subject to on the isles of Japan, resulting in attitudes of “acceptance and an enduring patience”. It is moreover held that diverse aspects of Japanese life and society are shaped by its environment and climate (ibid). It has also been stated, that the appreciation for Nature within the Japanese mentality, has been greatly influenced by Buddhism, in particular Zen Buddhism, which “has been credited with providing a metaphysical and religious basis to the Japanese appreciation of nature and has come to epitomize the religiosity of the Japanese ‘love of nature’” (Knight, 2004: 68). Zen Buddhist tenets include ideas of compassion or the impermanence of things, propagating simplicity and sensitivity of the beauty of Nature, ideas of oneness, which incidentally are said to be found within Shinto alike, as well as eventually finding its expression in the arts (Knight, 2004).

On the other hand it is also been stated, that much of the mentality that is commonly ascribed to the Japanese people as having a particularly rigorous ethics and system of paying respect, is precisely not attributable to its religious-spiritual tradition, but derives from feudal Japan, going back to the Kamakura period in 12th century until the Edo period in 19th century, when the Japanese population was largely implicated in a rigid, hierarchical social stratification system under the rule of the *Daimyô* and above him the *Shogun*. In this context it is claimed that the notion of ‘*rei*’ 礼 (referring to ‘manners’, ‘etiquette’ but also ‘expression of gratitude and reward’) played a central role within the Japanese mentality (Ackermann, 1996).

4.3.2 Ethical implications and metaphysics

From a Shintoist point of view, the human being is perceived as being deeply interdependent with the *Kamis* (Herbert, 1964; Yamakage, 2006). A clear vision of spiritual aspiration is advanced, which consists in the individual’s striving to accomplish his humanity by obtaining the ‘excellent characteristics’ of the *Kamis*. In other words the individual is committed on a path that will lead to himself resembling, if not becoming, *Kami*. This idea is reflected in the term *Kannagara no Michi*, signifying ‘the way according to the divine’, central to the Shinto spirituality, and close in meaning to the term Shinto (‘The divine way’). ‘*Michi*’ (道) in this context designates ‘The spiritual path’, a received celestial component as well as celestial ideal to be accomplished within humanity (Herbert, 1964: 122). Moreover, it is stated that *Michi* expresses (personal translation) “a profound and sincere conviction which connects the subject [...] to the same height and depth as the great scheme itself. It implies that the essence of the human life is connected to a superhuman life” (ibid).

According to the Shinto cosmogony, the human being is regarded as a spiritual and biological descendant from the divine, instead of having been created (ibid: 119). “Therefore the human being knows intuitively what he has to do in order to lead a life according to the divine model. Thus, he does not need a moral or ethical code and the question of good or bad does not occur. He would only need moral codes if he was to deviate from that path.” (ibid). This being said, there are obligations given to adepts of Shinto, however they do not constitute prohibitions. A clear ethical or moral prescription is not given. The ideal of the Kami-consciousness would be capable of leading the people automatically towards morality. Herbert states, that “this attitude results when one enters directly or indirectly in contact with the actions of the Kami, when we know that the Kami exist. [...] Gratitude and ineffable joy derive from the privilege of living in harmony with Nature.” (ibid: 124). In a similar way, Phillippe Pons (1995: 34) states that the role of the human being, according to Shinto ideas, consists of living in harmony with Nature, of which he is part of. Shinto is, following his description, the religious expression of a symbiotic relationship with Nature. Shinto implies thus an attitude which reasserts the belonging to a community and a certain system of values (ibid: 35).

From the concept of *Kannagara* derive central virtues of the Shinto spirituality such as gratitude (*Kansha* 感謝), purity/purification (expressed through the terms such as *Harai* 祓い, *Kiyome* 清め, *Misogi* 禊ぎ) and sincerity (*Makoto* 誠), literally the ‘heart of sincerity and straightness’, but also service. According to Yamakage (2006: 182), the idea of self-actualization consists in having a “pure heart-spirit”, hence the importance of purity conveyed within the belief, be it purity of environment or purity of heart. It will be seen in chapter 4.4.2 ‘Dismantling the eco-discourse’, however, why the concept of purity, contrary to expectations, may constitute an obstacle to environmental preservation. Moreover, once a Shintoist is unified with the Kami, he needs to pass on to a “life at the service of the others” (ibid: 186). Shinto calls on a “sense of duty and responsibility, as well as feelings of respectful and spontaneous love towards the whole world, feelings that are similar to those that are felt towards one’s own family members, [...] as well as a strong sense of esthetics.” (Herbert, 1964: 23). It is deplored, that this ‘essence of Shinto’, has been largely undermined throughout the many transformations the belief system itself, as well as the Japanese people have undergone (Yamakage, 2006). Therefore it is claimed, that essentially within the Ko-Shinto (古神道, ‘古’ standing for ‘ancient’), a truthful representation of the ancestral meaning of this religion can be found (ibid: 64). However, as mentioned before, many authors also deny the theory of a ‘transhistorical essence’.

4.4 Discussion: Shinto ecological discourse

4.4.1 Environmental preoccupation and destruction

Shinto appears to harbor inherent ecological discourses which derive for instance from the idea that all manifestations on Earth have the same origin, or are “different manifestations of the same vital energy”. Proponents thus tend to qualify Shinto as being a Nature-worship religion which promotes a symbiotic relationship with Nature and sees the human and non-human world as inherently intertwined. Diverse national and international literature perceive indeed in the entangling of Shinto and Nature useful ecological insight. It is moreover maintained that Shinto environmentalist discourses oftentimes draw on Western ideas of Ecology & Spirituality movements, that arose following Lynn White’s article of 1967. According to Yamakage (2006), Shinto has always been striving to protect its forests and has been implicated in efforts of afforestation. Presumably, this endeavor has been fostered by the realization that the well-being of the natural environment was inextricably linked to the spiritual well-being of human beings. In addition, he maintains (ibid), that the holistic worldview promoted by Shinto is largely conciliable with James Lovelocks Gaia theory, equivalent deities and religious ideas allegedly existing within Shinto that correspond to this idea.

Yet, as a matter of fact, on a practical level and throughout history, the Japanese people has proven many times to act in opposing ways. If one is to believe, that an indigenous, ancestral Shinto spirituality actually had been able to deeply shape the Japanese mentality as to venerating the Nature or feeling deeply connected and concerned about all living beings, then such claims stand at odds with the many observed environmental degradations that have happened in Japan as well as with an observed low degree of general environmental preoccupation (Knight, 2004). It can be stated, that Japan has contributed to ecological issues in many aspects. Next to the infamous water pollutions near the *Ashio* Copper Mine already towards the end of 19th century, Japan has been qualified as the world’s most polluted country in the sixties due to devastating impacts caused by Japan’s industries, making it necessary to import the Western idea of environmental protection (Knight, 2014; Chakroun, 2015). Besides, the ongoing habitat destruction has been held to be the major threat Japan is exerting on its wildlife and natural environment, such as wetlands and primeval forests (Knight, 2004: 60). Even in premodern times, where Western ideas have not been present yet, Japan is said to have experienced serious deforestation (Kalland, 2002). As far as discrediting environmental ethics it is equally known that Japanese logging companies participate in massive deforestation in Southeast Asian countries (Rots, 2015: 3). From this point of view there is thus a large gap between presumed environmental ethics and the observed degradations.

This inconsistency has been framed as the ‘veneration-destruction paradox’ (Knight, 2004: 3), which implies that a stance of veneration is in reality merely addressed towards “certain forms of nature for their aesthetic value [whereas] spiritual inspiration does not necessarily lead to a conservation ethic”. Philippe Pons (1995: 33) speaks in this context of a ‘selective attachment’ to Nature of the Japanese people, which may have to a large extent favored environmental

degradation. The Japanese people are thus held to venerate only a certain idea of the Nature and not the objective Nature itself, in which sense Pons (ibid: 32) maintains, that “the culture is the very condition of the existence of Nature”. He then states, that most Japanese people tend to venerate above all an artificial but highly elaborated aspect of Nature (ibid: 39). He quotes Augustin Berque in stating that the artificiality of Nature entails the extraction of preferred elements out of Nature and assembling them, which corresponds then to the culturally constructed notion of Nature. Accordingly, this is a conception of Nature which facilitates environmental exploitation (ibid).

4.4.2 Dismantling the eco-discourse

Knight (2004: 67) argues, that “it may be misleading to over-estimate the influence of religious beliefs on the perception of nature of modern Japanese society. For example, the belief, that nature is sacred (a belief normally associated with Shinto) appears to be far from ubiquitous in Japanese society”. Likewise, she argues (ibid: 70), that environmental degradation can not be simply attributed to an erosion of “traditional belief and value systems” that tended to foster Nature worship, since the “symbolic and esthetic appreciation of nature does not necessarily lead to a desire to preserve nature itself”. It has thus been stated that the dominant ecological discourse around Shinto, as well as Buddhism, which maintains that these religions have led to a conservation ethics within the Japanese people through their proclaimed harmonious relationship towards Nature is not accurate (Knight, 2004; Kalland, 2002). Kalland (2002: 147) states in this context that “[r]eading ecological insight from religious texts tends to be based on selective reading of these texts, ignoring evidence to the contrary”. He then raises the crucial question, if a holistic worldview, as it is proclaimed by authors such as Yamakage (2006) is actually contributing to environmental protection (ibid: 151). His objection goes as follows: Within the cosmology of Shinto, there is no clear definition given as to what constitutes Nature. Nature may include anything covering human beings, wild Nature, modified environments up to man-made artifacts. It is then said that from such a perspective it is difficult to distinguish an artificial Nature from wild Nature. It can thus even be “natural to destroy Nature” (ibid). Moreover, due to the idea of the impermanence of things, generally little value may be attributed to the actual manifestation of Nature, and what is being venerated is much more a certain idea about the Nature (ibid).

Another objection raised by Kalland (ibid: 153) consists in refuting a common argument invoked by ecological discourses, as to protection of the natural environment being achieved through the sacralization of latter. In other words, by holding Nature or certain elements of Nature, such as certain trees or Shrine associated groves as sacred or divine, a view that is commonly ascribed to Shinto belief, one is believed to consider them as under unconditional protection. What has been observed in contrast to such beliefs are so-called religious clearing rituals (Notermans *et al.*, 2016) where divinities are being evacuated from their original habitat and transferred to either

another Natural element or Shrine, in order for the forest areas to be cleared for other purposes, mostly constructions of buildings. Demographic increase and rising land prices in urban areas oftentimes lead to scarcity of constructible properties, forcing private shrines to cede important forest areas for economic reasons. It can be observed that an entangling of religious and socio-economic preoccupations is happening, where commonly the religious protection cedes in front of economic incitations within modern societies. Kalland (2002: 153) thus states that “[a] divine nature is [...] by no means a guarantee against environmental degradation as has often been claimed”. Moreover, the achieving of preservation through sacralization of Nature is in reality just another facet of the Nature-culture dualism and the reflection of an anthropocentric, rather than ecocentric attitude (ibid). In this sense he maintains that the Japanese people can be either anthropocentric or ecocentric in their attitudes in different contexts, while recalling that the dualistic Western conception of distinguishing between these paradigms is not necessarily applicable, in other words several seemingly antagonistic paradigms can be held for valid.

Furthermore, Kalland (2002) argues, that environmentalist paradigms can downright be destructive towards the environment. For instance he states (ibid: 149) that by removing certain elements that may appear disturbing in a given environment, one may contribute to its perceived ‘purity’, a core principle within Shinto, as well as to its aesthetic appreciation. This coincides with the selective attachment to Nature stated above. All things considered, he refutes the idea that religion can constitute a sufficiently powerful and lasting lever in order to provoke environmentalism (ibid: 155). Although he does not deny that some sensitivity towards the Nature may be related to the religious message, he still invokes past environmental destruction as a major counter-example (ibid: 154).

It has been argued that the witnessed ecological issues in Japan are closely related to the introduction of the Western-style technocratic paradigm, notably capitalism and industrialization during the modernization of the Meiji-restoration (Knight, 2004). According to Chakroun (2015: 45), the incompatibility between both the Japanese and the Western culture may have furthermore led to a crisis. As suggested by Berque, the environmental destructions were notably attributable to an elite class who exploited natural resources for their own interest (ibid). Another problem derives from the fact, that environmental awareness did not arise fast enough. Presumably Earth’s charging capacities and resources were being thought of as unlimited (ibid). The inherent characteristics of industrial societies maintaining alienated relationship towards Nature are thus equally applicable to Japan (ibid: 46). Economic imperatives and the “race towards modernization” (Pons, 1995: 41) have become the primary preoccupations and consequently it may also be argued that these factors have mitigated the ethical implications of religion. Shinto environmentalism, or Shinto ecological discourses can thus not entirely be discredited. Kalland (2002) however maintains that Shinto environmentalism is at best ‘Nimby’ (Not in my backyard) environmentalism, but is not capable of taking into consideration challenges on a global scale. Japan has succeed in recent years to adopt environmental policies and strive to overcome past environmental issues, however he asserts (ibid:

155) that such activity is mainly a consequence to the painful experiences and political pressures that the nation has subdued and not due to “searching for religious clues” (ibid).

In this context, it has been highlighted, that a significant and mandatory component of ecological awareness consists in education (Rots, 2015a: 12). Equally, Knight (2004: 73) opines, that the degree of ecological awareness is closely correlated to the amount of diffused knowledge in this field, be it in academic or popular discourses. Rigorous spiritual persons⁵¹, characterized by an intrinsic humility and explicitly lived material simplicity as have been observed, for instance, in Indonesia were indeed unconcerned about disposing garbage in near-by rivers. Spirituality in this sense, does not constitute an integral solution on its own to responding to ecological issues. As stated by Rots (2015a: 12) “[...] religious values or practices may play a part [in environmental awareness] – but it does *not naturally* emerge from a religious worldview.” Referring back to the integral ecology of Michel Maxime Egger (c.f. chapter 3.1.2 ‘Eco-spirituality: A Western approach on paradigm shifting’) it may constitute, however, an anthropological fundament upon which environmental education can have a longer lasting efficiency.

4.5 Ecological implications in contemporary trends of Shinto

4.5.1 ‘Environmentalist paradigm’ in Shrine Shinto and globalization

Rots (2015a, 2015b) argues, that the ‘environmentalist paradigm’ has become a widely adopted stance by diverse actors since the 1990s. Amongst others, the paradigm has been integrated by the head association of Shrine Shinto, *Jinja Honchô*. It is however yet to be seen to what extent leaders within this organization are genuinely concerned with environmental issues (ibid). For obvious reasons a public stance of Nature and ecological concern can serve as a political strategy of ‘greenwashing’ different actions of Shrine Shinto which may harbor underlying conservative, nationalistic implications and more generally, this stance helps fostering legitimacy of Shinto on a global scale. Yet Rots (2014) estimates that in recent years, notably through its association with the international organization ‘Alliance for Conservation and Religion’ (ARC), *Jinja Honchô* is exhibiting premisses of genuine environmental concern. While this does not imply that diverse controversies arising from Shrine Shinto’s association with right-wing lobbies and its nationalistic ideology have been surmounted, it is at the same time mentioned that nationalism is not necessarily contradictory to environmental preoccupation within the same organization (ibid: 14). Moreover, it is thought that the recent environmentalist discourse has managed to alter the way Shinto is perceived in Japan as well as in other countries (ibid: 33). Even though ecological knowledge at shrines has been generally low, in recent times, “young priests are increasingly aware of, and concerned with, environmental issues” (ibid: 18). This trend is welcomed as a positive evolution, since the main-focus is progressively shifting on more environmentally orientated matters (ibid).

⁵¹ Local village people in the East of Java, who are pious Muslims, praying 5 times per day from early in the morning on.

An important element of the environmentalist discourse is the institution of sacred groves surrounding Shinto shrines, *Chinju no Mori*, which is perceived as harboring significant symbolic value as to raising environmental awareness (Rots, 2017a). Sustainable action and education is efficiently achieved at these groves which constitute “the number one focal point of a local community. Both physical as a meeting place and sociocultural center and symbolic, signifying social cohesion and existential belonging to a place” (ibid: 193). This community and educational function is furthermore ascribed to the shrine itself, which is surrounded by the grove. The example of these sacred groves is believed to have a positive effect as a model for promoting sustainability action, at least on a local level. However, he claims that such ramifications confirm the assertion that Shinto is local and particularistic rather than holistic. Thus a concern on a global level can not necessarily be derived from this particular strand of environmentalism. In a similar fashion as Kalland’s argument (2005), it has been stated that “*Chinju no Mori* environmentalism is [thus] (not-)in-my-backyard environmentalism”, which “large[ly] fail[s] to address environmental issues that are not directly related to shrines.” (Rots, 2014: 16).

This being said, this environmentalist stance has largely contributed to popularization of Shinto on a global level, “even though, paradoxically, the Shinto environmentalist paradigm is grounded in notions of sacred *Japanese* land, rather than a universalistic understanding of nature as intrinsically sacred” (Rots, 2015a: 32). Adoptions of Shinto ideas by non-indigenous actors are thereby being operated in a selective way which usually disregard the indigenous aspect of Shinto (ibid). For those authors, who have characterized Shinto as representing the unique indigenous tradition of Japanese culture, the idea of a “global Shinto” would appear contradictory. Nevertheless, in present times different modalities of global Shinto, incorporating environmental or ecological discourses have been identified, such as large online-communities exchanging Shinto practices and ideas, the already mentioned environmentalist paradigm within the Shrine Shinto strand and its progressive internationalization, as well as arguably the biggest trend of global Shinto beyond national boundaries which is exerted by Shinto derived new religions and Shinto sects (ibid).

4.5.2 Environmental implications in New Religious Movements identifying with Shinto

In cases where transcultural exportations of Shinto ideas have been operated by Shinto sects and Shinto-derived New religions, it is not always clear whether these branches refer to themselves as Shinto, however it is held that most of these ‘sects’ exhibit combinations between presumed ancestral, esoteric knowledge aiming at individuals’ healing and salvation, and social or environmental activism, including agro-ecological farming (Rots, 2015a: 37). For instance the originally Japanese Shinto-derived cult ‘Mahikari’ has been diffused in Senegal in 1975, deriving from French expatriate, even though adapted according to local beliefs (Louveau, 2011b). Mahikari

is a “powerful” New religious movement that has a large following on a global scale, notably in Australia, Malaysia and Singapore (Smith, 2007: 46). It is Shinto-derived but includes elements of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam, a syncretism of beliefs which is common to many NRM (New Religious Movements) (ibid: 12). In the context of Mahikari in Senegal, French anthropologist Frédérique Louveau, specializing on religious mobility and environmental action, has observed different Shinto-derived teachings of esoteric ideas such as the insistence on one’s purification of physical and spiritual impurities, explanations on the formation of illness, spiritual elevation, as well as esoteric rituals such as the channeling of ‘light’ in order to purify each other (Louveau, 2011a, 2011b). She estimates, that these practices have an impact on the ecological attitude of the local population, due to the insistence on purity on several levels. It is regarded as important that individuals strive to preserve the natural environment, understood as everything that surrounds oneself, in order to prevent as well as possible impurities from entering the human body (2011b). In this sense she perceives a twofold objective conveyed in the teaching of the cult, which is both the purification of oneself and the objectives of “local and sustainable development” (ibid: 758).

From what she has witnessed in Senegal, Louveau appears to be painting an optimistic image of a “soft proselytism based on altruism and in connection with ecology” (ibid: 756) that the Mahikari New religion is seemingly exerting on lay people. However, existing controversy on proselytism set apart, Rots (personal communication, July 16, 2018) warns of blindly taken transmitted teachings of New Religious Movements for granted, as they are oftentimes built around ‘charismatic, spiritual entrepreneurs’ who claim to have received teachings of spiritual nature during a ‘divine epiphany’ despite their acuity not being verifiable. Besides, a ‘charismatic cult leader’ constitutes a central element in the definition of sects (Partridge, 2004). This is typically the case with Mahikari cult leader, Yoshikazu Okada, a former officer of the imperial army, who claims to have received revelations from a divinity named ‘Su’, and sees himself on a mission to bring purification to the world (Louveau, 2011a: 83). In relation to NRM, Smith (2007: 47) states that they “[...] are characterized by conversion through charismatic leadership and miracle healing methods. [...] They especially appeal as a panacea for the ills of modern society, such as ill health and emotional suffering, for which economic development and material affluence provide only partial solutions. New Religious Movements appeal to individuals, independent of family or community-based religious affiliations [...]”. There exists a tendency in modern Japan to reject and to see as problematic *a priori* any implication with either proselytism or New Religious Movements (Horie, 2009). Obviously, websites and literature alike, ‘exposing’ controversial content about Mahikari are plenty. Members tend to break away from their families and adopt new social identities, as well as seeing their worldviews profoundly distorted while having to commit entirely to the cult, entailing hence “a degree of conflict and transfer of loyalties” (Smith, 2007: 48). Truthful intentions of such cults and their leaders are prominently hard to identify, even though in the case of Senegal, Louveau appears to claim that the ecological attitudes of the initiated are

genuine. She praises the observed motivation of the young generations belonging to the cult as to seeking spiritual and physical purity within themselves and in the environment, as well as the implication of Mahikari in environmental politics as exemplary (Louveau, 2011b: 759-761). It is however admitted (ibid: 763), that “religious movements can oftentimes be seen as destabilizing forces of political authority, especially those which are considered as “sects” such as [...] Mahikari”. Nonetheless, she estimates, that the ideas conveyed by the local adaptation of Mahikari can constitute a lever in order to prevent the Dakar youth from delinquency and emigration and reorientate their roles as responsible citizens, concerned about the intertwining of spiritual development and environmental action (ibid: 764).

This being said, it is unclear if legitimacy upon such a cult can be held for acceptable since the ongoing controversy is considerable and obtaining reliable sources reveals itself to be a challenge. For instance, a citation from a 3-years long ex-member of Mahikari states: “[...] But if you do question and you end up leaving or trying to leave then the guilt and manipulation will be turned right up to full power. I was told that I was spitting in the face of god, that my family line would pay for lifetimes, I was told that I would no longer have any protection from God and that the world was coming to an end and that I was a part of making that happen.” The aim here is not to dive deeper into assessing controversies arising from New Religious Movements, nor to describe in detail the Mahikari cult, but much more to observe a trend which is Shinto(-derived ideas) oftentimes crossing borders in guise of such modalities. Indeed Smith (2007: 49) observes, that in the same manner as Japanese corporations, Japanese NRM have gained rapid influence overseas since the war and more significantly since roughly 30 years, entailing “millions of followers in all parts of the world”, while “facing the same organizational problems experienced by large multinational corporations” such as the maintenance and marketing of their product image. It may be argued, that influences of such institutionalized religious movements will remain largely regarded with suspicion, adopted by only a minority of populations and that neither proselytism nor NRM will have a significant impact, for instance in terms of raising ecological awareness. Despite advocacies for reconsidering the role played by religion as to facing ecological issues, such as invoked by Eaton (2009), it is questionable whether requirements of Ecology and Spirituality movements can be met by actions led under the flag of New religions.

4.5.3 Rediscovery of Shinto shrines and ‘Powerspot Boom’

This sub-chapter investigates the reviving interest in Shinto shrines within the Japanese people, amongst others facilitated through an array of ‘booming’ phenomena and questions if an ecological discourse can be built upon this tendency.

Japan has previously been characterized as a predominantly secular nation which seemingly despises topics related to religion and spirituality. Norichika Horie (2009: 2), religious scholar and

anthropologist at the university of Tokyo, states that many Japanese consider religion and spirituality as being susceptible to fraud and as having harmful effects on children and students, latter being associated to nationalism, political interests, religious groups and fundamentalism. This being said, since the 1980s, Western New Age inspired themes have been diffused through different medias and became popular in Japan. Initially this trend was designated as the Japanese ‘World of the Spiritual’ (*Seishin Sekai* 精神世界), which is to be considered as distinct from the Western New Age movement, yet both containing elements which overlap (Shimazono, 1999). The phenomenon is said to have developed during the 2000s into a veritable, but temporary, ‘spirituality boom’, which consists of a “big market of various types of popular practices” and which has received a lot of attention from the mainstream medias (Rots, 2017b). These practices and ideas have been framed by prominent figures as ‘*supirichuariti*’ (スピリチュアリティ), referring to the Western imported term ‘spirituality’ but generally pointing in this context at a “combination of popular development of transpersonal psychology and imported Western New Age Spirituality⁵²” (Horie, 2009: 8), emerging out of an endeavor to “reconstruct Japanese non-religious religiosity, that is, the affirmation of the ordinary life without any religion but with an implicit belief in spirits.” (ibid: 6).

Equally, in the wake of this upsurge of spirituality related topics deriving from the West, the notion ‘Powerspot’ has been widely diffused in Japan. These spots have become predominantly related to Shinto shrines⁵³ (Jinja Powerspots) and are described as “places where one feels a strong invisible power” or places which are “said to possess an energy suitable to allow one’s consciousness to ascend to a higher plane [...]”, as well as “sacred place[s] where the spiritual energy or power of the universe concentrates” (Horie, 2017: 192-194). In a similar way as the spirituality boom, the Powerspot phenomenon has become a ‘boom’, notably through its promotion by weekly magazines addressed to females in their 20s to 30s (Sakurai, 2014: 168). Progressively their popularity has then impacted all population groups. This spread has been stated to have triggered a series of consequences.

At first, the New Age influenced Powerspot discourse has contributed to a significant popularization of Shinto shrines, to the point that “the power spot has almost been absorbed into a kind of Shinto revival.” (Horie, 2017: 201). Thus, traditional Shinto shrines have been rediscovered as Powerspots and have attracted ever growing numbers of visitors. However, this booming phenomenon has been received by shrine-clergy with mixed feelings and many visitors seemingly were only interested in certain aspects of the Shrine-ground, which were promoted by the media as harboring some special power. Shrines have become decontextualized from their prior function as sacred pilgrimage places and have become destinations, sometimes of mass tourism, which are being approached in a consumerist and superficial manner. Instead of visiting shrines with genuine purposes, worldly benefits, such as prosperity in business, finding relationships or academic success, are being expected to be quickly obtained. Hence the idea of ‘obtaining’ something has

52 The term New Age is rarely referred to in Japan, which has dubious eschatological connotations of an arriving of a ‘New Age’ (Horie, 2009).

53 Amongst others, certain Buddhist temples, certain Shinto shrines and certain remarkable natural sites and elements are being designated as power spots.

been closely related to Shinto shrines, a negative consequence of mediatized promotion (ibid: 207). In this sense, the Powerspot boom has been qualified a superficial trend which presumably deviates worshippers from authentic beliefs in deities (ibid: 209).

Moreover, Horie opines (ibid: 201) that for the Japanese people, visiting a Shinto shrine as a Powerspot is seen as a mix between reconnecting with tradition and individualistic spirituality, in other words there is an entangling between traditional Japanese spirituality and Western New Age inspired spirituality happening. Thus it has been argued, that the New Age discourse (which originally had been Eastern influenced) has been ‘Japanized’ in the same manner as the concept of Western modernity had been adapted to the Japanese context. It appears that Shinto is integrating and reinventing these ideas, notably the Powerspot discourse, in its own terms. This evolution has been facilitated by the inherent vagueness of the Shinto tradition and its absence of doctrines, as well as its closeness to many New Age concepts (ibid). However, original post-secular tendencies of the imported New Age ideas have been undermined in the process of Shinto reintegrating the Powerspot discourse. In this context it has been stated, that Shrine Shinto actors integrate but also abuse of the notion of Powerspot in order to enhance their own nationalistic (however not militaristic) discourse, and to maintain popularity of the Shinto shrines. Notwithstanding this deplorable evolution, Horie estimates that the Powerspot boom should not be solely criticized since it has nevertheless contributed to a significant reconsideration of Shinto shrines.

In an optimistic light he states (ibid: 214) that in particular in recent years a depoliticized, new generation of Shrine worshippers is emerging which endeavors Nature-worship and genuine spiritual seeking, as well as rediscovering and recognizing the sacred nature of shrines. Similarly, Aike Rots speaks in a personal communication (August 1st, 2018) of a “rather diffuse but very dynamic trend, of new popular practices surrounding Shinto ‘spirituality’, [and] ‘powerspots’.”. In this context it is hoped that the Shinto shrine is identified as one form of many sacred places (*‘Seichi’* or *‘Seinaru Chi’* 聖地) in the world, coupled with the underlying idea of Kami-worship of the Shinto spirituality, much more than a place of quick worldly benefit. It is in this sense that the discourse of New Age on Powerspots, characterizing them as sacred places harboring a “mediating function between the Earth and the [...] universe“ (Horie, 2017: 196), can be beneficial for a post-secular reassessment of the Kami-belief. In order to give a qualification on sacred places, Horie quotes eco-psychologist James Swan, who states that it is “a place that ‘has the power to lead humans to a state of spiritual awareness more easily than any other place’. It is also a ‘source of purification, healing, transformation and insight’”, as well as “[a place] that ha[s] a direct connection to the planet itself (ibid: 195). Shinto shrines are considered as “celestial vessels, [...] channels through which one connects to the spirituality of nature, creation and the universe.” (ibid). Edward McDougall’s assertion on Shinto shrines (2016: 892) will be mentioned again who states in a similar manner that “[...] the sacred is allowed to be present within the everyday, while at the same time [providing] a setting for [...] the cultivation of a deep relationship between humans, the natural setting, and the presence of the sacred” (ibid: 892). Especially since the mid 2000s it has

been observed, that people engaged in rigorous following of Shrine etiquettes and meditation-like praying, which may lead to the assumption that there is a growing number of serious venerators of Shrines. Furthermore, Horie (2017) estimates, that regular visitors of Shrine-Powerspots may progressively adopt more genuine attitudes of spiritual seeking, the more time they spend on these sites, even though the initial endeavor may not have been ‘profound’. It can thus be estimated that there is an ongoing positive evolution in relation to a decrease of the shallowness of seeking secular benefits at Shinto shrines (ibid).

Yet, it needs to be pointed out, that seeking for worldly benefits at Shinto shrines is not necessarily related to a negative consequence of the Powerspot boom, former being a tendency which has already existed in the past. Moreover, given the fact that there are no strict doctrines within Shinto, expecting worldly benefits can not be simply dismissed as the ‘wrong attitude’. It will thus be part of a fieldwork as to finding out if one can speak in the first place of a right or wrong attitude of visiting shrines, even though certain clues may have been given by Horie’s advocacies. Furthermore it will be part of an on-site investigation, if above-stated deep ecologic or transformative aspects of sacred places, such the recognition of a “person’s holographic relationship to all reality” (McDougall, 2016: 892) can actually be ascribed to Shinto shrines and if an ecological implication can be deduced, in the sense of a contribution to the Eco-spiritual project (c.f. chapter 3.1.2 ‘Eco-spirituality: A Western approach on paradigm shifting’).

Part II: Fieldwork

This part will deal with the fieldwork conducted by the author of this essay. It has been conducted between August 7th, 2018 and September 3rd, 2018 in Japan, in the respective prefectures of (from the West) Ehime, Kôchi, Fukui and Tokyo.

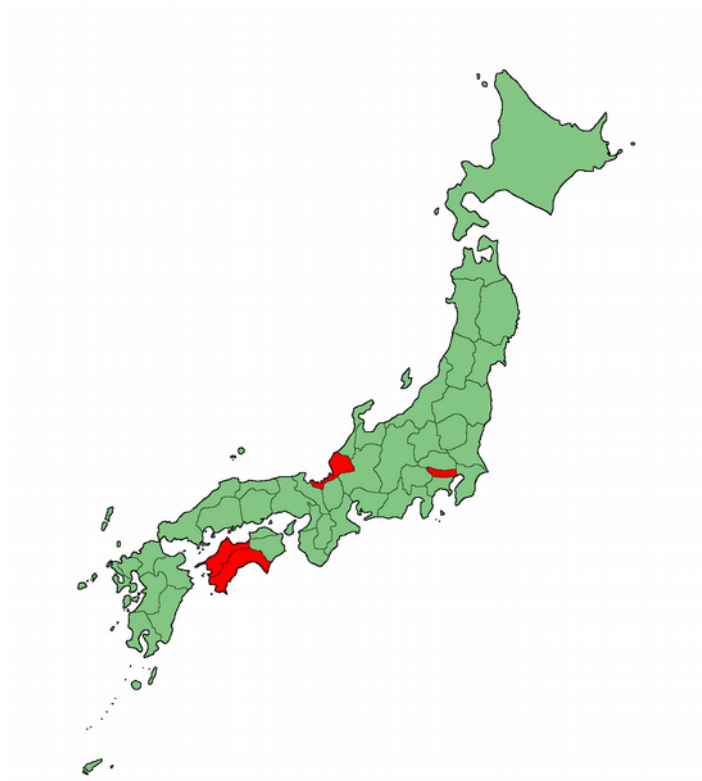


Figure 5: Regions of Japan (red), Source: <https://jet.wikia.com>

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Endeavor

As already mentioned in the introduction, 1 postulate and 2 working hypotheses have been deduced from the central research question ‘**How can ‘contemporary Shinto’ respond to the ecological crisis?’**, which are sought to be verified during the fieldwork.

Postulate: A growing part of the population is reclaiming an ‘original meaning’ of Shinto.

The postulate implies the following statement: Shinto has not only experienced a decline but at the same time an original meaning of the Kami belief has been undermined during its transformations, which is seeing in recent times an upsurge amongst certain parts of the population. The primary objection against the idea of an ‘original meaning of the Kami belief’ will be recalled, using Aike Rots’ words (personal communication, July 16th, 2018): “I don't really think Shinto has a single spiritual foundation or essence. If anything, Shinto is an umbrella term for a great variety of ritual practices and beliefs, popular and marginal [...]”. Keeping this objection in mind, it has thus firsthand been endeavored to investigate *if* something has been ‘lost’, as well as *what* and *how*.

Given the fact that the research question focalizes on ‘contemporary Shinto’, it has been endeavored to understand present day evolutions of Shinto within the Japanese people and to investigate to what extent and in what form a population tendency exists which genuinely advocates a reconsideration of the Japanese ‘Kami-belief’, before further seeking to question ecological implications of these advocated ideas. It is furthermore to be investigated, if one can speak of a “new generation of Shrine worshippers which endeavors Nature-worship and genuine spiritual seeking” (Horie, 2017: 214). Equally, it is being demanded what type of future evolution are likely to occur or are being advocated.

Hypothesis 1: Core ideas of an ‘original Shinto belief’, which are to be identified during the literature review and fieldwork, can respond to the Eco-spiritual project in its diverse requirements.

It is hypothesized that core-ideas of an ‘original Shinto belief’ can serve as a foundation in order to establish a Shinto (-inspired) Eco-spiritual discourse. However, it first needs to be questioned if it can be assumed that, despite controversies on an ‘original Shinto spirituality’ (c.f. chapter 4.3.1 ‘Inconsistencies’), there exists in reality an ‘adequate’ way of addressing the belief system, which subsequently hints (or not) to a set of qualifiable spiritual core-ideas. Comparison between observed infield discourses and literature may thereby help qualifying certain core concepts of Shinto with more confidence. Ideas conveyed within a presumable ‘original meaning’ will then be assessed

through the conceptual framework of Eco-spirituality. The relevance of the Eco-spirituality discourse as to responding to the ecological crisis has been mapped out in chapter 3.1.4 ‘Eco-spirituality: A Western approach to paradigm shifting’. Broadly speaking, such a discourse implies the existence of a set of practices and ideas which can induce paradigm shifts within individuals as to obtaining an operational ecological consciousness, which is informed by ecosystem integrity. The conceptual framework will be further elucidated in chapter 7 ‘Discussion of results’. However, given the cultural identity of the belief system, it needs to be furthermore assessed, if an ‘Eco-spiritual function’ may be arbitrarily and legitimately attributed to or deducted from the Shinto spirituality.

Hypothesis 2: Shinto is an embedded belief: The principal place where it is practiced can serve as a place for promoting ecological awareness in two ways. Jinjas (Shinto shrines) can serve for such ends:

- 2.1. Through the specific experiences made in those places, which promote an enlarged consciousness of the world. (Eco-spiritual function)
- 2.2. Through environmental education on natural sites where environmental preservation is being achieved. (Eco-spiritual and environmentalist function)

The endeavor here will be the assessment of a practical implementability of diverse Shinto ecological discourses, in form of an environmental and Eco-spiritual program operated on a deliberately chosen sacred site, in this context Shinto shrines. After assessing the two sub-points (2.1. and 2.2.) taken separately, the viability of this hypothesis will be evaluated based on a recapitulation of diverse environmental and ecological functions of Shinto shrines, as well as on encountered challenges and counterarguments.

(2.1.) It will be questioned if, and in what way Shinto shrines may constitute a frame within which transformative experiences of sacred nature can be achieved, following the idea of a shifting of paradigm or ‘meta-noia’ as framed by Michel Maxime Egger (2012). Edward McDougall’s assertion (2016: 891) will be recalled in this context, who states that the central point of a Shinto shrine is that it is “in some sense every-day and natural, but also unique and special” and thus “the pivot [...] to experience the transformative nature of sacrality interconnected with secularity.”, as well as Pope Francis’ claim that the experience of sacredness is the foundation of developing a genuine ecological morality (Egger, 2017). In this context it is to be investigated, what meaning can be attributed to the Kami-experience and if there exists a specificity to Shinto shrines, as sacred places, which may (or not) make them worthy of consideration.

(2.2.) Moreover, it is questioned if shrines and their surrounding sacred groves can serve as public sites where environmental awareness through education can be achieved, fostered by the symbolic value of Shinto as a so-called ‘Nature-religion’, harboring a presumable stance of environmental preservation or operating environmental actions on its shrine grounds.

5.2 Data collection procedures

Interview questions have been derived from the postulate and the two working hypotheses and have been reformulated in the form of interview grids (c.f. appendices 1.1-1.3.), which have been adapted according to different types of interlocutors. The interlocutors can be broadly separated into 3 categories: 1) ‘ordinary’ Shrine visitors, 2) Shinto experts, and 3) Shinto shrine clergy (priests). In reality it was not always obvious to separate categories 1) and 2) since the definition of Shinto expert itself is not clear, yet may be designated as persons having extensive knowledge about the belief system. The interview grids were structured according to the following themes (detailed questions were adapted according to the interlocutors):

1. Introduction & personal components
2. Views on Shinto, Kami and Shinto shrines & environmental awareness
3. Contemporary tendencies & future evolutions of the belief system
4. Transformational (Eco-spiritual) aspects of Shinto shrines

All conversation were held in Japanese between the author of this essay and the interlocutors. Different methods of note-taking were being employed, entailing on-the-fly jotting, audio-recording and jotting after field sessions. Different qualitative research methods have been implemented and tested on site. These principally include semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and participant observation methods.

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with persons with whom 1) a trustful relationship has been established over the course of several hours or days, or 2) an appointment has been explicitly scheduled. These interviews have been characterized as interviews, which have been prepared beforehand, yet “giv[ing] the participant freedom to express views with his/her own words.” (Stuckey, 2013: 59). This has been important, since it has not been intended to obtain exact, objective responses that may verify the different hypotheses, investigated topics being rather vague in nature and touch on estimated tendencies or hard-to-grasp notions such as (Eco-)spirituality, ecological consciousness and sacrality. The semi-structured interview has been chosen in order to accord the interlocutor sufficiently free space to let arise personal views and opinions on these topics in a casual, rather than forced manner. Moreover, it has been stated, that the “open-ended questions may [...] provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic [...]” (ibid: 58). The interview grids have in this respect merely helped to direct the conversations, as well as serve as check-lists in order to cover the expected topics. However, in some cases, time constraints did not permit to cover all aspects. In the case of semi-structured interviews, notes have been taken either directly in a notebook, or through audio-recording. It has appeared that audio-recording permits to recall conversations in a more detailed manner, however,

in particular at the beginning of the field-trip it has been refrained from using audio-recording out of fear of establishing a constraining atmosphere.

In many cases, the interlocutors were encountered on-the-fly, making it inconceivable for the observer to veritably ‘impose’ an interview, let alone record the conversation. Much of these communications have thus been done in form of informal interviews, where diverse topics of the interview grids were sought to be seeded into a casual conversation, in order to obtain fragments of informations that may contribute in verifying the working hypotheses. The position of the observer as a field-researcher has been mentioned in most cases. The interlocutors were addressed in an as respectful and tactful manner as possible. Interlocutors were encountered in and around shrines, as well as in all kinds of public or private spaces, where circumstances have allowed to touch upon the investigated topics. It has been stated that the informal interview goes hand in hand with participant observation, in that the observer is immersed in the field and is seeking to develop an understanding of the setting and build rapport. It is an integral part “of the process of observing a social setting of interest” (RWJF, 2008). Participant observation has been characterized as being a method which permits to develop “a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study” (Kawulich, 2005: 3), and has in this short fieldwork been used in order to achieve “involvement in the day-to-day [...] activities of participants in the researcher setting” (ibid:2) as well as “establishing rapport within a community [...] as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally [...]” (ibid), underlining in this regard the aspect of unobtrusiveness. The effectuated methods however deviate from the traditional participant observation method, in that the observer was not involved in a “variety of activities over an extended period of time” (ibid: 17) in order to observe daily activities of the community, as well as preceded by an entry procedure into a given community. At the end of each field session or significant conversation, field-notes were taken as quickly as possible in order to recall as well as possible the remembered content.

Towards the end of the field-trip, the author of this essay has participated in a discussion round organized by the scholar Norichika Horie at the university of Tokyo, where he had the occasion to submit his main findings (c.f. appendix 3.) during the fieldwork and receive corresponding feedback.

As for the transcriptions and their translations, it has been sought to reproduce as accurately as possible what the interlocutor has said. Some minor questions which were asked by the observer have not always been written down in the transcriptions.

5.3 Challenges

It is admitted, that the data collection has not been following a particularly rigorous scheme, in terms of rigorously sticking to interview grids or in terms of establishing a defined strategy of contact making with new interlocutors and note-taking. It was also not an obvious task to decide

upon criteria of appropriate sites of field research in advance, since Shinto exists all over the country, thus anticipating places where resourceful information may be obtained has proven to be a challenge. It has been repeatedly stated by many persons, that the Japanese generally do not know much about Shinto, and indeed finding people who were capable of giving detailed knowledge about either Shinto or Shinto & Ecology was not easy. Moreover, touching upon sensitive topics such as spirituality, environmental or ecological awareness, ecology, sacrality, deeper understanding of belief systems, has been done with precaution, since it has been assumed that they may frighten, disturb or upset certain persons, notably bearing in mind that there is a general disdain towards religion. There was some part of reluctance, at times, on behalf of the observer to push interlocutors too far into talking about subjects that they may feel uncomfortable about. Therefore it was sometimes difficult to go to the core of certain questions which had been formulated in the interview grids. Most of the time, the author has already felt lucky enough, if the interlocutor gave informative insight about personal views on his belief, as well as relationships between Shinto & Ecology. It did not always feel appropriate to force the course of the interview by asking abrupt questions which were unrelated to what the interlocutor was saying, however it has been sought to direct the conversations as well as possible in order to cover the diverse aspects of the interview grid.

5.4 Persons, Regions

With regard to the informal interviews effectuated with ‘ordinary’ shrine-visitors, the responses were oftentimes very similar in content. Thus only a few persons have been chosen to be listed here, whose responses are representative for what the observer has been told numerous times in the several regions he has visited. Moreover, personal details have been sought to be obtained as well as possible, however, sometimes merely a surname could be asked depending on the appropriateness to go deeper into enquiry. These details can be found in appendix 3 ‘Transcriptions of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations’.

Tokyo metropolitan area

Person 1 (P1), Web-marketer

Norichika Horie (N.H.), Religious scholar at university of Tokyo

Fukui prefecture

Osamu Kôjimoto (O.K.), Organic farmer

Chiaki Kôjimoto (C.K.), Dental assistant

Takashi Tanaka (T.T.), Chief curator, Shinto expert

Genji Nosaka (G.N.), CEO, Chief curator

Yoshihiro Mihara (Y.M.), Shinto expert

Kôchi prefecture

Akihiro Hosokawa (A.H.), Head priest at Kôchi Hachimangû

Takanori Ogasawara (T.O.), Head priest at Tosa Jinja

Ehime prefecture

Mitsuhiro Yanagihara (M.Y.), Shrine administrator, Shinto expert

Chizuko Nomoto (C.N.), Organic farmer

Rie Sasaki (R.S.), Organic farmer

Person 2 (P2), Shrine visitor

Couple 1 (C1), Shrine visitor

Couple 2 (C2), Shrine visitor

Mitsuharu (M.), Cook

Kaori Kawahashi (K.K.), Middle school teacher

Junko Obata (J.O.), Museum personnel

Hiroaki Hirano (H.H.), Environmental activist, Shinto expert

Chapter 6: Identified topics

Following contents derive entirely from the different conversations which were being held during the fieldwork. All the persons cited in the following section have been interlocutors of the author. Photos of persons have been included upon agreement.

6.1 Discourses on Shinto, Kami and Jinja

6.1.1 'General population' and '*Jinja Mairi*'

Relationship to the notion 'Shinto' and 'religion'

Most Japanese persons are not familiar with the usage of the notion 'Shinto', nor do they call themselves Shintoists. Shinto practices, such as going to shrines, are much more related to culture than religion. According to Chiaki Kôjimoto (C.K.), a dental assistant from Sabae (Fukui prefecture), people don't think very deeply about the meaning of Shinto. She states that she is not affiliated with anything which one would call either Shinto or religion. Person 1 (P1), a web-marketer from Tokyo states that he does not have any beliefs and thinks that religion is nonsense. He knows that there exists the word Shinto but according to him, nobody in Japan uses it. Repeatedly, in different regions, it has been stated that nobody thinks about Kami in a very profound way. "It is just the regular everyday and has nothing to do with religion". According to Takashi Tanaka (T.T.), Shinto expert and chief curator of the Oono historical museum from Fukui prefecture, "Shinto shrines are more or less popular, because their image is 'esthetically Japanese', however 99% of the Japanese [...] don't use the word Shinto. We use the word Jinja, not Shinto". Even upon asking Takanori Ogasawara (T.O.), head priest of the 'Tosa shrine' from the Kôchi prefecture, if he is a Shintoist (Shinto believer), he would answer with hesitation: "something like this, yes, probably". Moreover, he states, that Shinto in its core is not a religion but is synonymous to the morality of the Japanese people (*Dôtokukan*).

Visiting shrines

Despite the absence of belief, (P1) states that if he would come across a Jinja while visiting a tourist destination he would go there and "bow and clap his hands" (Shinto custom of praying), rather than refrain from it. When there is a shrine, people would go to pray, "because the idea of Kami is proper to the Japanese culture.". Visiting a particular, beautiful shrine is a common Japanese touristic activity. Mostly these kinds of shrine visits are comprised within a 'package' of other touristic activities. The shrine visits are being referred to as '*Jinja Mairi*', or '*Omairi*', which stands for

'going to a shrine to pray'. The particularity of the 'tourist' shrines is that they are sufficiently affluent in order to have a regular shrine clergy, as well as a shrine office which sells different fortune-bringing items, such as 'Omikuji' or 'Ofuda'. Notably drawing 'Omikuji' (small fortune papers) appears to be an integral part of the more touristic type of *Jinja Mairi*. Furthermore, a large number of remarkable, affluent shrines are being officially described as 'Powerspots' in tourist guides. People would go there (regardless of the notion Powerspot) to pray for good fortune, health, success in business or school, relationships, as well as traffic and household safety. In contrast, less popular shrines which do not have a regular shrine clergy are rarely being visited as a tourist destination, except if these have been identified as 'Powerspots' and in this case oftentimes only by core-adherents of the Powerspot culture. Besides, visiting shrines at rare, special occasions is a common cultural activity which is being practiced by the majority of the population. Going to shrines, according to (C.K.), is related to joyful moments. These occasions include 'Hatsumoude' a New Year's festivity where festival stands are being put all over the shrine ground of the local shrine. Other common ceremonies at shrines comprise birth ceremonies, weddings, or traditional rites of passage. With regard to regular shrine visits, interlocutors oftentimes stated, that the only occasion when they go to shrines is at *Hatsumoude*, thus once a year, if at all. Some people however, who particularly value the connection to their birthplace, visit their local shrine on a monthly basis in order to pay respect to the enshrined local tutelary deity, however they appear to be the minority. Here again the implication is cultural rather than religious or spiritual. Whats more, Ogasawara (T.O.) states, that sometimes young CEOs would fervently visit shrines, in order to pray for success in business, but the expected benefit is worldly rather than of spiritual nature.

Most interlocutors, notably those which were encountered directly on a shrine ground confirm, that there is a "certain calmness" or a "calming effect" which emanates from these places. However, the general conception consists in "praying for something good to happen", deeper questioning being for that matter not made.

Unconscious Kami-belief

(P1), who stated that he has no beliefs, admitted that he is in reality confused when being asked about beliefs. He states, that all Japanese, including himself, think that there is Kami and somewhat fear and respect them, but they don't *believe in Kami*, in the sense of a Christian God. Some do in fact consciously admit that they believe in Kami, while others deny their existence. Akihiro Hosokawa (A.H.), head priest of the 'Kôchi Hachimangu shrine', states, that all Japanese people are unconsciously strong believers. Many interlocutors who at first stated that they do not believe in anything, later on admitted, upon further enquiry, that they somewhat think that Kami exists. Some have also mentioned that the Japanese people originally have their ethics and mentalities derived from the Kami belief, just that it is not conscious anymore.

6.1.2 Loss of belief

Several interlocutors, including Shinto experts, priests and more firm believers state that the Japanese people have lost sight of the real meaning of the belief. Equally they notice a general decline in interest towards Shinto shrines. The major reasons which have been given for this evolution were 1) modernization under the Meiji restoration, 2) the interdiction of Shinto teachings by the GHQ⁵⁴, 3) the forced separation of the emperor from his divine status by the GHQ and 4) the Aum-incident⁵⁵ of 1995 in Tokyo (referred to as ‘Sarin gas attack’). People in general started to become afraid of the notion of ‘religion’ (*Shûkyô*) since the Aum-incident, and a deeper questioning of Shinto beyond its common contemporary cultural practices is quickly associated with religion. (T.T.) from the Oono historical museum states:

“The belief has however changed since the Meiji period, and the Kami got far away from the heart of the people. Traditionally, the idea of the ‘Japanese Kami’ had a strong implication of gratitude which was the number 1 virtue and all moral implications derived from this. However, this has got lost. [...] I feel very desolate about the loss of belief today. [...] After the defeat of WWII, the American GHQ forced to cut the connection between the *Tennô* (Emperor) and Kami. Ever since, Japanese people started to distance themselves from Kami. [...] Moreover, the Aum-incident has been crucial for the alienation from religion amongst the Japanese people. Unfortunately, in our today’s lives, Kami has no more place to exist amongst the people.”

In general, the influence of the GHQ upon the belief system is held to have been more disruptive than the Meiji restoration. While some merely observe the decline in meaning of Shinto shrines and the belief, several interlocutors also think that an ‘ancestral meaning’ has gone lost during the transformations the Kami-belief has undergone. However, if one searches, one may still stumble across many people who have “the real knowledge”, as claimed by organic farmer Rie Sasaki (R.S.) from the Ehime prefecture. Similarly, Junko Obata (J.O.), museum staff from the Ehime prefecture states:

“Most people in Japan today think of Kami as something towards which one expresses wishes and maybe says thank you. But I think this is not exactly true. [...] I think there are not many Japanese people who try to understand the deeper meaning behind our own belief system, so I feel very grateful that people from other cultures endeavor to better understand this part of Japanese culture. I think nowadays, unfortunately, the majority of the Japanese people somewhat misunderstand the concepts of *Jinja* and *Omairi* and the deepness of their meaning.”

There have wishes been expressed as to protecting the Kami-belief and with it the original Japanese culture from disappearing. Many regret the fact that something as extraordinary as *Jinja* and Kami is

54 GHQ standing for ‘General headquarters’, the Japanese designation for the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, during the occupation of Japan after WWII (1945-1951).

55 The New Religious Movement ‘Aum Shinrikyô’ committed a deliberate act of bio-terrorism in the Tokyo subway in 1995, where the deadly sarin gas has been released, entailing dozens of dead and thousands of injured.

not valued anymore correctly. According to Yoshihiro Mihara (Y.M.), a Shinto expert from the Fukui prefecture, even shrine clergy is said to oftentimes misunderstand the “real ideas” of Shinto nowadays, despite their good intentions. In this vein, Mitsuhiro Yanagihara (M.Y.), a Shrine administrator from the Ehime prefecture claims:

“In ancient times, the *Gūji* (Head priest) could speak with Kami and consciously manipulate the energy of the universe. In a sense, the prayer is nothing else than manipulation of the energy of the universe. The *Gūji* was a medium of the Kami, like an oracle. But today, there are few people who are real ‘spiritualists’ who can do this. [...] Nowadays, the *Gūji* should be able to do this, otherwise he is not veritably fulfilling his role.”

6.1.3 Contemporary trends and evolutions

Ogasawara (T.O.), head priest of the Tosa shrine deplores that, notably in the Kôchi region, there is very little understanding and interest for shrines. This is applicable for the Tosa shrine, which has lost a lot of its meaning. Nevertheless, he sees some interesting evolutions happening in recent years, however they may be merely temporary as well. He states, that especially older university students as well as women start to become more genuinely interested in shrines as they grow older. Moreover he observes, that due to the Powerspot- and *Goshuin* ‘booms’, and also due to technological means such as smartphones, very recently, large numbers of people have started to get attracted by shrines. Even though, as a member of the clergy, he refrains from employing the term ‘Powerspot’, he is in a sense grateful for this evolution. What type of meaning these people search at shrines, however, remains unclear. (T.O.) believes that it is important that young people regain their relationships of trust and confidence towards the shrines, which is much more a cultural than religious matter. Moreover he advocates the idea that the Shrine ground can regain a new meaning amongst the population, for example by hosting new types of events, however big amounts of effort need to be put into such projects of redynamisation. Alongside efforts of redynamisation, he points out, that it is important to know well the history of Shinto which has admittedly been controversial due to its nationalistic implication. His wish is to render the Tosa shrine along with its neighboring Buddhist temple, into one “big spiritual site” (*Daireijo*), which shall represent harmonious coexistence and respect. It is important for him that contemporary Japanese belief systems evolve into a harmonious relationship between Shinto and Buddhism again.

Several interlocutors have mentioned, that their belief and relationship towards either shrines or Kami has changed. These people are all part of the category which deplores some kind of loss of belief amongst the general population. (J.O.) from the island of Oomishima (Ehime prefecture) states:

“[...] when I go to a Jinja, I only have feelings of gratitude. I can not at all go to Jinjas to wish for stuff. Maybe it is true that not everybody thinks like this, and there are still many people who go to Jinjas in order to hope to have their wishes fulfilled. But I really feel that more and more people realize this meaning behind the Kami in our 21st century. There is definitely a tendency.”

Similarly, Kaori Kawahashi (K.K.), a middle school teacher from Matsuyama (Ehime prefecture) mentions that when she was young, she used to go to Jinjas during *Hatsumoude* on New Years and didn't really care about a deeper meaning of doing *Omairi* (going to a shrine and pray). But today, she says, it has become very important for her to put her hands together. Everybody, she states, should regularly put their hands together in order to express gratitude. Moreover she believes, that little by little the Japanese people are reawakening to a new consciousness and that people are starting to get interested in spiritual topics. She states, that “this is something very recent, and small, but there is some kind of change happening.” (K.K.) as well as several persons, who expressed such views were oftentimes closely in touch with the milieu of organic farming. In these circles, the Japanese philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka has repeatedly been invoked as a pioneering figure, who believed in the regenerating power of Nature. He is equally considered as a pioneer of what has been referred to as the ‘study field of environmental belief’ (*Kankyôshinkôgaku*). This is also the case for organic farmer Chizuko Nomoto (C.N) from the city of Matsuyama (Ehime prefecture), who states:

“Formerly I prayed to the Kami for example for academic success, or for household safety. But then I started to reevaluate the prayer and change my praying method and it started to be more about general gratitude towards life.”

In her activity as an organic farmer, the belief and especially praying component appears to play a crucial role.

6.1.4 Shinto spirituality

Discourses on Kami

The most commonly heard statement in relation to the Kami-belief, from ‘ordinary’ shrine-visitors and Shinto experts alike, is the concept of *Yaoyorozu no Kami*, which literally means ‘8 myriads of Kami’, referring to the idea that there is Kami residing in all elements, from a single rice corn to mountains and seas, as well as within human beings. Within this concept, the Kami is rather perceived as an ‘energy which pervades everything’ than 8 myriads of individual Kamis. Views upon Kami are however divergent, and it is difficult to say, if there exists a general, unified conception of Kami. Some interlocutors were in fact talking at the same time of Kami in a polytheistic and pantheistic way. Some others were denying the polytheistic, mythological facet and

referred to Kami merely as a ‘mechanism’ (*Shikumi*, lit. ‘how it works’), such as environmental activist (implicated in projects of mitigation of water pollution) Hiroaki Hirano (H.H.) from Matsuyama (Ehime prefecture). According to him, the mythological Kami ‘characters’ were simply man made, for Kami to be relatable for human beings. He mentions, that the ‘Kami energy’ is the same as the vital energy of the universe: “Everything has this energy, the animals, the humans. And this is the idea of the *Yaoyorozu no Kami*.”. (R.S.), organic farmer from Matsuyama (Ehime prefecture), advances the idea, that the notion of Kami has been created by the people, but at the same time Kami has also existed long before the people. She thinks that the notion of Kami has been created in order to establish bonds between people: “People are different and not everybody understands and thinks the same. But when we have created an existence such as the Kami, then it is easy. Everybody knows, Kami is something which we venerate and express gratitude towards. Let’s all venerate Kami. It’s suddenly as simple as that.”. She also mentions that because people believe in a certain existence, this existence is being nurtured and becomes more existent.

There exists a tendency to perceive Kami in the sense of ancestors, this being especially the case within families who have a stronger Buddhist tradition. Thus even in Buddhist families, one speaks of Kami. This being said, arguably and as stated before, a large part of the population does not believe consciously in Kami and questioning a deeper meaning behind Kami is rather uncommon.

Kami and spiritual-ethical implications

Several pointed out the close link between the Japanese ‘sense of ethics’ (*Doutokukan*) and the underlying belief in Kami. Notably the concept of *Yaoyorozu no Kami* has been invoked as the most evident cause: “Since Kami is in everything, it goes without saying that we take care of all things.” Several interlocutors have stated, that the Kami has a consciousness. This consciousness expresses a wish, of how it would like to see the world go. However, the Kami-mechanism itself, according to (H.H.) will not limit the actions of people whether ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Nevertheless, as an environmental activists, (H.H.) admits that he likes to believe that the wish of the Kami consciousness is one of human beings taking care of the Earth. In a similar vein, Shinto expert Yoshihiro Mihara (Y.M.) from Fukui city claims that while on one hand Kami has a consciousness and expresses a wish that humans take care of the Earth, it does also not care if we all disappear:

“We all have to think progressively about aspects that permit us to stay on Earth. Kami supports us for that, but on the other hand, Kami doesn’t care either. If we all disappear he would just think: ‘once again, the human being has caused his own ruin’. Kami doesn’t say: don’t do this, don’t do that, i.e. don’t pollute the river. He just says ‘if you pollute, you understand that it gets polluted, don’t you?’ [...] The hearts of the people have to be reset, so we break away from a mindset where we always want more and more.”

(Y.M.) sees Kami as different from human beings in that they are not incarnated in a material existence. While human beings “build roads and houses”, the Kami supports the human being or lets him know that he is slightly on the wrong path. Similarly, (J.O.) from Oomishima (Ehime prefecture) speaks of the Kami as creating paths (*Michi*) for people. The Kami for her is

“an existence which watches over us, in order to make sure that we walk the path that we are meant to walk, and Kami protects us for that. If we break away from that path, then the Kami existence (*Kami no Sonzai*) assists us to get back to that path. So the Kami existence is not at all an existence which fulfills wishes. But it is something, which gives us at times painful experiences, in order to remind us of our personal path. Also when we are on the right path, the Kami existence will give us signs that it is the right path and maybe gives us power to encourage us on that way.”

According to Shrine administrator Yanagihara (M.Y.) from Matsuyama, the people are born as Kami, which is their real nature. We are all descendants of Kami. It is in the process of growing up that we slowly back away from this nature. He too speaks in terms of ‘path’ when referring to Kami and gives an account on human self-actualization:

“The meaning of Kami is the path of love (*Ai*). [...] Love means giving to each other, to surrender and make space for each other, encouraging each other, helping each other, consoling each other, forgiving each other. When one wakes up to love one starts to do for others which then creates gratitude [...] From the Kami perspective, the closer we get to love, the closer we get to Kami. It is all about giving and giving. The goal of the humanity is to strive towards love. [...]”

Many interlocutors underlined indeed the importance of gratitude, as being the number one virtue of the Kami-belief. Combining the different statements received in different regions, it can be suggested that the Kami has a sort of wish or expectation for the human being on one hand, but on the other hand Kami doesn’t care “if we all disappear”. Kami does not impose any taboos or dogmas. However, if the human being is to follow the path of Kami, which is one of taking care of the Earth and sharing love, then he would get signs and encouragement, that he is on the ‘right’ track so to speak, which corresponds to the Shinto idea of self-actualization. Several interlocutors indeed underlined the aspect of Kami ‘supporting’ us, when actions are in alignment with the Kami intention.

Perceiving Kami

(R.S.) claims that Kami sometimes makes itself perceptible through a succession of remarkable events that happen in a short period of time. She thus feels the existence of Kami through events that happen around her, rather than ‘seeing’ Kami with her eyes. Furthermore (R.S.) estimates that

the Kami can be nurtured by people focalizing their attentions to a certain shrine. Every time a person would go to a shrine to do *Mairi*, the Kami presence would become stronger. Several interlocutors maintain that there are places where the Kami-presence can be felt. For example (R.S.) speaks of “mystical looking places”, when she goes deep into the *Yama* (mountain-forest). Similarly, (T.O.) speaks of particular sacred places where the presence of the Kami, otherwise an invisible existence, can be felt (*Kôgôshii* lit. ‘which evoke the presence of Kamis’), and admits that he has a personal appreciation for these kinds of places. He maintains that in former times the Kami-belief had most likely been practiced in such places without the existence of dedicated shrines. Kami is for that matter not a visible existence, but “exists in the hearts of the people”.

Discourses on Jinja

Besides the already mentioned shrine-practices which are commonplace in contemporary Japan (visiting shrines as a tourist-recreational activity, the prayer usually being directed towards worldly benefits, as well as during special occasions and once-in-a-lifetime rites), there appears to be very little understanding and knowledge about Shinto shrines. Repeatedly, it has been stated, that Japanese people are not particularly interested in shrines and generally do not seek to understand any deeper meaning. (T.O.) mentions, however, that the ‘Powerspot boom’ and ‘*Goshuin* boom’ have in recent years contributed to a significant increase in the understanding of Shinto shrines.

Amongst persons who advocated ‘deeper’ knowledge about Jinjas, several views have been given. Shinto shrines have been characterized by many of the more firm believers as a crucial place for expressing gratitude. Moreover, it has been stated, that one should approach the Jinjas with a certain intention or a special idea, which is in alignment with the Kami-idea, notably expressing gratitude, and approach them in a respectful manner, rather than randomly wishing for good things to happen. In turn, (Y.M.) from Fukui city mentions that there is no need to wish for anything “since the Kami knows it already. The only thing one needs to do, is to express gratitude.”. Yanagihara (M.Y.) from Matsuyama states, that when one asks for something which is not in alignment with the Kami-way, it simply won’t be heard. Ogasawara (T.O.) from the Tosa shrine mentions that the gratitude plays a central role and without gratitude, the meaning of Shinto would not be fulfilled: “It is the idea, that the population is granted an existence by Nature and thus one pays awe and gratitude towards the Nature and its inhabiting divine forces.”. It has moreover been stated, that the Jinjas have been built in order to provide to the population a place where the *8 myriads of Kami* can properly be venerated. (R.S.) believes, that if the concept of taking care of all things of the Earth didn’t have a proper institution, the ideas would get lost, that’s why Jinjas have been built. (Y.M.) states:

“Firstly, Jinja exist in order to worship Kami. Secondly, they exist in order to pacify the wrath of the Kami. In order to pacify the wrath, a human builds a Jinja. Depending on the region, the people of the ancient times knew that *here* we have to build a Jinja, otherwise there are going to be floods or other calamities. [...] Thus one builds a Jinja in order to be able to communicate with the Kami and know, in which direction one has to develop, so people can become close to the Kami’s will again.”

(T.O.) states that the Jinja is a place which is characterized by its openness to all beliefs, nonbelievers, Christian and Buddhists alike being all wished to visit the Jinja and pray there. Moreover he believes that provincial Jinjas which are built outside of big agglomerations, such as the Tosa shrine, are special places where one can feel a proximity to Nature.

Spiritual relief is sometimes sought at shrines by people who are attained by difficult times in life. While seeking spiritual guidance is socially accepted, not many people ask for this kind of help. (T.O.) presumes that Shinto shrines are less associated with individual spirituality than Buddhist temples. While there are authors who try to establish a link between Shinto and spiritual growth, he is not sure if such efforts may be fruitful, since Shinto is essentially undogmatic and characterized by its openness of interpretation.

He states that he has been handed over responsibility over the Tosa shrine. It is under his instruction, that the evolution of the Jinja will be determined. While on one hand, he states that Jinjas have been constructed on places which have formerly been identified as ‘sacred’, thus pinpointing such places, on the other hand it is also the responsibility of the shrine-clergy to look after the Jinja and keep it a clean place, in order for their sacred nature and thus the Kami-presence to be felt.



Figure 6: Tosa shrine, Kôchi prefecture; Photo: Author

Transformational capacities of Jinjas

Several stated that the Jinja is a sacred ground (*Seichi*), located within a spiritual boundary (*Kekkai*) which connects to a ‘universal consciousness’ or places which ‘manipulate the energy of the

universe' and can play a role in resetting the mindsets of people. They are places, where particular informations can be received, according to (H.H.). However, he is not sure if they can awake any sort of environmental consciousness. Some Jinjas are being said to be more 'powerful' than others, in other words the Kami presence can be felt more or less depending on the Jinja. The ones who "have the energy are the real Jinja. They are places which connect to the energy of the 'Sky-Earth' (*Tenchi*)" and are said to have the ability to neutralize agitated spirits and put people in a purified, meditative state. It is then in this state that people can realize their own Kami or the connection to Kami, thus recognizing the 'path of Kami'. (T.O.) estimates, that the sacred character of the Jinja can serve as an entry point as to "raising awareness about the close relationship towards Nature.". With regard to transformational capacities, head priest Hosokawa (A.H.) from the Kôchi Hachimangû shrine estimates that those people who actually start to regularly come to the shrines, usually develop at one point a consciousness of Kami.

This being said, not many interlocutors appeared to be convinced about the idea, that an ecological or environmental consciousness can be directly achieved just by visiting a shrine. According to (R.S.), Jinjas can not necessarily change people who have no interest *a priori* in these places, even though probably they would feel something. She says, if the person is already on a personal path of being interested in sacred sites, then he/she may have a certain reaction from the place, but this is not something which can be forced onto people.

Genji Nosaka (G.N.), a CEO of an organic farming company from the Fukui prefecture has taken over several years ago a platform entitled *Kami spot network*, where he endeavors to list up all shrines of the Fukui prefecture. He says, that linking all shrines in this way may create something extraordinary in the end. His wish today is to create awareness around sacred sites and offer sacred experiences to the population. (G.N.) has welcomed the idea of establishing a link between ecological consciousness and transformative experience of sacred sites.

6.1.5 Divergent insiders' and experts' view on Shinto

Shinto experts and priests both stated that Shinto is not a religion and it has neither dogma nor taboos. Many state that the Kami-belief is much more a tradition which is deeply anchored within the Japanese culture, and that the Japanese mentality and ethical values are based on this belief. Several interlocutors stated that a genuine stance of reverence towards Nature had in fact been anchored in the hearts of the Japanese people since ancient times. (Y.M) states that there was initially no need to introduce Buddhism, because there was already a Kami belief existent and that it is somewhat unnatural and forced that there exists nowadays a so-called Shinto-Buddhism syncretism. According to him, even back in the days when Buddhism was introduced and spread by prominent figures such as Kukai, it was merely a way to paraphrase the Kami in Buddhist terms.

Several state that the deep connection to Kami has been progressively undermined, as already mentioned, during the diverse transformations that happened to Japan.

(T.O.) has characterized Shinto as a shamanistic tradition, where shamanistic methods were employed in order to pray to the divinities of Nature for a successful rice harvest. Shinto, according to him revolves around the divinities of Nature and the community's relationship towards these. During different seasonal festivals, Kami are addressed through season-specific *Norito* prayers. The spring festival-*Norito* would be concerned with prayers for rain but also good weather, the summer festival for the resilience of rice plants in order to endure the harsh typhoons and the autumn festival in order to express gratitude for the harvests. He states that Shinto is particular because it is a belief where closeness to Nature plays a fundamental role.

While some state that Shinto is originally based on rice culture and harvest, others, such as chief curator and Shinto expert (T.T.) from Oono (Fukui prefecture) state that before rice agriculture arrived from the continent, the Japanese people were mainly hunters and gatherers. The claim goes that the animistic Nature divinity derives from this epoch which is referred to as the *Jōmon* period (15'000 BC to 300 BC), rather than from the rice agriculture epoch, referred to as the *Yayoi* period. *Jōmon* and *Yayoi* are essentially being considered as antagonistic, and *Yayoi consciousness* presumably has constituted the fundament upon which a Western inspired modernization was likely to arrive. Due to place constraints these ideas will not be further mapped out here, please refer to the transcriptions of Takashi Tanaka (T.T.) and Hiroaki Hirano (H.H) in appendix 3.

6.2 Shinto & Ecology

6.2.1 Viability of a Shinto ecological discourse in Japan

Opinions on the relationship between Shinto and Ecology are diverse. Several interlocutors have not consciously been considering a potential relationship between these two domains. While some simply deny any potential connection between belief and environment, some also expressed that they found the idea pertinent, without however having thought about it beforehand.

Especially in view of the general disdain towards religion, the association Shinto and Ecology may appear questionable, according to (T.T.). Even though he advocates the idea, he doubts that this association can achieve lasting changes in mentality in contemporary Japan, and is likely to be perceived as a form of proselytism. The main issue here, once again, is the deplorable loss of understanding of core Shinto ideas and “the alienation of Kami from the hearts of the people”. An operational ecological Shinto discourse in Japan will be closely related to the Kami consciousness and its resulting spiritual aspiration, which can not simply be forced upon people. (T.T.) thus estimates that a considerable amount of effort needs to be put into reeducating the population about the meaning of the Kami-belief, as well as re-legitimizing a deeper questioning of the belief. This renewed understanding will be necessary as a sort of “soft cushion”, as (T.T.) frames

it, between the notion of Shinto/Kami/Jinja and Ecology, otherwise such efforts are likely to be associated with dubious acts of New religions. Yet, he admits that a genuine attitude of reverence towards the mountains (*Yama*, lit. ‘mountain-forest’) and water is highly desirable and especially if priests set this example it may have an impact on the people.

6.2.2 Environmental action on shrine grounds

As for the Tosa Shrine in Kôchi, environmental awareness and action is already, although implicitly, being operated. Above of all, Ogasawara (T.O.) sates, that he is well aware of the environmental damage that has been happening in Japan, such as the Minamata illness. He has been present on the Shrine ground since 25 years and has put a lot of effort into restoring the once neglected shrine. Such efforts have been done according to different Japanese environmental charts or methods such as the *Kinshizen-Kôhô* (lit. ‘Near-Nature-method’), a framework for modifying the environment in agreement with an understanding of the ecosystem. He repeatedly insisted on these different methods and appeared to have a detailed knowledge. (T.O.) spoke in terms of “striving for a healthy ecosystem on a local level.”. Measures included, informed by past mistakes of Japan’s environmentally harmful behavior, the intentional choice of tree species from an ecological rather than esthetical point of view in order to prevent soil erosion and enable to replenish ground water stocks in the surrounding sacred grove. According to him coniferous monocultures in former times have caused soil erosion, thus specific deciduous trees are being planted at a certain interval, in order for the fallen leaves to absorb rainwater.

Moreover, he believes that the Tosa shrine can become a hosting place for new kinds of events within the sacred setting, as long as these comply with the ‘Jinja-rules’. Recently he has started to welcome a traditional drum (*Taiko*) group to perform on the shrine ground. Upon inquiry, (T.O.) has welcomed with appreciation the idea that the Jinja can become a ground of promoting environmental awareness by hosting certain types of events. However as for now, he states, there is a lack of financial resources and willingness. All things considered, it appears that Shinto, taken the Tosa shrine as an example, is well aware of the incongruity between its Nature-message and past environmental destructions, as well as of its own controversial history. It is in this context the openness of interpretation and the malleability of the belief system which can enable to integrate ecological discourses at a more explicit level.

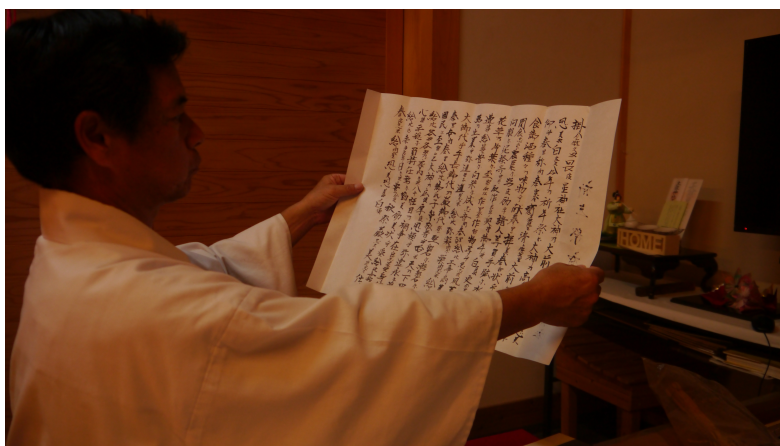


Figure 7: Head priest Takanori Ogasawara holding a Norito writing; Photo: Author

6.2.3 Kami-awareness and ecological consciousness

Combining the assertions of several interlocutors, it can be suggested, that there is a direct and profound relationship between environmental awareness and the awareness of Kami, in that its underlying spiritual aspiration, namely the following of the ‘path of Kami’, harbors an intrinsic stance of taking care of the Earth and other people, of giving and having a ‘straight heart’, as well as expressing gratitude towards Nature (more precisely towards *Nigi-Mitama*, the abundant, harmonious aspect of the Kami-nature) for allowing human beings a harmonious existence.”. In this context it has oftentimes been stated that Kami *is* Nature, and according to (T.T.) it is composed of *Ara-Mitama* and *Nigi-Mitama* (c.f. Chapter 4.1.2 ‘Kami and Jinja’). It is especially the notion of ‘taking care of the Earth’ (*Chikyû o daiji ni suru*), rather than ‘taking care of Nature’, which has been expressed by many interlocutors throughout different regions. Jinjas play for that matter a crucial role as to providing a framework where these associations are being reminded. As for Sasaki (R.S.), her genuine interest in Kami has begun approximately at the same time as she started to “want to take care of the Earth”. She mentions that “when one realizes Kami then automatically people will tend to take care of the Earth.”. However, she admits that this assertion is valid for her, precisely because she believes in Kami. In the end it is something personal, and she has no definite answer to the above-mentioned assertions. According to (Y.M.) from Fukui, “underlining the relationship between environmental preservation and Kami is extremely important. It is essential and very important that people realize that there exists Kami and from there ethical values will derive as well as the sense of taking care of the Earth.”. For Nomoto (C.N.), organic farmer from Matsuyama, there is a strong connection between prayer and agriculture. She thinks of Kami in terms of ‘power of the Kami’, which is transmitted through spoken prayer and which allegedly harbors a ‘spiritual power of the word’ (*Kotodama*, lit. ‘spirit of the word’). She endeavors in the

future to help decontaminate radioactively contaminated soil from the Fukushima region through the use of specific microorganisms.

It is striking that all the ‘deep Kami believers’, in the sense that they 1) firmly believe in the existence of Kami and 2) provide deeper knowledge on the belief, who were encountered during the field-trip, also have a ‘strong ecological discourse’, in the sense of repeatedly addressing notions of ‘taking care of the Earth’, or ‘doing for the Earth’, as well as regarding Shinto as a profoundly Nature-oriented belief system. For example Mihara (Y.M.) states:

“If someone uses fertilizers, and kills thus insects, bacteria, or other organism and operates a type of agriculture that does not harmonize with Nature, the question will be, is this pleasing Kami? Kami asks: If just the human beings can live is that alright? No probably not. Kami says, that we are all friends, spiders, frogs, shrimps, snakes, we are all of the same family, why can’t you have a good relation ship. Aren’t we part of the same kinship? Human being for economic ends and for money does everything, drills tunnels, tears down mountains, cuts down trees. As a consequence the rivers and seas get polluted. At this point Kami would say: Do it better! Find a way to be in harmony with Nature, otherwise human beings will all disappear. If all animals and fish die, human beings will all die. But human beings fight wars, invent weapons, kill each other, something which is good for nobody. Kami asks: Why do you fight? Build a world where people don’t need fight. Why do you fight? For power and money.”

According to (Y.M.), a Kami society is one which is aware of the cycle of Nature and lives in accordance. At the moment, the Earth’s population is very different from Kami. Especially a consumerist and capitalistic society looks into exactly the opposite direction as the Kami.

6.2.4 Ritualistic ecological paradigm

Besides the discussed individual spiritual aspects resulting from the Kami-belief, which may bear an ecological implication, (Y.M.) gives another account on the “close relationship between Kami and environment”. It essentially comes down to the reasons why shrines have been built in the first place: To correctly worship Kami 1) in order to express gratitude and 2) in order to pacify their wrath. (Y.M.) states that in ancient times the people knew where they had to build a Jinja, in order to prevent floods or other calamities from arriving. The calamities corresponding to the *Ara-Mitama* of the Kami-nature appear when the intentions of the people and the Kami drift apart: “The Kami can’t help but feel in anger about the acts of the human beings. [...] Thus one builds a Jinja in order to be able to communicate with the Kami and know, in which direction one has to develop, so people can become close to the Kami’s will again.”. He mentions that the concept of ancestor worship has been present in Japan before Buddhism arrived and essentially referred to the fact that all people are children of Kami. However, in modern times, people forget that they are children of Kami and fight each other and degrade the environment, towards which Kami feels a profound frustration.

He then states that in ancient times, people had the knowledge of Kamis of different elements such as the Kami of the fire, the thunder or the wind. He also invokes the spiritual power of the word (*Kotodama*), certain successions of sounds which are contained in the *Norito*-prayers, through which Kamis are being addressed correctly. (Y.M.) states, that in regions where there are repeated fires, such as in the city of *Awara*, a famous city for hot baths, the corresponding Kami is not worshiped correctly. The *Nigi-Mitama* is not being venerated and the *Ara-Mitama* is not being pacified. Same goes, according to him, for the repeated forest fires in California.

6.2.5 Great Eastern Earthquake and spirituality

According to religious scholar Norichika Horie (N.H.), it is crucial to mention the 3/11/2011 Great Eastern Earthquake and Tsunami, when speaking of Ecology and Spirituality in contemporary Japan. It has profoundly changed the lives of many, and has changed the way Nature was being considered. The prevailing death of thousands of people and the devastating consequences of the threefold catastrophe of earthquake, tidal wave and nuclear accident confronted many with profound existential questions of life and death. It has been stated that this event has had a far-reaching impact, not only on those who were directly affected, but on the whole Japanese population. It has been considered as a pivotal event that changed the perception towards Nature of many and arguably entailed consequences of spiritual nature. Environmental awareness has indeed increased, and according to Horie, ever since, Shinto and forest protection, as well as studying the roles of sacred forests has become a particularly hot topic in present days. *Chinju no Mori* (sacred groves) are in this context notably being perceived through their diverse protective roles against environmental catastrophes.

Furthermore, many people who were evacuated from the affected areas were forced to reestablish new lives from scratch, bringing along considerable amount of trauma and violent rupture with the birthplace. It has been observed that it is not uncommon for these environmental refugees to change their lifestyles, and former corporate people engage in new ecologically oriented direction such as organic farming. This has been the case with Osamu Kôjimoto (O.K.), an organic farmer from the Fukui prefecture, who had been encountered during the field-trip. He has left behind Fukushima 7 years ago with his wife Chiaki (C.K.), a few days after the nuclear accident and has settled down in the Fukui prefecture in order to dedicate himself to organic farming, even though he did not have any previous knowledge.

Chapter 7: Discussion of results

7.1 Preliminary remarks

The ‘environmentalist paradigm’ refers to a general tendency of reclaiming ancestral ecological ideas which have presumably been forgotten “as a result of the twin process of modernization and ‘Westernization’ [...] contain[ing] important clues for living sustainably and solving environmental problems today” (Rots, 2017a: 192). In this context it has been suggested on several occasions during the field-trip, that the Shinto belief needs to be interpreted in a new light in order to overcome past prejudices and misunderstandings. It is thus not only a matter of reclaiming original, lost ideas, but reinterpreting them in a contemporary, ecologically informed manner. Such efforts will without a doubt be necessary if Shinto seeks to reclaim its image of a Nature-religion. One aspect of reevaluation is a transparent acknowledgement of past controversies and inconsistencies. Takanori Ogasawara (T.O.) from the Tosa shrine appears to set such examples, in that he advocates the importance of well knowing the Japanese history and in admitting that Shinto has indeed been “abused” for nationalistic purposes. It is also according to Takashi Tanaka (T.T.) that shrine priests play a pivotal role in pointing towards new directions into which the belief system may evolve.

Even though it has been argued that environmentalist ideas have had progressive influence on the mainstream self-definition of Shinto (Rots, 2017a), Tanaka states that nonetheless any association between Shinto and Ecology may be looked upon with skepticism, given the general distrust of the Japanese population towards religion. Consequently, a considerable amount of effort needs to be invested in order to re-legitimize an innovative interpretation of the Shinto framework.

Equally, different objections towards Shinto ecological discourses (c.f. chapters 4.4.1 ‘Environmental preoccupation and destruction’ and 4.4.2 ‘Dismantling the eco-discourse’) need to be taken into consideration. Recalling past deforestations, amongst others in pre-modern times⁵⁶, and other environmental issues, the ‘veneration-destruction’ paradox, invoked by Knight (2004), appears to be pertinent: Veneration as promoted by Shinto is in reality merely addressed towards certain forms of Nature for their aesthetic value. Moreover, Kalland’s objection (2002: 151) of Shinto promoting a holistic image of Nature, where it can be “natural to destroy Nature” is perhaps equally truthful. However, referring back to Ogasawara, the contemporary endeavor shall be the acknowledgement of such reproaches rather than their denial or contestation. In an age of globalization where Western ideas have pervasively entered the Japanese culture, it can be expected that Shinto is capable of integrating a Western inspired ecological discourse, in the same manner as it has done with the Western New Age discourse (Horie, 2017: 201), in order to overcome its loopholes and reaffirm its message of Nature veneration. In this context, however, it is hoped that notably conservative Shrine Shinto actors do not abuse of imported concepts for nationalistic

⁵⁶ Even though it may well be argued, that notions of environmental preservation, as they exist in the West, have not been existent.

means, as it is for that matter already being observed with the ‘environmentalist paradigm’ (Rots, 2015a, 2017a).

7.2 Discussion and verification of postulate and hypotheses

7.2.1 Verification of postulate

Postulate: A growing part of the population is reclaiming an ‘original meaning’ of Shinto.

The majority of the Japanese appears to engage in some form in Shinto practices, mostly visiting shrines, however few question the meaning behind the belief. Most are unfamiliar with the term Shinto and there exists a general disdain against religion and spirituality, which is closely associated to either dubious religious organizations or political movements. Practices which seem religious from a Western point of view, such as praying in front of shrines, are in most cases not perceived as religious but cultural.

Upon further investigation, an array of persons have been encountered who claim that there exists a cleavage in contemporary Japan between what can be called an ‘original meaning’ and the commonplace custom which is practiced at Shinto shrines. The difference can be seen by the way Shinto shrines are being approached. Horie (2017, 2018) distinguishes in that regard between ‘worldly benefits’ and ‘spiritual seeking’. According to Shinto expert and chief curator Takashi Tanaka, there is an alienation of Kami from the hearts of the people, alongside a loss of belief, an evolution which has been described as ‘deplorable’. Most interlocutors who had a particular knowledge on Shinto have claimed similar thoughts. Diverse transformations that the belief has undergone have been held for responsible for the loss of a ‘consciousness of Kami’ or the ‘realization of Kami’. Pivotal reasons for such transformations depicted in both chapters 4.2.2 ‘Loss of faith’ and 6.1.2 ‘Loss of belief’ (fieldwork) coincide, whilst during the fieldwork, most commonly, the forced interdiction of Shinto teachings as well as separation of the Emperor and Kami by the American GHQ after the defeat of WWII, and the Aum-incident of 1995 have been invoked.

Moreover, most Japanese people indeed appear to have an unconscious Kami-belief, which however they do not consciously assume. This observation may to some extent confirm the assertion of several authors and interlocutors alike who maintain that the Japanese mentality is closely related to the Kami-belief. However, Rots’ statement (2014) needs to be kept in mind: “Most historians [...] deny that there is any transhistorical essence to Shinto (i.e., something that defines ‘Shintoness’). This is different from most insiders’ interpretations and from most popular introductions to Shinto, which usually assert that Shinto is *the* indigenous religious tradition of Japan – singular, ancient, uniquely Japanese, and with an unchanging core essence.”. Indeed, for those interlocutors who assert, that the ‘consciousness of Kami’ has gone lost, the Japanese

mentality is oftentimes depicted as being deeply intertwined with the notion of Kami (not Shinto) and furthermore Japanese people are described as ‘children’ or ‘descendants of Kami’. Yet, historical acuity of these statements cannot be proven. Nevertheless, it can be stated with certainty, that there exists a geographically dispersed population part which both claims the loss of a so-called original or real meaning of the Kami-belief and advocates its reconsideration. Opinions on the ‘trendiness’ of these claims are however divergent. During this fieldwork it could not be assessed *to what extent* such a population tendency exists. Tanaka (T.T.), for instance, claims that unfortunately, the original belief is more and more in decline and thus appeared to be rather pessimistic about a significant upsurge. Other interlocutors have stated the contrary and maintained optimistically that ever more people are becoming conscious about the real meanings of the Kami belief, as well as interested in spiritual topics. In a similar optimistic vein, Horie (2017: 214) speaks of a new generation of Shrine worshippers which is emerging and which endeavors Nature-worship and genuine spiritual seeking.

Broadly speaking it can be suggested that what has been lost is the ‘root part of piety’ as has been suggested by Buddhist Monk Riten Tanaka (Ueshima, 2009). An ‘original meaning’ of the Kami-belief consists in this respect first and foremost in the proximity felt to the Kami and its ethical-spiritual implication. ‘Original meaning’ (*Hontô no imi* 本当の意味) in this context refers to the diverse advocacies that have been encountered during the field-trip. Accounts given on this meaning all had a ‘re-enchanted’ character, in that notions of spirituality (first and foremost gratitude), conscious and affirmed belief in Kami as an invisible or sacred existence, and Earth-awareness were repeatedly mentioned.

This being said, visiting shrines for worldly benefits or genuine spiritual seeking is oftentimes not a matter of either-or. There are not just the ‘core-groups’ who have understood a presumable ‘original meaning’ of the Kami belief, and ‘the others’ who are misunderstanding it. In-between cases are plenty, and every person has a slightly different discourse. Shrines are being visited for an array of reasons, and it can be suggested, that at different times different meanings are being sought. Specific rites and festivals let aside, visiting shrines comes down to: Seeking mysticism, seeking ‘Powerspot’ influenced mysticism, reconnection to tradition, recreational touristic activities, genuine spiritual seeking, specific worshipping of certain deities, as well as expecting worldly benefits, such as health, wealth or relationships.

Lastly, however it needs to be pointed out that the vagueness of interpretation and malleability is an inherent property of Shinto (Herbert, 1964; Horie, 2017). From this point of view, even if the contemporary ‘re-enchanted’ claim of a Kami belief is not based on entirely truthful historical content (which in any case cannot be proven), it cannot be dismissed either. A so-called ‘original meaning’ of the Kami-belief may indeed be a free interpretation. Nonetheless, coinciding and complementary ideas (c.f. chapters 6.1.4 ‘Shinto spirituality’ and 6.2.3 ‘Kami-awareness and ecological consciousness’) have been identified across several regions, which moreover correspond

to diverse literature. These ideas will thus be scrutinized in the next chapter upon their ecological relevance.

7.2.2 Verification of Hypothesis 1 (Application of the conceptual framework: Eco-spirituality)

Hypothesis 1: Core ideas of an ‘original Shinto belief’, which are to be identified during the literature review and fieldwork, can respond to the Eco-spiritual project in its diverse requirements.

The endeavor of the Eco-spirituality project (c.f. chapter 3.1.2 ‘Eco-spirituality: A Western approach of paradigm shifting’) consists in operating paradigm shifts in order to bring forth a consciousness which is adapted from an ecosystem point of view. The objective is to obtain a so-called ‘integral ecology’ which consists of a combination between surface ecological actions or ways of living (external side) and an operational ‘eco-consciousness’, or ‘internal ecology’ as framed by Egger (2012: 17) (internal side). Such a consciousness shall promote applications on the external side out of intrinsic motivation. The contribution of belief-systems as to inspiring ways of favoring shifts within consciousness in order to bring forth an ‘internal ecology’ are for that matter being sought. Tenets claim that a resacralization or ‘re-enchantment’ of our vision of the cosmos (ibid: 22), as well as its spiritual-ethical implications, constitute a pivotal precondition in order to expect the desired outcomes.

The framework of Eco-spirituality, as given by Michel Maxime Egger in his book ‘La Terre comme soi-même: Repères pour une écospiritualité’ (2012), next to laying out broader principles of the meaning of Eco-spirituality as described above, has proposed a detailed instruction on the process of an ‘Eco-spiritual transformation’, rooted in Christian tradition, to which it was not expected to find, as part of this essay, sufficient resources in order to respond in detail. Thus, in an admittedly simplistic manner, this essay contents itself to consider the Eco-spirituality in a very broad acceptance, by merely considering its general requirements. A general guideline has been given in a threefold process by Egger (ibid: 22) which consists in 1) Resacralization, 2) “Reconsidering the place and the role of the human within Creation” and 3) the practical implementation of a personal paradigm shifting. As for 2), an eco-compatible model of spirituality, as part of the ‘internal ecology’ is being demanded. The spiritual aspect of the internal ecology will be investigated according to qualifications given on spirituality by Bourg (2018) (c.f. chapter 2.1.1 ‘Spirituality: Premodern and universal usage’): Spirituality in this regard consists of 2 interdependent functions of ‘exteriority’, which relate to (1) the perception of and relation towards Nature as a whole and (2) the human aspirations, ideas of self-actualization and accomplishment. Expected evolutions in this respect entail, broadly speaking, as to spirituality (1): From

anthropocentrism and a “denying ontology” of the environment (ibid: 140) to Franciscan ethics of caring, compassion and universal kinship. As to spirituality (2): From consumerist aspirations to defined ideas of accomplishment which situate themselves outside the societal boundaries (c.f. chapter 2.3.1 “Technoscience’ and Western spirituality’). In a sense, it can be said that the requested model of consciousness corresponds to the ‘Sahlinsian individual’, hinted at in chapter 2.3.2 ‘Debate on the economic agent within Western spirituality’.

Resacralization

As already foreseen by Egger (2012: 18) or Pope Francis (Egger, April, 2017, personal communication), the recognition of the sacred, understood as the recognition of “divine presence within creation”, constitutes the foundation upon which an operational ecological morality can be built. In the case of Shinto this recognition is the equivalent of the realization or awareness of Kami, a sacred existence or entity, according to Herbert (1964: 40). While mostly referred to as an invisible existence, the Kami is being recognized in certain ‘moments of Kami presence’, certain describing these as “a succession of remarkable events that happen in a short period of time”. According to McDougall (2016: 889) these moments are to be distinguished from encounters with an individuated person. They imply much more “reminders of our deep embeddedness in the awe-inspiring process”.

It is suggested that in this context Shinto shrines can play a crucial role in increasing the likelihood of ‘moments of Kami presence’. Ogasawara (T.O.) describes them as sacred places where the presence of Kami can be felt (*Kôgôshii* lit. ‘which evoke the presence of Kamis’). He states that Shinto shrines have been built on places which initially evoked the presence of Kami, and are thus veritably pin-pointing sacred grounds. He maintains that it is also thanks to the efforts being put into maintaining shrine grounds a clean and welcoming place, that the sacred character can present itself to the fullest. Moreover, in recent times the ‘Powerspot’ boom, as well as improved infrastructure and technological means contribute to an increased awareness around these places and their accessibility. The Powerspots are described as “sacred places where the spiritual energy or power of the universe concentrates” (Horie, 2017: 194), or according to Ogasawara, as places where one “unconsciously wants to lower one’s head when being [there]”, while predominantly hinting at Shinto shrines in the Japanese context. It is on such places that “the person’s holographic relationship to all reality becomes manifest” (McDougall, 2016: 892), or in terms of Egger (2017) “when one has such an experience, it becomes possible to establish a link with the all-encompassing dimension that exists in the whole Creation.”. It is in this sense that Ogasawara speaks of Shinto shrines as constituting entry points as to raising awareness about the close relationship towards Nature. Moreover, it has been stated, that ‘powerful places’ such as

certain shrines, permit the visitors to neutralize their spirits and reach a “purified, meditative state. It is then in this state that people can [...] recogniz[e] the path of Kami.”.

However, according to Hirano (H.H.) not all shrines are Powerspots, and moreover, there exists a tendency to abuse of the notion of Powerspots for promotional ends in order to attract visitors. Furthermore, the arbitrary attribution of this notion is being despised by certain as a form of cultural denaturation. Equally, while on one hand legitimacy may be achieved as to spreading awareness around Shinto shrines as sacred places, thanks to the ongoing trends of reconsidering Shinto and its shrines as Japanese tradition (Rots, 2017a), an arbitrary or insensitive usage for an ‘Eco-spiritual’ endeavor is likely to be encounter resistance. This being said, persons such as Genji Nosaka (G.N.) are already endeavoring resacralization and expressing the wish to offer experiences of sacred nature to the population, in his case by adopting a platform named *Kami-spot-network* which seeks to enlist all Shinto shrines of the Fukui prefecture.

Spirituality (2)

It can be stated, that the spiritual implication of the Kami belief is necessarily preceded by (a) moment(s) of Kami-presence (Herbert, 1964: 124), keeping however also in mind the subjective interpretation which is accorded to such events. Sacrality reveals itself to the person which is “prepared by their personal experience [...] to recognize it as such. To others [...] it does not exist; in fact it remains concealed in mundane objects and events.” (Rennie, 2007: 76). Deriving from the realization of Kami, the idea of ‘*Michi*’ has been repeatedly expressed by different interlocutors. According to Herbert (1964: 122) *Michi* designates ‘The spiritual path’, a received celestial component as well as celestial ideal to be accomplished within humanity. Some have given defined visions on the Kami existence, which impacts our human aspirations. In this regard, it has been claimed that the Kami has a certain expectation towards humanity. These expectations can be said to be coinciding with what an ‘original Kami belief’ would refer to. The ideal is given through the concept ‘*Kannagara-no-michi*’, meaning the ‘path according to the divine’ and implying the striving of human beings in order to resemble, if not become Kami. This constitutes the transcendental ideal of accomplishment. Yet, even though the reference ideal is transcendental, it can be stated that the belief around Kami is more centered on the affirmation of the ‘here and now’. Hence it is this-worldly orientated, in comparison to a more transcendently orientated Buddhism⁵⁷, where enlightenment is to be achieved through the recognition of ‘emptiness of all things’⁵⁸, and by seeking to escape the this-worldly cycle of suffering (Falcombello & Egger, 2017). Several interlocutors from different regions have indeed insisted on the fact that Kami supports human beings for walking their personal ‘*Michi*’, and gives more or less perceivable signs, or even

⁵⁷ The general claim in Japan goes that Buddhism is more concerned with the afterlife, whereas Shinto with its festivals is more centered on the celebration of the ‘here and now’.

⁵⁸ Even though this affirmation may harbor, depending on interpretation, an ecological implication, and which is not to be taken in a nihilistic sense (Falcombello & Egger, 2017).

punishments when we deviate from the path. Anything which is in accordance with the ‘divine path’ is thus part of the idea of self-actualization and the essence of a ‘Kami spirituality’. Foreseeably, specific accounts on the meaning of divine virtues are slightly divergent. Some core virtues are however, being repeatedly encountered in the field and in literature alike. These comprise gratitude, purity and sincerity. Gratitude is in that respect principally thought in terms of ‘gratitude for the existence that is being provided’, which relates to one crucial aspect of the ‘original meaning’ of visiting Shinto shrines. The act of expressing this type of gratitude is by folding hands together⁵⁹. Some interlocutors have moreover stated, that the path of Kami, which coincides with the goal of humanity, is essentially a path of loving and caring, in the sense of giving to each other, encouraging each other, helping each other and forgiving each other. Following this idea, it has been stated that the closer the human gets to these virtues the closer he gets to Kami, drawing in that regard parallels with figures from diverse religions, amongst others Christianity.

Spirituality (1)

“Kami wished that people have good relationships and take care of the Earth. And they didn’t wish that people seek too many treasures. Many civilizations have disappeared for this reason.” - Yoshihiro Mihara

It can be stated that the relationship towards ‘all existence’ is conditioned by the idea of spiritual aspiration which comprises a strong ecological component of ‘taking care of the Earth’ (lit. ‘holding the Earth as something valuable’), as expressed by many interlocutors. A central element in this context, which has been invoked numerous times, is the idea of *Yaoyorozu no Kami*: Kami is seen as existing in all things, human beings and non-living elements included. It is due this conception that Shinto can be described as an animistic belief system (c.f. chapter 3.1.4 ‘Indigenous traditions and animism’). Kami is either perceived in terms of an all-encompassing or -permeating life-force or in terms of individual Kamis inhabiting diverse elements. The resulting idea is thus that we are all either Kami or descendants of Kami and thus all part of the same family. According to many, a spontaneous attitude of taking care arises from this conception. In this sense, Herbert’s assertion (1964: 23) that Shinto calls on a “sense of duty and responsibility, as well as feelings of respectful and spontaneous love towards the whole world, feelings that are similar to those that are felt towards one’s own family members, [...] as well as a strong sense of esthetics“, is largely applicable to what has been stated by the diverse interlocutors, as well as conciliable with Franciscan ethics.

The relationship towards Nature is furthermore conditioned by the conception that Nature *is* Kami and that its soul is composed of *Ara-* and *Nigi-Mitama*⁶⁰ (c.f. chapter 4.1.2 ‘Kami and Jinja’) from which result a stance of fear and reverence. Shinto shrines, presumably in ancient times worshipping sites without specific buildings, were thus created in order to worship in an appropriate

⁵⁹ Which is by the way a custom which is practiced by every single Japanese person, notably before eating.

⁶⁰ Simplistically speaking, *Ara-Mitama* refers to the wrath of Nature and *Nigi-Mitama* to its beauty and abundance

manner the different soul-divisions of the Kami. The Nature-worship aspect of Shinto derives from this conception. The reverence of *Nigi-Mitama*, is thereby essentially epitomized in the ‘gratitude for the existence that is being provided’, expressed at shrines. Furthermore, according to Yoshihiro Mihara (Y.M.), the shrine is a place where *Ara-Mitama* is pacified through correct worship, that is through the means of specific *Norito*-prayers. According to this vision, different elements of the Nature, such as fire or thunder, have specific Kamis associated to them. Environmental calamities, for instance forest fires, are seen as a consequence of either not properly worshipping the corresponding Kami, or the wrath expressed by Kami towards a “society which looks into exactly the opposite direction as the Kami.”. He states that “a Kami society is one which is aware of the cycle of nature and lives in accordance.”. It is in this sense that for him the Kami-awareness is closely related to environmental concern. To sum up, the essential stances towards ‘all existence’, conveyed by a Kami-spirituality are thus a sense of caring, a sense of universal kinship, gratitude, fear and reverence.

Paradigm shifting towards an integral Ecology?

Above mentioned elements of an ‘original Shinto belief’⁶¹, have been found to be largely coinciding between infield discourses and literature. The ideas and practices conveyed by the Shinto/Kami-spirituality appear to fulfill general requirements of an Eco-spirituality within the aspects of resacralization and ‘internal ecology’ and appear likely to bring forth ecological surface applications, out of intrinsic motivation, provided that educational aspects have equally been covered. Even though the spiritual concepts conveyed appear pertinent for an operational ‘internal ecology’, the question remains, how to practically consider operating a paradigm shift.

Shinto shrines in this context have been described as enabling to “[...] experience the transformative nature of sacrality interconnected with secularity” (McDougall, 2016: 891). However, not all interlocutors found the idea of expecting transformative experiences, merely by visiting Shinto shrines, compelling. Sasaki (R.S.) states that shrines can not necessarily change people who have no interest *a priori* in these places, even though they might feel something. As to a real-life application, it remains unclear if shrines can actually be considered as places which may bring forth expected paradigm shifts.

61 In diverse literature, many more presumable core-ideas have been encountered. It can thus be assumed that what has been presented in this essay constitutes merely a simplified and by far not integral account on what the ‘original’ Kami-spirituality signifies.

7.2.3 Verification of Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: Shinto is an embedded belief: the principal place where it is practiced can serve as a place for promoting ecological awareness in two ways. Jinjas (Shinto shrines) can serve for such ends:

- 2.1. Through the specific experiences made in those places, which promote an enlarged consciousness of the world.
- 2.2. Through environmental education on natural sites where environmental preservation is being achieved.

As to (2.1.), the indicated ‘enlarged consciousness of the world’ will be related to diverse statements made about the roles of shrines which have been mapped out in the previous chapters. It implies the consequences of sacred experiences, such as ‘moments of Kami-presence’, as to getting human beings in touch with the meaning of a ‘greater scheme’. Invoking Herbert’s words (1964: 155), it can be stated that “the Shinto shrine is a visible manifestation of the consanguinity which exists at all times between the human individual and the entire world, including humanity, living beings, and non-living things, the dead, the entire earth, the celestial bodies and the Gods, whichever name one gives to them.”. The previous chapter has in that respect covered the essential aspects of how sacredness is related to an ecological awareness. However, As stated by Rots (2014: 12) ecological awareness “does *not naturally* emerge from a religious worldview” and an equally mandatory component consists in education.

As to (2.2.), head priest Ogasawara (T.O.) has mentioned the potential usage of the Tosa shrine ground for all sorts of events, as long as they comply with the ‘Jinja-rules’. Upon enquiry, if environmental educational activities can realistically take place on the shrine ground, he has welcomed and appreciated the suggestion, however also mentioned that there need to be sufficient financial resources and willingness of people in order to realize such projects. Taken the Tosa shrine as an example, environmental measures are actively being achieved on its grounds (c.f. chapter 6.2.2 ‘Environmental action on shrine grounds’) and can serve as a living example of immersive education. It remains to be seen in a real-life application if the conveyed symbolic value of Shinto coupled with an on-site environmental or ecological sensitization can in fact contribute in raising environmental awareness.

Besides, shrines, associated with surrounding groves can be seen as harboring substantial symbolic value. One of them, which is specific to the Japanese culture, is the symbolic value of “existential belonging to a place”, which goes hand-in-hand with the recent development of associating Shinto with ‘Nature’ and ‘tradition’ rather than religion (Rots, 2017a; Horie, 2017). While framing this evolution as a “discursive secularization⁶²”, Rots (ibid) estimates that it is a

62 Secularization in this context hints at the distinction between immanent and transcendental, rather than religious and non-religious.

positive development⁶³ which places Shinto back into the public realm as a firm part of the Japanese culture as a 'Nature-tradition', beyond the postwar state-religion dichotomy. Arguably, this evolution can contribute to a legitimation of the usage of shrine grounds for environmental purposes, since its underlying message is progressively disconnected from religion. Yet, as a matter of fact, many shrines, in particular in urban agglomerations, have not managed to preserve their natural surroundings despite sacred groves being a constitutive aspect of shinto shrines.

While consequences of an implementation are not entirely foreseeable, it can nevertheless be assumed that the Shinto shrine potentially represents a specific location where several elements constitutive of an Eco-spiritual project coupled with ecological education can take place simultaneously. However, Tanaka's (T.T.) objection needs to be recalled, stating that in contemporary Japan, people would not be ready to see an association between Shinto and Ecology, especially when topics related to spirituality are touched upon. On the other hand, from an Eco-spiritual point of view, a purely secular approach as to obtaining ecological awareness, be it at shrines or not, is likely to be less effective than the combination of spiritual and ecological preoccupation. Even though a certain amount of legitimacy is being progressively reattributed to Shinto thanks to its reaffirmation as Japanese tradition and its newly promoted proximity to Nature, it is still questionable if a sensitization to religious-spiritual topics (in the sense of an in-depth knowledge of Shinto-spirituality) can be achieved without being associated to dubious New Religious Movements.

63 Keeping in mind however, that in the same process of discursive secularization, right-wing actors seek to reestablish imperial symbolism in the public realm by attributing the status of Nature and tradition to Shinto, even though it has been argued that environmental preoccupations are progressively replacing hidden nationalistic agendas.

Conclusion

It has been stated that in recent decades presumable ancestral ideas of Shinto as an animistic Nature-worship tradition, harboring ecological implications, have been reclaimed. This trend is being framed as an 'environmentalist paradigm' by orientalist and religious scholar Aike Rots. It is argued, that such ideas have spread to the point of exerting a significant influence on the self-definition of Shinto. Shinto in this process is being progressively associated with Nature and Japanese tradition, rather than religion. While on a surface level it appears to epitomize a stance of environmental preservation, it has not been obvious to conclude if Shinto is realistically promoting an increased environmental awareness. On the contrary, an array of arguments tend to dismantle its ecological discourses. It has been stated that at best, if at all, Shinto environmentalism is 'not-in-my-backyard' environmentalism, striving to preserve its own restricted natural setting.

As it has been observed during the field-trip, most Japanese people do not question or seek deeper meanings behind the belief system. While it can be stated that in recent years different trends, such as the 'Powerspot boom', '*Goshuin* boom' as well as the environmentalist paradigm, have contributed to an increased popularity of the belief system and its institutions, religious and spiritual topics remain largely despised. Visiting Shinto shrines for Nature and tradition, recreational activities or so-called worldly benefits is widespread and commonplace, yet the questioning of the spiritual background of Shinto does not seem to be socially accepted. It has in this respect been seen that Japan has experienced an array of key events which have led to a progressive alienation from both religion and Shinto in the past, and which may serve as explanations for this evolution.

While ideas and practices not having necessarily been stripped of their spiritual meaning, they are predominantly apprehended in a secular manner. Yet, during the field-trip as well as in diverse literature it has been maintained that Nature-messages of Shinto without an openness to spirituality remain largely symbolic, misunderstood or disregarded. This affirmation however may receive objections in a modern civilization ruled by rationality, that will tend to dismiss such views as primitive and irrational.

This being said, according to religious scholar and anthropologist Norichika Horie (2017) there exist population parts which endeavor genuine spiritual seeking and Nature-veneration at Shinto-shrines, and which seek more than merely recreational or worldly benefits. Similar claims have been made by Christopher Partridge (2004) in relation to the West, stating that a contemporary milieu of genuine spiritual seekers is emerging which sets itself apart from both the religious-secular dichotomy as well as the oftentimes despised New Age Movement. Hopes are being put into this tendency as to finding remedies to the ills of the technocratic paradigm within modern societies by promoting worldviews which appear more adapted from an ecosystem standpoint. With regard to the Japanese context, it could however not be assessed if such a tendency is growing. Nevertheless observations in the field have shown that there exists a geographically dispersed population part, as

suggested by Horie, which advocates a fundamental reconsideration of the Kami-belief according to its 'original ideas'. The common objection consists in deploring that the Japanese hearts have been alienated from their awareness of Kami. Yet, this awareness has been stated to be pivotal in order to wholly incarnate the ecological implications deriving from a presumable Shinto spirituality. Diverse statements were thereby collected and compared with according literature, in order to draw conclusions on what actually signifies a Shinto spirituality.

In order to respond to the research question, **How can 'contemporary Shinto' respond to the ecological crisis?**, next to mapping out diverse ecological discourses which have been found in literature, it has been sought to investigate if tenets of the Shinto spirituality fulfill requirements of the so-called 'Eco-spirituality' framework. It has moreover been mapped out in the first three chapter of this essay, what an ecological crisis means, and in what way the 'Eco-spirituality' can respond to latter. Upon assessment on these tenets, Shinto appears to be able to respond to general requirements in that it proposes a desirable model of spirituality, a close relation to defined sacred places and an inherent environmental preoccupation, in order to bring forth an operational 'ecological consciousness' which is likely to provoke ecological surface actions out of intrinsic motivation.

The question however remains, how an ecological consciousness can be adopted out of intrinsic motivation. So-called moments of 'Kami-presence', moments when individuals realize the underlying sacredness of Nature, are in this respect being thought of harboring significant value as to operating paradigm shifts, keeping in mind however that a great deal of subjectivity is linked to such experiences. Moreover, given the general disdain towards religion and spirituality in present day Japan, an Eco-spiritual project will have to be preceded by a process of re-sensitization to its conveyed topics.

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Appendix 1: Interview Grids

1.1 Shrine visitors and ordinary people

Themes	Sub-themes	Questions
1. Introduction & Personal Components	1.1. Self Introduction 1.2. Environmental habits	- 自己紹介をお願いします - 環境に関連した個人的な習慣がありますか？
2. Views on Shinto & environmental awareness	2.1. Personal habits of Shrine worship 2.2. Ideas about Shinto 2.3. Environmental awareness	- あなたの神社の習慣について教えてくださいか - これは神道と言えるでしょうか？ - 信仰、または神社崇拝と環境意識とのあいだに何らかの関連性があると思いますか？
3. Contemporary tendencies & future evolutions of the belief system	3.1. Current tendencies towards Shinto, shrines and spirituality 3.2. Relationship towards notions of New Age, Spirituality Boom, Powerspots 3.3. Nationalistic implications 3.4. Personal relationship towards shrines and Kami 3.5. Lifestyle & ideals 3.6. Future evolutions	- 神道の意味を再評価する傾向が住民の間にあると思いますか？なぜですか？ - 住民の間に精神性の損失（そんしつ Loss）または求めがあると思いますか？ - Powerspots、New Age、スピリチュアリティなどの概念にどのように関係していますか？ - ナショナリズムと神社のつながりが見えますか？ - 神社、又は神はあなたにとって何を意味しますか？ - あなたの理想、願望（がんばろう Aspiration）、ライフスタイルについて教えていただけますか？ - 神道、神社、そして人口全般の信念から、あなたは将来どのような進化を期待できますか？
4. Transformational (eco-spiritual) aspects of Shinto shrines	4.1. Personal transformation 4.2. Transformational aspects of shrines 4.3. Spiritual growth and ecological consciousness 4.4. Applicability	変革の側面（へんかくのそくめん <i>Transformational aspects</i>) - 貴方はある時点で神社に最も興味を持ち始めましたか？ - 神社には変容的な能力があると思いますか？ - 神社参拝と環境関連の話題への開放性との関係を確立（かくりつ Establish）することは可能でしょうか？ - あなたはその適用性を実感できますか？

1.2 Priests

Themes	Sub-themes	Questions
1. Introduction & Personal Components	1.1. Self Introduction	- あなたの仕事と役割について教えてくださいか？
2. Views on Shinto & environmental awareness	2.1. Ideas about Shinto 2.2. Views on Kami and Jinja 2.3. Environmental awareness	- これは神道と言えるでしょうか？ - この信仰やこの場所について私が知るべきことは何か？ - 神社とはどういう意味ですか - 信仰、または神社崇拝と環境意識とのあいだに何らかの関連性があると思いますか？
3. Contemporary tendencies & future evolutions of the belief system	3.1. Current tendencies towards Shinto, shrines and spirituality 3.2. Relationship towards notions of New Age, Spirituality Boom, Powerspots and Western influence 3.3. Nationalistic implications 3.4. Future evolutions	傾向 - 神道の意味を再評価する傾向が住民の間にあると思いますか？なぜですか？ - Powerspots、New Age、スピリチュアリティなどの概念にどのように関係していますか？ - 住民の間に精神性の損失または求めがあると思いますか？ - ナショナリズムと神社のつながりが見えますか？ <i>Evolutions</i> - 神道、神社、そして人口全般の信仰から、あなたは将来どのような進化を期待できますか？ - 将来に対して何らかの望みや願いがありますか？
4. Transformational (eco-spiritual) aspects of Shinto shrines	4.1. Transformational aspects of shrines 4.2. Spiritual growth and ecological consciousness 4.3. Applicability	- 神社には変容的な能力があると思いますか？ - 神社参拝と環境関連の話題への開放性との関係を確立（かくりつ Establish）することは可能でしょうか？ - 霊的成長に関連する環境意識は存在していると考えられるでしょうか。 - あなたはその適用性を実感できますか？

1.3 Experts

Themes	Sub-themes	Questions
1. Introduction & Personal Components	1.1. Self Introduction	- あなたの仕事と役割について教えてくださいか？
2. Views on Shinto, Kami and Shinto shrines & environmental awareness	2.1. Shrine-going 2.2. Ideas about Shinto 2.3. Environmental awareness	- あなたは何故人々が神社を訪れると思いますか？ - 神道は環境問題に取り組むことができると推測 (すいそく Estimate) していますか？
3. Contemporary tendencies & future evolutions of the belief system	3.1. Tendencies of population towards Shinto, shrines and spirituality 3.2. Relationship towards notions of New Age, Spirituality Boom and Powerspots 3.3. Spiritual seeking at shrines 3.4. Nationalistic implications 3.5. Future evolutions 3.6. Globalization	- 神道の意味を再評価する傾向が住民の間にあると思いますか？なぜですか？ - 神社で定期的に参拝する多くの人々が自分たちを神道とは考えていないと思いますか？ - 住民の間に精神性の損失 (そんしつ Loss) または求めがあると思いますか？ - Powerspots、New Age、スピリチュアリティなどの概念は神社や神道にどのような関わりがありますか？ - 世俗的な利益を求める代わりに、霊的成長の純粋な態度で、神社に向かっている人口が増えていますか？ - 宗教の境界を越えて存在する新しい世界的な霊的パラダイムが現れていると思いますか？ - ナショナリズムと神社のつながりが見えますか？ - 神道、神社、そして人口全般の信仰から、あなたは将来どのような進化を期待できますか？ グローバル化 - 神社へ行くという考えの中には、世界的な適用性があると推測していますか？
4. Transformational (eco-spiritual) aspects of Shinto shrines	4.1. Transformational aspects of shrines 4.2. Spiritual growth and ecological consciousness 4.3. Applicability	<i>Transformational aspects</i> - 神社には変容的な能力があると思いますか？ - 神社参拝と環境関連の話題への開放性との関係を確立 (かくりつ Establish) することは可能でしょうか？ - 霊的成長に関連する環境意識は存在していると考えられるでしょうか。 - 神社参拝の社会的受容 (じゅうよう Acceptance) のために新しい霊的パラダイムが神社、又は神道の枠組み (わくぐみ Framework) の中で存在できると考えられますか？

Appendix 2: Persons, Regions

Tokyo metropolitan area

Person 1 (P1), Web-marketer

Norichika Horie (N.H.), Religious scholar at university of Tokyo

Fukui prefecture

Osamu Kôjimoto (O.K.), Organic farmer

Chiaki Kôjimoto (A.K.), Dental assistant

Takashi Tanaka (T.T.), Chief curator, Shinto expert

Genji Nosaka (G.N.), CEO, Chief curator

Yoshihiro Mihara (Y.M.), Shinto expert

Kôchi prefecture

Akihiro Hosokawa (A.H.), Head priest at Kôchi Hachimangu

Takanori Ogasawara (T.O.), Head priest at Tosa Jinja

Ehime prefecture

Mitsuhiro Yanagihara (M.Y.), Shrine administrator, Shinto expert

Chizuko Nomoto (C.N), Organic farmer

Rie Sasaki (R.S.), Organic farmer

Person 2 (P2), Shrine visitor

Couple 1 (C1), Shrine visitor

Couple 2 (C2), Shrine visitor

Mitsuharu (M.), Cook

Kaori Kawahashi (K.K.), Middle school teacher

Junko Obata (J.O.), Museum personnel

Hiroaki Hirano (H.H.), Environmental activist, Shinto expert

Appendix 3: Transcriptions of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations

August 8th, 2018

Person1, mid 20s, m
Webmarketer
Tokyo metropolitan area

- I don't have any beliefs. I think religion is bullshit. Yes there is the word Shinto, but this is something nobody uses here. And yes, if I visit some place in Japan, and there is a Shrine I would definitely go there to clap my hands and bow, this is a Japanese custom. I would certainly do it, rather than refrain from doing it. But this is the strange part about Japanese people because yes, we do have some sort of superstition. But we are by no means religious believers. Well, yes I agree, I am confused to be honest about myself, when you ask me this question. Japanese people all think there is Kami and we pay respect and fear Kami. But we don't believe in Kami. It is not like Christianity where you believe in a God. It's more a subconscious thing, it's the Japanese mentality.

- I barely go to shrines. As I said when I travel and there is a Shrine at the destination. Otherwise maybe once a year at *Hatsumoude* on New Years, but even then it's not sure. If you ask a girl to come to clap with you at a shrine, she most certainly will say yes. But I attach no particular importance to Shrines.

- I don't see any link between environmental consciousness and belief.

August, 10th, 2018

Osamu Kôjimoto, 49, m
Organic Farmer
Sabae, Fukui Prefecture

- I have no particular proximity to shrines. But I know that these places are sacred places, like Jerusalem, and exist all over the globe. As you will probably notice most shrines here have no particular importance anymore to the local people. They are mostly abandoned and degraded. I believe in former times, people used to value much more Shrines. They transferred from bigger shrines the *Wakemitama* of Kami in order to fulfill certain roles. But today I believe there is nobody anymore that goes regularly to shrines. It may be possible that something has got lost over the years. The Shrines are at most being used once or twice a year for particular occasions such as *Hatsumoude* on New Year. The main idea about Shinto for me is that it is more related to the 'here and now', the 'day'-belief, where as Buddhism is more related with the 'afterworld', the 'night'-belief.

- It is however possible that the presence of the Shrines in the villages has a certain effect on the local population. Even though there is no direct relationship, they may radiate a calming effect on the surroundings. But I am not certain about this.

- Most Japanese people have virtually no knowledge about neither Shrines nor Shinto. Its a custom yes, but there are very few people who are actually interested. It seems as if European people have more knowledge about Jinjas, as I can see.

- I have never thought about the relationship that could exist between *Jinja* and Environmental protection. But actually it makes sense. Kami *is* Nature and the people from ancient times venerated Nature as *Kami*. Fukuoka also believed in the regenerating power of Nature. It seems like an interesting suggestion to establish a link between spiritual growth and environmental consciousness. I have never thought about it though. I definitely believe that people, especially people from the city

should live a slower lifestyle. That's why I like the rural side. And people should relearn to hold for important / praise Nature, the water and trees. Even though most forests here are human made but today this is our Nature. People needed the wood in the modernization period, in order to build cities and houses. But today we can protect again the Nature.

- My Boss is recently starting to consider organizing an activity of reassessing the place and meaning of Shrines in our Prefecture and spreading the message of the importance of shrines on a national and international level. He believes that reevaluating Shrines may play an important role environmental protection. This is really a curious coincidence, that you are interested in this field.

Chiaki Kôjimoto, middle aged, f
Dental assistant
Sabae, Fukui Prefecture

- I have never thought much about belief. There was the Sarin Gas attack in Tokyo, which was responsible for the rejection of religion amongst many people. I would go to Jinjas, maybe once a year if at all, but I never questioned the meaning behind the belief. I am certainly not affiliated with religion or what you would call Shinto. But my daughter went to the Shrine for *Shichigosan* and at *Hatsumoude*, there are many night caravans *Yatai*, so going to the Shrine is related to a joyful moment, of festivity. Before building a house we may ask for a (Shinto) priest to clean the area, or also at the birth of a child, in order to pray for good health and growth. But honestly, people don't think about any deeper meaning of this. It's just customs. People do this because that's what people do. But that's about it. Especially nowadays, our family does not have anymore the relationship to our local Jinja. If I would still be living in Fukushima, probably we would be going to Jinja at least once a year and would have some sort of relationship to our *Ujigami*. But I think it has been quite a long time since my last visit on a Shrine ground.

August, 14th, 2018

Takashi Tanaka, early 40s, m
Chief curator & Shinto expert, Oono historical museum
Oono, Fukui prefecture

Please can you tell me about Shinto, Kami and Jinja

There are 2 types of Kami: *Chigi* (地神) and *Tenjin* (天神). *Chigi* is the old type of Kami, which derives from the Joumon-Era (15'000 BC to 300 BC), the hunter and gatherer era. It is from the *Chigi* that the idea of the Kami in all natural elements exists. *Chigi* is thus the animistic nature divinity. Then from Korea and China came the rice cultivation since the 4th century, starting from the region of *Kyushu* in the south of Japan, as well as the idea of *Tenjin*. From *Kyushu* then the powerful clan of *Kyushu* brought it to *Nara* (former *Yamato* clan). The rice agriculture is more related with the *Yayoi* period as opposed to the *Jomon* period. Then in Japan today, there are two types of Jinja: *Chigi* and *Tenjin* Jinjas. The *Shinokura* Shrine of *Ono* in the south of the city, is a *Chigi*-Jinja, as opposed to the *Ise-Jingu*, where the deity *Amaterasu* is enshrined, which is a *Tenjin*-Jinja. This is because *Ono* is a more rural area, and thus there is mainly *Chigi* left over. Since the *Meiji* restoration, however, *Tenjin*-Jinjas have become way more frequent. Most *Chigi* Jinja did not have a name and got destroyed during the *Meiji* restoration, and the land got rented. That money was then used for the bigger shrines. During that time the *Meiji* government gave money to the bigger shrines, but the smaller 'weird' shrines, which enshrined 'weird' *Kamis* got neglected or destroyed.

The belief has however changed since the *Meiji* period, and the *Kami* got far away from the heart of the people. Traditionally, the idea of the 'Japanese *Kami*' had a strong implication of 'gratitude' which was the No1 virtue, as well as all moral implication that derived from this. However, this has got lost. The *Jinja* in this context was a crucial place to express gratitude. *Shinto*

is not a religion and has no dogma or taboos. It is a very important thing, that Jinja, but also temples (*Tera*) exist, and Mister Tanaka feels really desolate about the loss of belief today. However, he says that he *hates* (insists) the concept of ‘powerspots’. It is a very bad evolution that the Jinjas integrate the powerspot idea today.

What evolutions were or are happening?

Probably Jinjas are in decline at the moment. Sometimes Anime (Japanese animation) can promote the belief of Shinto temporarily, but this is probably not significant. Probably in these days, people who really feel emotional relief from believing in Kamis and going to shrines are very few. Jinjas are just more or less popular because their image is esthetically ‘Japanese’ but 99% of Japanese have lost sight of the real meaning of the belief and also they don’t use the word Shinto. We use the word Jinja, not Shinto and the Japanese people feel no proximity to the word Shinto.

What can you say about Ecology & Jinja?

‘Shinokura’ means that the Kami sits on the field. In the traditional Jinja, the meaning of Jinja was ‘forest’ (*Mori*). That means, that the forest itself was more important than the building. There was always the close relationship to natural elements at Jinjas. For example at the Shinokura-Jinja, thanks to the extraordinary clean water, people wanted to welcome a divinity. In ancient times, there was a particular place where the divinity could descend.

Today and in the future it is unfortunately difficult to see a positive evolution around the Jinja, in order to arouse environmental consciousness. But traditionally it would actually have been possible and this association (Ecology and Jinja) was in reality very strong. Mister Tanaka believes, that there needs to be a 1) tremendous effort to re-understand the meaning of Jinja and then 2) talk about environmental consciousness.

The Kami consists of *Ara-mitama* related to the fear of Nature, the negative aspect and *Nigi-mitama* related to the beauty of Nature, the positive aspect. This conception was very important for the closeness to Kami people felt. And in this sense Nature *is* Kami. But, Tanaka says, that we have moved away from Nature. After the defeat of WWII, the american GHQ forced to cut the connection between the *Tennô* (Emperor) and Kami. Ever since, and due to the defeat, Japanese people started to distance themselves from Kami, with the pressure from the GHQ. But Tanaka believes, that the GHQ in reality misunderstood the idea of the ‘Emperor = Kami’. They forced Emperor Shôwa (Hirohito) to announce that he is not Kami, but they were thinking in terms of the Christian monotheistic God, so there was already an unfortunate misunderstanding. However, the regular Shrine worship and visiting has dramatically decreased, amongst others out of fear of displeasing the GHQ. Moreover, the Aum-incident (1995) has been crucial for the alienation from religion amongst the Japanese people. Unfortunately, in our today’s lives, Kami has no more place to exist amongst the people.

Tanaka likes to think that the original Japanese heart had a genuine attitude of reverence towards the mountains (*Yama*, lit. ‘mountain-forest’), water and so on. He thinks that this attitude is highly desirable, especially if the priests set this example and this may have an impact on the people. However in these days, Tanaka thinks that it would be too confrontational to expose to the Japanese people a direct link between Ecology and Jinja. It is thus desirable to reeducate the people on the Jinjas, before the link Ecology and Jinja can be established, like a ‘soft cushion’. Moreover, during this education, Tanaka thinks it is important that the specificity of every Kami is being recognized. It is important to know which are the functions of each Kami and not randomly worship Kamis for the wrong reasons. For example in a fisherman's village, it is important to know what kind of Kami will be enshrined.

August, 18th, 2018

Akihiro Hosokawa, early 40s, m
Head Priest, Kôchi Hachimangu Shrine
Kôchi city, Kôchi prefecture

Can you talk about Shinto and your role?

Shinto is not a religion, it is the Japanese custom. Basically it boils down to saying ‘thank you’, for example before or after you eat, you say thank you (*Itadakimasu, Gochisousama*). His role is to tell the sorrows from people who come to pray here directly to the Kami who is worshipped here through *Norito* (sacred prayers). Also, his role at this place is to worship the *Hachiman* Kami. It is socially accepted to seek spiritual healing when difficult times in life come. The idea is that we are all descendants of Kami. The *Ubusuna Mitama* (The soul of the local deity) is distributed to all people from that area in the form of *Wake-Mitama*. So all Japanese people are unconsciously strong believers, however there are no ‘Shintoists’, even himself. Nowadays, there are not many young people who regularly come to the shrine. This is a habit of mostly elder people. However he thinks, that when one visits regularly the shrine, at one point people usually develop a consciousness of Kami.

What can you say about the relationship Shinto & Ecology?

The prevailing idea within Shinto is the concept of *Yaoyorozu no Kami*. There are Kami everywhere, in every Natural element, so from this stance it is normal that we take care and have respectful attitudes to all things. Maybe in this sense we can speak of that relationship.

August, 20th, 2018

Takanori Ogasawara, middle aged, m
Head Priest of Tosa Shrine
Kôchi city, Kôchi prefecture

Personal introduction
Shinto & Jinja knowledge
Shinto & environmental implications
Spirituality, universal consciousness
Future evolutions

Ogasawara *Guji* is the head priest of the Tosa sanctuary in the North East of Kochi city in the Kochi prefecture since 3 years, following the footsteps of his father. He has been working on the Tosa shrine ground for 24 years. Tosa shrine being the principal shrine in the Kochi prefecture, he visits 11 other shrines regularly in the prefecture in order to recite seasonal prayers (*Norito*). Ogasawara seemed confused and uncertain how to reply, when asked if he is a Shintoist (*Shinto Shinja*). He would say ‘something like this, yes, probably’.

The saying around Shinto is that the Sun-Goddess *Amaterasu* has given the *Inaho* (Religious artifact, made from rice plants) to the first *Tennô* (*Tenmu Tennô*), in order for him to govern the country, more than 2000 years ago. The rice fields and their harvest is the very foundation of the belief system. Shinto is a shamanistic tradition. Since ancient times, shamanistic methods were employed in order to pray to the divinities of Nature for a successful rice harvest. Seasonal ceremonies played a central role when addressing the divinities. During the spring festival one prays for rain but also good weather, during the summer festivals one prays for the resilience of the rice plants in order to endure the harsh typhoons, and the autumn festival is essentially a ceremony of expressing gratitude for the rice harvests. Fear of the wraths of spirits was ever present. The

many festivals (Matsuri), such as Bon-Odori or Yosakoi were in reality held in order to pacify the spirits.

The belief system was, as mentioned before, at first closely linked to rice culture. Only later on deities started to be venerated for successful fishing, industry, all sorts of businesses, household safety, war, love and partnership and more recently traffic safety. Ogasawara believes, that Buddhism is more related to individual aspects of spirituality, whereas Shinto is more concerned with the divinities of Nature and the community's relationship towards these. It is important to maintain good relationships to these divinities, that's why one will encounter Shrines everywhere in Japan, even in the most remote places. Shinto is particular in this sense as the closeness to Nature plays a fundamental role.

During the seasonal festivals, so-called *Nortio*-prayers, resembling Sutras, are being recited by the Shrine-priests towards the deities. The seasonal *Norito*-prayers are linked to seasonal specificities but essentially address divinities within diverse natural elements, in order for Nature to allow human beings a harmonious existence. Recurring elements are rice, water, vegetables, fruits, wind, water. It is remarkable that the contemporary form of Norito is still the same as it has been written down in the Englishiki writings of the *Heian* period during the 10th century.

Every shrine has one or several specific deities. The Tosa Shrine is in reality a sanctuary which comprises several Shrines and sacred natural elements on its Shrine-ground, including the main shrine building where two principal deities are being worshipped: *Ajisukitakahikone no mikoto* and *Hitokotonushi no kami*. The first deity is said to reside in a plow, thus a man-made object. Even though the deities have specificities, they can all be addressed through the seasonal *Norito*-prayers. It is essentially an act of asking and thanking the Nature deities for a harmonious human existence.

The *Kami* is an invisible existence, which exists in the heart of the people. In particular sacred places (神々しい場所 *kougoushii*, literally meaning 'places which evoke the existence of Kamis'), their presence can be felt. In former times, the Kami-belief was most likely practiced in such places, without the existence of dedicated shrines (Jinja). Ogasawara highly appreciates such places which are *kougoushii*, where the presence of Kami can be felt. Moreover he thinks it is important that such places exist, since they provide to the people relief from everyday stress and an internal calmness. Jinjas commonly are constructed on such grounds, in order to pinpoint the areas where such a connection can be felt. There are regional differences between Jinjas and some are stronger than others.

The Jinja architecture has come into existence when Buddhism has spread in Japan during the 7th century, but it is admitted that there exists very little historical evidence from before the 8th century. Since the Heian period, Buddhism and Shinto have existed for a long time, until the Meiji-era, as Shinbutsu-shugo (Kami and Buddha association) syncretism in a mostly peaceful and harmonious way. He notes, that particularly the Edo-period must have been a peaceful time.

Ogasawara endeavors to make young people more interested in Shrines again. He organizes summer workshops at shrines for high-school children, but generally regrets a loss of interest in recent days. As children grow older, they lose sight of the Shrines. However there are regional differences in the interest amongst the younger populations. Places where children have grown up with a strong bond to the Shrines, in particular through joyful ceremonies, such as *Mikoshi* (Shrine transporting through the city), people tend to have a stronger bond. However in the Kochi region, there is very little understanding. Nevertheless he observes, that in recent years, older university students, as well as women started to become more and more interested again. Also many people tend to become interested as they grow older for example when bringing a newborn child to the Shrine (*Miyamairi* or *Omiyamairi*), as well as young CEO's who fervently visit shrines for business success. This year's visitors at the Ise-Shrine in the prefecture of Mië exceeded by far the number of visitors since a long time. Internet and smartphone certainly contribute to this success and the rediscovery of the Shrines. Also the infrastructure has become better in order to enable people to visit these places. There are two major booming factors, which have emerged in recent years, the Powerspot boom and the Goshuin boom (collecting sacred writings at each shrine in a dedicated notebook), which greatly contribute to the increased number of visitors, however this may be also just a temporary phenomenon.

On a more spiritual side, people afflicted by depression seek relief at Shrines and would also consult the Shrine personal. There exist certainly efforts to establish a link between Shinto and spiritual growth, such as authors writing books about Shinto-teachings, ethics and ways of living.

But Ogasawara is not sure if such efforts may be fruitful, since Shinto is essentially undogmatic and characterized by its openness of interpretation.

The Jinja is a place which is characterized by its openness to all beliefs. Nonbelievers, Christian, Buddhists alike are wished to visit the Jinjas and pray there. He believes that Jinjas, especially when built outside of the big agglomerations, are special places where one can feel a proximity to Nature. Jinja grounds are community spaces (even though privately owned). Recently he agreed on welcoming a local high-school band for traditional drum (*Taiko*) to practice on the shrine ground and performing on an event. He wishes to put more effort in providing the Shrine ground for diverse cultural events and multiple usages, other than the seasonal festivals and traditional usages. However, there need to be people who are willing to put efforts into such events, as well as financial resources, since provincial Shrines such as the Tosa Shrine, however big they are, do not have the same financial resources at their disposal as the Shrines of Tokyo or Kyoto.

The *Guji* (head priest) has a certain amount of decisional power as to influencing the direction of the Shrine, even though, there are regional differences and some shrines do not have a *Guji*. Moreover, he is part of a decision committee of 11 other Shrine clergy, with whom he decides upon future projects and must submit them to the prefecture in order to be authorized. The Jinja can generally speaking accommodate all kinds of events, as long as they don't contradict the Jinja rules.

In former times, huge *Matsuris* were being held at Tosa Shrine, welcoming more than 150'000 people in one night. But these days are gone, and nowadays people would not come anymore in such numbers to the Shrine in order to celebrate. In a certain sense, the Shrine has lost a lot of its meaning in recent years. Ogasawara believes, that today the Shrine ground can regain a new meaning amongst the population, however big amounts of effort need to be put into projects.

Environmental implications

He states, that environmental damage that has been happening in Japan is well known, such as the 'Minamata Itai Itai illness'. When renovating the Jinja buildings, diverse environmentally informed measures were implemented such as according to the chart of *Kinshizenkôhô*, and *Fukudomekaihatsu*, which are endeavors to strive for a healthy ecosystem on a local level. Ogasawara believes that a Jinja can become a ground of promoting environmental awareness. Informed by past mistakes of Japan's environmentally harmful behaviors, such as coniferous monocultures, which led to soil erosion issues, particular attention is now being put into choosing for instance ecologically adapted tree species. Deciduous trees are replanted, in order to permit the fallen leaves to absorb rainwater and replenishing ground water stocks.

Shrines have for example been constructed at certain places in order to announce that these areas need to be protected, for example at certain water sources, or rocks. This implies that these places are associated with Kami and cannot be touched. Thanks to the surrounding Shrine forests, *Chinju no mori*, the sacredness of the place can be maintained or established.

It needs to be remembered that next to environmental awareness, the Jinja are places where the presence of the Kami can be felt, and thus are places where one can reflect upon the relationship towards Nature. The sacredness (*Kougoushisa*), may derive from particular rocks. Ogasawara thinks, that rocks place a very particular role in attributing this kind of character to a place.

Jinja Spirituality

Ogasawara thinks that the *Kannushi* (= *Guji*) needs to put more efforts to make young people reflect upon how they should relate to Jinja. It is important that young people start to have again a relationship of trust and confidence towards the Jinja, especially here in the Kochi region. This is not a religious matter but much more a cultural matter. Shinto in its core is not a religion but is synonymous to the morality of the Japanese people (*Doutokukan* 道德観). Amongst these values, gratitude (*Kansha*) plays a central role. Without gratitude, the meaning of Shinto would not be fulfilled. It is the idea, that the population is granted an existence by the Nature and thus one pays awe and gratitude towards the Nature and its inhabiting divine forces. During the WWII regrettably Shinto has been abused as a symbol for nationalism. It is also regretted that during the Meiji restoration Buddhism and Shinto have been forcefully separated. Contemporary Shinto is much more aware of the controversies it has undergone and endeavors to make up for these past events. He mentions that it is important to know well history.

The Tosa shrine ground sits just next to a Buddhist temple. Ogasawara sees both institutions as part of one big spiritual site (*Daireijo*). It is important for him that contemporary Japanese belief systems evolves into a harmonious relationship between Shinto and Buddhism again and Tosa shall represent harmonious coexistence and respect. He sees the future of Tosa Shrine and Buddhist temple as a sort of spiritual Mecca. Moreover he wishes to keep and make Tosa Shrine a very unique and special place by progressively removing all unnecessary artifacts from the site, as well as from the belief itself and strive towards a pure existence, where there would ideally just stand the wooden shrines and the surrounding forests and natural elements. He has put a lot of effort into the restoration of the Tosa Shrine making it a beautiful place again, alongside his father since more than 20 years. At the time the shrine was heavily worn down and there was large amount of garbage all around. The sacred character also depends a lot on the effort that is put into these places and through this character they may serve as entry points of raising awareness about the close relationship towards Nature.

The Powerspot boom is a trend-word, which in a way he despises but at the same time welcomes because of the popularity of Jinja it has promoted, in the same manner as the *Goshuin* collectors. However Shrine clergy must not use these notions, which in a sense distort the meaning of the Jinja belief system. For Ogasawara, a powerspot is a place, which has a sacred character and which makes a person want to bow his head almost unconsciously. He evokes that Shinto places oftentimes overlap with powerspots that are written on, especially in women magazines.

August, 22nd, 2018

Mitsuhiro Yanagihara, 74, m
Shrine administrator & Shinto expert
Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Mitsuhiro Yanagihara, I am a shrine administrator from the local shrine in this part of town, however I am not a priest. Sometimes, however, I feel more concerned about the conditions of the shrine and the right execution of different ritual aspects. I am a grandfather of 2 grandchilds and owner of a local Sake shop. During the great Kobe earthquake of 1995, I have undertaken a huge rescue mission for old people, where I went together with friends all the way from Matsuyama to Kobe with 2 big tourist busses and rescued more than 40 people and brought them back to Matsuyama to give them shelter. Nowadays I study about the earth, the environment and above all I am concerned with the purity of water.

What can you tell me about Shinto and Kami?

In ancient times the *Gûji* (Head priest) could speak with Kami and consciously manipulate the energy of the universe (*Uchu-enerugi*). In a sense the prayer is nothing else than manipulation of the energy of the universe. The *Gûji* was a medium of the Kami, like an oracle. But today, there are few people who are real 'spiritualists' who can do this. The manipulation of the energy of the universe is called *Ki-kô* (Japanese equivalent of Qi-Gong) and the energy of the universe is called *Ki*. *Ki-kô* is the ability to change Nature. It is difficult to explain in words what *Ki* it is, but with exercise everyone can learn to perceive it. Nowadays, the *Gûji* should be able to do this, otherwise he is not veritably fulfilling his role.

The people are born as Kami, this is their real nature, and it is in the process of growing up that we slowly back away from this real nature. The real foundation of the universe is infinite love (*Ai*). Love means, giving to each other, to surrender and make space for each other, encouraging each other, helping each other, consoling each other, forgiving each other. When one wakes up to the love one starts to do for others which then creates gratitude, this creates a sphere of love which resonates in the universe. Likewise, the accumulated stress on Earth is reflected in the universe. From the Kami perspective, the closer we get to love, the closer we get to Kami. It is all about

giving and giving. The goal of the humanity is to strive towards love. There is something which blocks us from becoming Kami, which is the believe that we are not Kami. But Christ, Buddha, etc, have accomplished this through self-love. The meaning of Kami is the path of love. And if a person's action is in harmony with the path of Kami then the Kami will be supportive of us. The journey on Earth of a human being lasts approximately 30'000 days. What we take during that journey is admiration, awe, what we leave is gratitude. The Kami are in a way the collection of all beings' souls.

The Jinja is surrounded by a sacred boundary (*Kekkai*). Just before one enters on the boundaries, at the moment of passing the *Torii* (Archway), one has to deliver the intention with which one is going to step on the sacred ground and maybe ask for something to the universe. When asking something which is not in resonance with the love way, it won't be heard. The Jinja is a place where one feels the connection to the universe. And the mirror which is in the main sanctuary, even if it is closed so we can't see it, means, that we can become Kami.

The link to the environment for me is above all in the purity of water towards which we feel gratitude. The water with which we flush the toilet, and the water that we drink, all the time we need to express gratitude towards it. The cumulative stress of the people will be impregnated in the water, and creates a vicious cycle of unhealthy emotions. It is thus above all important to purify the water in order to have a clean environment.

The universal vital energy is a natural wave of vitality, but there are many people who don't really understand this idea. The problem is that, when somebody says, show me love, there is no way to *see* this love. One cannot see, what the soul is, but one can see what has been produced by the soul, it is the actions of the human beings, or the virtue of the human beings. For example we have the word '*omotenashi*', in Japan, which equals to a 'service which exceeds one's expectations and thus surprises people', and to have this kind of virtue is very important. We people from Shikoku oftentimes have this virtue, and we have this mindset, of wanting to give to people, it is give & give, not give & take. I want you to promote this idea in Switzerland. The problem is that this type of message of love is oftentimes misinterpreted in a 'religious' way, and thus will be ignored. When we think, that the Kami is everywhere, then it stops to be religion, because the *Yaoyorozu* idea, is that many things can be held for true. And religion is when only one thing is held for true. Kami is in the beer, in the food, the music is Kami. So the water is an elegant way, of putting something proper into the human body, since I believe that it is difficult to change consciousness with religion.

August, 23rd, 2018

Chizuko Nomoto, 70, f
Organic Farmer
Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture

Can you tell me about yourself and your activity?

I am a retired high-school teacher and now I am dedicating myself to organic farming. My research field is EM bacteria who affect the structure of the soil. I am cultivating these microorganisms and visit as a volunteer radioactive contaminated places to give out these microorganisms. I believe that such bacteria can purify the soil by changing the microorganism structure. It is thus a fertilizer which is perfectly organic.

What can you tell me about Kami?

I have a *Kamidana* (family Shinto altar) at the house, where I do daily *Norito*-prayers. However, I don't go often to the Jinja, except for special occasion, i.e. when there is an autumn festival, or for *Mikoshi*. Formerly I prayed to the Kami for example for academic success, or for household safety. But then I started to reevaluate the prayer and change my praying method and it started to be more about general gratitude towards life.

What can you tell me about Shinto & Ecology?

Shinto is the Japanese culture. It is the underlying idea that Japan is protected by the Japanese Kami. In this sense I think Japan is a special country. I think about the Shinto belief that there is a radiating love and peace reaching out towards every living being. I don't really refer to the word Shinto, but I firmly believe in the power of the Kami. There is a strong connection between prayer and organic agriculture. In my case, I pray to the EM bacteria, for example I say thank you and I send out good intentions to the bacteria, in order to achieve the maximum of efficiency. The prayers are words, which harbor spiritual power (*Kotodama* 言霊). For me, the prayer is very important in order to have healthy vegetables and I spray the bacteria on a daily basis.

August, 24th, 2018

Rie Sasaki, 32, f
Organic Farmer
Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture

How would you characterize the contemporary evolutions of the Kami belief.

I definitely believe that some ancestral knowledge about the belief of Kami has been lost. But if you search, you would probably come across people who have the real knowledge. I am not only referring here to religious persons such as priests and *Gûji*, but also artists. There may be numerous musicians who sing all the time about love and this kind of stuff, but in reality there are also quite a few musicians who sing about themes such as Kami, the Earth in their songs.

Can you talk about the relationship between Kami and environment?

I think that when one realizes Kami (*Kami o ishiki suru*) then automatically people will tend to take care of the Earth (*daijini suru*). When I think back, there is probably a link between when I started to become genuinely interested in Kami and the moment I started to want to take care of the Earth. Besides, I am living myself as a person who believes in the existence of Kami, so that's why it is real to me and things tend to go well, generally speaking. But if I say, for example, that there is no Kami, then people around me would not care either. I have no definitive answer. The fact that I think about Kami today seems to me as if I was communicating with the people of the past.

It may be the fault of the Americans that the ancestral belief has gone lost, even more than because of the Meiji restoration. Since the loss of WWII we are in a way colonized by the Americans and our culture has become Americanized, it seems more cool and fashionable. But today, in the same manner as Western people get interested in our culture, and come here, the regular young Japanese person tries to live up to Western standards, live a Western inspired corporate lifestyle with a regular salary, then making a family and earn good money and build maybe a 'my home'. This lifestyle is being promoted by all forms of media as the Winner-lifestyle and if you don't conform to it, you may be regarded as a loser, who does not earn money and fails at many things in life. This is an unhealthy model which puts a lot of societal pressure on the people. And there are more and more people nowadays who realize this somewhat artificial pressure that is put upon us, who realize that we have been brainwashed. So once they have decided to live a new original lifestyle and turn their back to the societal pressure, the question arises, what standards to obey and follow, if it isn't societal standards anymore. The answer is Earth's standards. Henceforth these people follow the current of Earth's processes, and people realize that this is the way of living which feels the best for them.

What can you say about Kami and Kami-belief, Jinja.

Maybe the Kami sama is not just Kami, but every element has its own Kami, for example the Moon, the Sun the Earth. So everything for example that there is on Earth which is necessary for

our living, this is what we call Kami. And we invented this concept of Kami in order to give people a reason to take care of these resources, for example the concept *Yaoyorozu no Kami*. This is maybe something that every country does. If the concept of taking care of all the things of Earth didn't have an institution, this idea would get lost. That's why Jinjas have been built, so people have a place where the Kamis can be correctly worshipped. Everybody of the region/village, on a local level, comes together and celebrates this a couple of times per years.

I believe this village or community style of living together is becoming popular again amongst young people. And also placing importance on organic products. I for myself, think that Japanese people have too many societal rules which are too burdensome, and I don't like this. Maybe in front of Kami but between people, I'm not sure about this.

What is the role of the Kami?

I think Kami's role is to create links between people. People are different and not everybody understands and thinks the same. But when we have created an existence such as the Kami, then it is easy. Everybody knows, Kami is something which we venerate and express gratitude towards. Let's all venerate Kami. It's suddenly as simple as that.

So do you think Kami have been created by the people?

Kami have both been created by the people and have existed before the people. But because people believe in a certain existence, this existence is being nurtured and becomes more existent. So it is not a non-existence (*Mu*) but an *existent* existence (*Yu*). For example I went to the *Izumotaisha* today to do *Mairi*. So for this reason it has certainly become stronger. This being said, I have never seen with my eyes the Kami. I feel the existence of Kami through the events that happen around me, that feel like Kami. Usually Kami makes itself noticeable through the succession of a series of remarkable events which happen within a short amount of time. Especially when I go deep into some Yama, and there are some mystical looking places, like cascades and rocks, which nobody knows how they have arrived there, and when I asked the *Guji* how these rocks have been placed there, he replied, that they probably have already been there.

What can you say about transformational capacities of Jinjas?

I don't think, that Jinjas can change people who have no interest *a priori* in these places. They would not necessarily feel something when they enter a Jinja ground and would be mainly preoccupied by their personal matters. However if a person is already on this personal path of being interested in sacred sites, then he may have a certain reaction from the place. It is hard for me to say, maybe if a person had sorrows and personal problems and he went to the Jinja, then there may be a positive reaction he may get out of it. But if a mother just told her son 'come and look how great this Jinja is' or 'lets pray while standing under a waterfall', then nothing is going to result. Because the worldview cannot be forced upon people. Its up to everyone what he/she believes in. People may come to these conclusions on their own, when the time comes.

Personal views?

Probably, people who are interested in these remarkably beautiful places such as Jinjas, are the minority but it is there that I would meet people who are interested in the same topics as I am. And people who I mostly share no things together, wouldn't probably show up there. It is funny about the world that I am interested in, that it has a very long history, so If I think in terms of all the generations that had been interested in this during the Japanese history, there are definitely more people interested in this, than in dumbed down popular mainstream topics. I feel like I am communicating with the whole history of Japan when I am interested in the beauty and deepness of these places. For me Kami is a topic, which will be able to link the people from the past, present and the future. I think of this as something very exciting.

August, 25th, 2018

Person 2, senior, m
Ooyamazumi Shrine, Oomishima, Ehime prefecture

- I like to go to Jinja maybe once a month. I probably go there more often than the average person. I like these places because they have a special atmosphere about them, some kind of calmness that emanates out of them. It's different from the regular places, and especially here, every morning the personnel cleans and swipes the place so there is a welcoming cleanness about these places. I have a special connection to my birth place Jinja in the *Saitama* prefecture and I visit Jinjas all over Japan while always keeping in mind the birthplace Jinja. When I pray I usually ask for all kinds of things, that's the meaning of praying. I ask for the safety of my family, on the road, or for health.

- Environmental activities I don't consciously do but there are some ethical implications due to the fact that I regularly visit Jinjas. One becomes calm (落ち着く).

Couple 1, mid 20s
Ooyamazumi Shrine, Oomishima, Ehime prefecture

We don't oftentimes go to Jinjas, but we definitely like coming here. It was just our day trip to this Island from Matsuyama City, which took us about 1.5 hours. We come mainly here to eat the famous *Kaisendon* (Seafood and rice bowl) and it just happened that this Jinja stood nearby, so we came here to do *Omairi* (Shrine going). We would definitely go to the Jinja if there is one, but we don't go on purpose except maybe on *Hatsumoude* at New Years. Or if there happens to be a Jinja of this type then we would go there. We come here thinking that we can clean our consciousness. There is definitely a calming effect to these places.

Is this Shintoism/Are you Shintoist?

(Hesitation). Hmm, yes that would be something like this. But we don't think about the word Shinto. But yes Jinja are Shinto places. But it is by no means a religious thing. We are not religious people. It is the Japanese culture. Almost every Japanese person goes to Jinjas to do *Omairi* and buy *Omikuji*. It is some kind of *Uranai* (Fortunetelling).

How do you relate to Kami?

Female: I definitely believe there is *Kami*. But I don't know much about it.

Male: I don't think there is any *Kami*. This place is just a place which permits oneself to calm down. And pray for something good to happen. This is a very personal thing and it's different from person to person. But in the end it's not so much a question of whether there exists *Kami* or not. I think there is an ethical implication to the fact that we go to Jinjas.

Environmental implications?

We are definitely open for questions such as putting high value in Water, or the Nature. But we don't have any environmental activities. This is the Japanese culture, it is important to value things... maybe (かゝる)?

August, 26th, 2018

Couple 2, Yuuki & Ai, mid 20s
Students
Hakatajima, Ehime prefecture

- In both our families we have a stronger Buddhist tradition, so for us *Kami* would be more in the sense of ancestors. We would definitely pray when we go to our parents house, and honor the ancestors. This being said, when there is a Shrine we would also go there to do *Omairi* and draw *Omikuji*. This is probably something that every Japanese person does. The idea of *Kami* is proper to the Japanese culture and we think that it is possible that the Japanese ethical values are related to the idea of the *Yaoyorozu no Kami*, the *Kami* residing in all things. *Kami* probably exists yes. But nobody, honestly, thinks about this deeply. It is just the regular everyday and has nothing to do with religion. It is actually possible that people from the outside, for example European people, are more curious about Jinjas and sometimes happen to know more than we do.

Mitsuharu, 41, m
Cook
Hakatajima, Ehime prefecture

- Of course there are influences of *Jukyô* (Confucianism) and so on but essentially the Japanese ethical values are related to the idea of the *Yaoyorozu no Kami*. It means that in every thing or object there is a *Kami*. In every rice corn, in this ice cream. This is something every Japanese person thinks. The sea also has a *Kami*. My friend who is a fisherman goes twice a month to the *Jinja* which worships the *Kami of the sea*. *Kami* definitely exists. However, it is not a person, or a specific being. *Kami* is much more an energy that pervades everything. I think a *Jinja* is a place where a person can get in touch with the energy of the universe. This is something I sometimes hear.

Kaori Kawahashi, mid 30, f
Middle school teacher and coach
Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture

- I like to go to Shrines for specific reasons. I probably go more often than the usual Japanese people. Most Japanese people just go there 'on the way' because they are visiting something else and it just happens that there is a Shrine, so they might do *Omairi*, or buy *Omikuji*. But I think this is not the way Jinjas should be approached. One should go to a Shrine with a special idea in mind, for example in order to express gratitude and consciously choose to go there in a respectful way, rather than randomly wishing for good things to happen in a tourist-like manner. When I was younger, I had a different relationship to Jinjas, I went there on New Years for *Hatsumoude*, and didn't really care about the deeper meaning of doing *Omairi*. But today I understand that putting the hands together (*Te o awaseru*) is a very important thing. Everyone should regularly put their hands together, and for this reason going to a *Jinja* is good. This is essentially the act of expressing gratitude. And when we say 'thank you' it feels as if our hearts get cleansed (*Iyasareru*). I think Japanese people have a very developed sense for gratitude. I have for example a friend who says 'Thank you' every time she breaks an egg.

- Another friend I recently discovered, who does organic farming folds her hands each time before she begins the farming work. She thanks and prays for the Microorganisms, the weather, water, and I can without a doubt taste this in the vegetable she harvests. She has by the way married the grand son of Fukuoka, whom she met during a workshop. Fukuoka is very famous here and basically spread the idea, that we don't need any chemical fertilizers, which are very dangerous for our health. Eventually, this comes back to the idea of the *Yaoyorozu no Kami*. In every things resides a *Kami* and therefore we must take care of things (*Mono*) and say 'Thank you'.

- I think little by little the Japanese people are reawakening to a new consciousness. I think people are starting to get interested in these spiritual topics nowadays. This is something very recent, and small, but there is definitely such a tendency which is growing. There is some kind of change happening.

Junko Obata, middle aged, f
Museum staff, Toyo Ito architecture museum
Oomishima, Ehime prefecture

What kind of relationship are people having towards the belief and Kami on this island?

What could it be. One cannot see Kami, but there are quite a lot of people on this island, who know that something exists.

Is it because of the presence of the Ooyamazumi Shrine?

The island is already inhabited since more than 1000 years. I could not tell you if it was because the Shrine existed, and people who came by ship visited the Shrine as something central, or if the island had been considered as sacred from the beginning and that's why the island as well as the shrine became popular. But either way, what is for sure is that the knowledge of the existence of Kami on this island had a great deal of impact to the inhabitants of this island.

Why did you move to this island from Tokyo?

Maybe it was some kind of *Michibiki*, I feel a bit ashamed to tell why I think like this. Because in our society explanations which are beyond the rational are oftentimes not accepted. But I had always this thought linked to ancestor belief. And that my destiny to come to this island is linked to the ancestors. In fact once I came here I discovered that this place had to do with my ancestors. As if I was called to come here by my ancestors in order to finish something, or make up for something which my ancestors messed up. And once I look back, it really seems as everything has been as it should be, it really felt like there was a way (*Michi*) that has been constructed for me, many things made sense. This is something which I find remarkable about the Japanese Kami.

Do you think this is what the Japanese Kami means?

Yes. I think the Japanese Kami makes ways for people. Most people have the Kami consciousness completely immersed in their day to day life and do not really think about it. Most people in Japan today think of Kami as something towards which one expresses wishes and maybe says thank you. But I think this is not exactly true. To me Kami is much more an existence which ensures and watches over us (*Mimamoru*), in order to make sure that we walk the path that we are meant to walk, and Kami protects us for that. And if we break away from that path, then the Kami existence assists us to get back to that path. So the Kami existence (*Kami no sonzai*) is not at all an existence which fulfills wishes. But it is something, which gives us at times painful experiences, in order to remind us of our personal path. Also when we are on the right path, Kami existence will give us signs that it is the right path and maybe gives us power to encourage us on that way.

What can you say about Jinja Mairi?

As I think of the Kami existence in this way, when I go to a Jinja, I only have feelings of gratitude. I can not at all go to Jinjas to wish for stuff. Maybe it is true that not everybody thinks like this, and there are still many people who go to Jinjas in order to hope to have their wishes fulfilled. But I really feel that more and more people realize this real meaning behind the Kami in our 21st century. There is definitely a tendency.

I had this suspicion in mind that there may be such a tendency.

Maybe especially amongst young people there may be such a tendency. I think it is extraordinary that you were thinking this already, without living here. I think there are not many Japanese people who try to understand deeper meanings behind our own belief system, so I feel very grateful that people from other cultures endeavor to better understand this part of Japanese culture. I think nowadays, unfortunately, the majority of the Japanese people somewhat misunderstand the concept of Jinja and *Mairi*, and the deepness of its meaning.

Are you a Shinto believer?

In a way yes, in the sense that I believe in Kami. But it is just within myself, that I believe in Kami, not that I am affiliated to some specific Jinja or organization. It is not a religious thing. I believe in Kami because I feel grateful about life and the mere fact that I am alive is like a miracle. So as I said before when I go to the Jinja it is just to express gratitude. This being said, I have not experienced a direct contact with Kami, maybe this is something I will know when I die.

Is there an environmental implication within Jinja or Jinja Mairi?

Yes definitely. But one needs to have a certain intention when going to the Jinja in order to let the Jinja have an impact on the person. I think everyone has a certain level in his personal development. And it depends on this level of development, that one gets in touch with the existence of Kami. So not everybody may sense the same thing when he goes to the Jinja. But when the person has the right attitude approaching the Jinja, there may be a possibility to get in touch with the Kami. The Kami way is one of taking care of the Earth and other people, as well as to give (*Yuzuriau*). There is that direction within the Kami belief. So in this sense the awareness of taking care of the Earth is deeply intertwined with the awareness of Kami.

Do you think unconsciously, Japanese people have their ethical values influenced by the existence of the Kami?

Yes this makes actually sense to me. Japanese people generally have a high ethical sense. Indeed I believe that, because there is the Kami existence, that the Japanese value system is being shaped.

Hiroaki Hirano, 69, m
Environmental activist
Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture

Can you talk about Kami and Environment?

There are two types of people which are our ancestors. Two ways of consciousnesses, two ways relating to natural resources. There are, in relation to the ancient history of Japan, *Jomon* type and *Yayoi* type persons. *Jomon*-type is cyclical orientated. *Yayoi*-type invented the metal, paddy fields and also is advocating nowadays the use of Western technology. It is basically the equivalent of the Western type of human being. The *Jomon*-type is the type which advocates recycling and recognizes the cyclic nature of Nature and is mainly found within Eastern consciousness. Our modern world, has particularly emerged from after the defeat of WWII. The cyclical *Jomon* consciousness was still present during the Edo-period. But since the Meiji restoration, it has been overtaken by the *Yayoi*-type consciousness, and the technology of the *Yayoi* type has largely evolved, and in order to deconstruct what it has brought forth, it will be difficult nowadays. Atomic waste, plastics, economic system, and we are seeing around us that it is coming to a dead-end. The questions is then, what we should do now. Today, if *Yayoi* and *Jomon* fight, the *Yayoi*-type will win. There are people who have an environmental consciousness, but most don't do, and these people are definitely in the majority.

The Jinja are places, where particular informations can be received. They are linked to the universal consciousness. I don't know if it can awake environmental consciousness, or if it can

change types of people from Yayoi to Jomon. There are Jinjas which have energy and some which don't. The ones which have the energy are the real Jinja. They are places which connect the energy of the Earth and the Skies. When the human being connects to the Sky-Earth (*Ten-chi*), the vital energy will be replenished. Within us we also have the Kami energy and when we connect to the Sky-Earth we can heal from illnesses as well. When we connect, the part just behind the heart-organ, which is the place of the Kami-consciousness, will be connected. It's all about if one is ready to believe, and very easily, the Ego can come in the way and start to doubt such concepts. The Kami Energy is the same as the Vital Energy of the Universe. Everything has this energy, the animals the humans. And this is the idea of the Yaoyorozu no Kami.

Kami is a mechanism. When one has a feeling and uses words to express it then it becomes material. We cannot use Kami but we can express the emotions. Everything that exists, is children of Kami. However, they are not individuated figures, like in the mythological descriptions, which is just man made. Now, in order to receive the Universal vital energy, one has to be in a position of gratitude, or wishing happiness for other people, and this is what corresponds to the way of the Kami from Shinto. In this sense, Kami doesn't exist as figures, but it is a mechanism. However, it has an underlying consciousness, that has given birth to the Kami-mechanism. Unfortunately it is also possible to use it for bad purposes and harness that power, and the mechanism will not limit the actions of the people whether they are good or bad. But there is a sort of wish of the Kami, I like to believe it, that it wants that we take care of the Earth.

However, it is important to think, that there is no ultimate truth, many things can be true. Thus New religions who believe that they have the only truth probably will realize at one point that they were probably not on a right path. In the case of Jinja and Shinto, it is the idea of *Yaoyorozu* (8 myriad of deities in every thing) which states that many things are right and can be held for true. Shinto merely says, this is one possibility of many other but it is not trying to push it upon people. This is the Eastern-type of consciousness, which is more supportive of the idea of: this is possible, but this is also possible. This religion is *also* possible. And it appears, that the Western civilization, who tends to push upon people, is for that very reason progressively feeling attracted by the Eastern-type philosophy. Notably around the same time when the notion of 'environment' has emerged, people started to get attracted by the 'cyclical Eastern consciousness'. It is the difference between Western consciousness which has a dualistic perception of the Divine and the Nature, and the Eastern consciousness, where it is unified. However, I believe that many many people will have to die, before the Western civilization, capitalism, will come to a stop. It just spreading further at the moment, and the more capitalism spreads the more the Earth is being destroyed. There is already a consciousness which is emerging, but it is not significant enough. On the other hand the human beings are veritably holding the Earth's destiny in our hands.

August, 27th, 2018

Genji Nosaka, 81, m
CEO System Bank corp., Organic Farming, Curator Bhutan museum
Fukui city, Fukui prefecture

Genji Nosaka is CEO of System Bank corporation, as well as of a newly built organic farming company. Furthermore he is chief curator of the Bhutan museum in Fukui city and he has recently taken over the responsibility of an association called *Kami-spot-network*. Fukui is by the way the number 1 place in the world in terms of the total number of shrines and temples. He sees some kind of connection between Bhutan and Fukui. For Nosaka, Fukui has a remarkable old culture, and it is a wonderful place which he wants to spread to the world.

He states, that the Japanese people have a natural feeling of Nature veneration. This mindset came from ancient times, where people who worked outside had no choice but to revere and fear Nature. Shinto is furthermore, according to him, a Sun-worship belief. The Japanese people all have the Nature-veneration belief deeply within themselves, however most of the time not consciously. He states, that today's Shinto tradition is mostly based on benefits (*Rieki* 利益) which can be obtained at shrines.

Now he wants to develop his new association called *Kami-spot-network* in the prefecture of Fukui. It is a network of places, where sacred experiences can be made. His wish is to raise awareness about sacred places and provide the population experiences of sacred nature. There are approximately 1000 shrines only in Fukui, and his goal is to list them all up. He thinks that if he can connect the shrines through a network, something new can appear out of it. He thus underlines the importance of putting things into connection. Networks have the ability to change the world. Moreover, he thinks that it is a very interesting idea to consider sacred places as to offering transformative experience which can raise ecological awareness.

August, 28th, 2018

**Yoshihiro Mihara, middle aged, m
Shinto 'expert' (he calls himself beginner)
Saba, Fukui prefecture**

Please tell me about your thoughts on Shinto and Ecology.

What the Kami can do is different from what Humans do. Humans build roads and houses, but the Kami doesn't do this kind of work. He supports the human or lets him know that he is slightly on the wrong path. When he is on the right path he will give supportive signs to the human being and claps his hands. Same thing goes for agriculture, here the question is if it is done according to the will of Kami. If someone uses fertilizers, and kills thus insects, bacteria, or other organism and operates a type of agriculture that does not harmonize with Nature, the question will be, is this pleasing Kami? Kami asks: If just the human beings can live is that alright? No probably not. Kami says, that we are all friends, spiders, frogs, shrimps, snakes, we are all of the same family, why can't you have a good relationship. Aren't we part of the same kinship? Human being for economic ends and for money, does everything, drills tunnels, tears down mountains, cuts down trees. As a consequence the rivers and seas get polluted. At this point Kami would say: Do it better! Find a way to be in harmony with Nature, otherwise human beings will all disappear. If all animals and fish die, human beings will all die. But human beings fight wars, invent weapons, kill each other, something which is good for nobody. Kami asks: Why do you fight? Build a world where people don't need to fight. Why do you fight? For power and money.

Now, what does the Japanese Jinja in this context signify? This is Shinto, do you know? Do you know what Jinja means? Firstly, Jinja exists in order to worship Kami. Secondly, they exist in order to pacify the wrath of the Kami. In order to pacify the wrath, a human builds a Jinja. Depending on the region, the human of the ancient times knew that here we have to build a Jinja, otherwise there are going to be floods or other calamities. This is the *Ara-mitama* of the Kami. There exists *Ara-mitama* and *Nigi-mitama*. Why does the *Ara-mitama* appear? Because, the Kami can't help but feel in anger about the acts of the human being. When the intentions of the people and the intentions of Kami drift apart more and more, it is a problem. Thus one builds a Jinja in order to be able to communicate with the Kami and know, in which direction one has develop, so people can become close to the Kami's will again.

In this context I am doing a certain ritual. I have three sacred objects. A mirror, an amulet and an invisible sword which I can descend from the sky. This is a promise I have made with Kami. But this is going to be a deep story which tears us away from environmental aspects.

Now, why do calamities happen, in Kyushu and everywhere in Japan. In fact, this is closely linked to the Kami. Regarding the concept of ancestor worship in Japan, even before Buddhism arrived, the original thought of Shinto was: All people are children of Kami. But now people forget that they are children of Kami, so they kill each other pollute rivers and Kami is very frustrated about this. Japan is a country which has been chosen by the Kami. And from Japan, many so called *Goshikijin* have been sent out. This is a very deep aspect and I am by no means intending to tell you something disturbing. All the Kami from ancient times, Jesus, Moses, they all were right, right, so why do people fight each other? We did not teach something like this. Kami did not wish this. They wished that people have good relationships and take care of the Earth, also they didn't wish that

people seek too many treasures. Many times civilizations have disappeared for this reason. So 'using Kami' means to venerate the intention of the Kami.

In this context, underlining the relationship between environmental preservation and Kami is extremely important. It is essential and very important that people realize that there exists Kami and from there ethical values will derive, as well as the sense of taking care of the Earth.

Now, more than 6000 years ago, there existed another Japanese A-I-U-E-O (alphabet). Nowadays we think that the Japanese writing (Kanji, Katakana, Hiragana) originated based on Kanji (Chinese ideograms), from China. But before the Chinese writing, there existed an original Japanese alphabet but it has been undermined in order to promote Kanji. And each vowel was related to a Kami of the Nature, so each vowel was a *Kotodama* (sound which has spiritual power of the word), but this idea has been forgotten now. For example 'A' is related to the Kami of the thunder, *Raijin*. 'I' is related to the Kami of the wind, *Fû-jin* (Chinese), *Shinatsuhikosama* in Japanese. 'U' is related to *Atago-shin* or *Akiba-shin*. This is the name of the Akihabara district in Tokyo, so originally all those names were names of Kami. For example in Fukui prefecture, there is a city called *Awara*, a city of hot baths (*Onsen*), and maybe you know but there are all the times fires, and that's because the Kami of the fire is not being worshipped there, even though there are shrines. So it is in this sense, that the environment is very closely related to Kami. So for example in the USA, in California, there are all the forest fires, and the American people have to become aware of the Kami of the fire. They pray to Jesus, but their prayer doesn't reach the Kami of the fire. So where there are environmental calamities, the according Kami *must* be venerated properly. And this knowledge has been lost in present days, yet in reality this relationship is deeply anchored in Japan. However amongst present day people, even most *Kannushi* (Priests) of the Jinja don't even know this, and that's a problem. I really confirm this. Moreover, all the Kamis of the natural elements have a connection. For example the combination of the Kami of the fire and wind have given birth to the sun. The idea of *In* (Yin) and *Yô* (Yang) has in reality been present in Japan before the Yin-Yang philosophy arrived from the continent. When the Kanji arrived from China, in order to make those Kanjis valid, the Japanese people had to 'throw away' the ancient alphabets, but at the same time also all the ancient thoughts that were linked to those writings. That was approximately the same time as Buddhism arrived in Japan. But in reality, the Japanese people didn't need Buddhism because there was already the Kami. But the Japanese leaders put a lot of effort into introducing Buddhism. The more the Kanji and Buddhism was introduced the more the ancient ideas got undermined. But these ideas were in reality much more deep and astonishing. Nowadays, Japanese people think the Chinese history is great, but these ancient ideas of Yin Yang that existed in Japan were much more amazing.

Now, because we are not in symbiosis with Kami and neglect and ignore them, the calamities arrive. But this is something which were few people know. Not even the professors of the Tokyo university or *Guji* (Headpriest). And there is a necessity to reeducate people on this relationship. The country would go much better if people were aware of this. Kanji and Buddhism have been introduced from China. But in reality even one of the most important people of Japanese Buddhism, Kukai, was in fact a Shintoist and was advocating the veneration of Amaterasu. So in order to introduce Buddhism, Kukai has elegantly paraphrased the Kami in Buddhist terms, so it would fit well with the Japanese mentality and be persuasive. Japanese people are not the type of people who blindly venerate *Shaka-sama* (Buddha) but they unconsciously knew, that something more amazing existed. Kukai was venerating Amaterasu, while pretending that it is Buddhism. The idea of Kami was very deeply anchored in the Japanese mentality and country and unfortunately this anchorage became progressively undermined with the different transformations that happened in Japan.

I think that nowadays, the Shrine clergy have good intentions and thoughts, but they do not know anymore the real ideas, and this is very deplorable. It is notably since the GHQ arrived after the defeat of the WWII. It has probably been an error that Japan did engage in the war. Leaving aside this case, the GHQ realized that there existed the Kami idea which they were afraid of and realized how amazing it was, and that's why they prohibited the Kami idea. There was no need to have religion in Japan originally. But nevertheless Buddhism has arrived and the leaders were elegantly establishing the Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, but this is something very unnatural and didn't need to have existed.

The Kami has a consciousness, or a will. He sees the human being who strives after wealth, builds wall and fights each other. Kami would say, that's because human beings all strive after the

ideal of rich people. We have built a world where only money matters. On the other hand, if we think about one 'extreme' way of getting over the problems, it may not be a solution either. We cannot all become suddenly 'Amish'. But we all have to think progressively about aspects that permit us to stay on Earth. Kami supports us for that, but on the other hand, Kami doesn't care either. If we all disappear he would just think "once again, the human being has caused his own ruin". Kami doesn't say "don't do this, don't do that, i.e. don't pollute the river". He says just "if you pollute, you understand that it gets polluted, don't you?". So what has to change is the way we think. The hearts of the people have to be reset, so we break away from a mindset where we always want more and more.

Appendix 4: Presentation for SPIEM, University of Tokyo

Remarks

The author of this essay had an occasion to present the collected material in a summarized form at an informal meeting, named SPIEM (Spiritual informal education meeting) organized by Norichika Horie, associate professor for religious studies at the university of Tokyo, together with Mrs Oomichi and Mr Koike, both religious scholars from the Kokugakuin university in Tokyo.

Presentation

Felix Ackermann, August 29th, 2018

• Introduction: Shinto & Ecology

My name is Felix Ackermann, I am a student at the Master's course of Sustainability at the Environmental faculty of the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. I am currently writing my Master's thesis on Shinto and Ecology which situates itself in the research field of Spirituality and Ecology. 環境信仰学

I have become interested in the ideas behind Shinto a few years back, when I had the chance to do an internship in an architecture office in the prefecture of Shimane, near the city of Izumo. Several people I met during this time seemed to have a close relationship towards Kami. They put high value into praying and going to shrines. It seemed to me as if ecological and ethical values were somewhat related to their sense of spirituality, which made me first hand interested into further investigating Shrine worship, the meaning of Kami amongst the people and thus studying Shinto. I was personally deeply impressed by the Izumo Taisha and was touched by the concept of Kami and thus also felt a personal motivation (動機どうき) to visit shrines as sacred places.

Having returned to Switzerland, I have started to read about Shinto and have come across all kinds of literature (学術文献ぶんけん) which tackle the topic from different vantage points. Many controversial aspects revolving around Shinto, such as its abuse for nationalistic means have become clear.

From an environmental vantage point many things have equally been written on Shinto, however oftentimes shedding a critical light on optimistic ecological discourses which are being held in the name of Shinto as a 'Nature-worship religion'. For example, by qualifying the Japanese people as being only 'selectively attached' to the idea of Nature, thus venerating only a certain type of Nature, the commonly employed argument that Shinto Nature-worship entails a harmonious relationship towards Nature is oftentimes being invalidated. In order to underline this counterargument, environmental issues of Japan, such as deforestation or pollution are being highlighted. In other words, if the Japanese people really were so close to Nature, why would they do so much harm to the environment?

According to some authors, environmental conservationism due to sacralization of natural sites does not seem to be a viable argument, given the fact that oftentimes for economic reason these very sacred forests are being decimated to merely a couple of trees, in order to give way to buildings.

Nonetheless, it seemed to me as if within the Kami-belief and sacred sites, there may still reside some tacit potential (可能性) as to fostering (増加) some kind of ecological consciousness. In order to pursue this question, I have travelled for a bit more than 3 weeks now in 3 regions of Japan, the prefectures of Fukui, Kochi and Ehime, in order to speak with different kinds of people, ordinary people who visit shrines, priests, as well as historians, and experts (専門家) in the field. It is admittedly a very short time span, but I hope to have obtained a very tiny glimpse of the contemporary tendencies of the Kami belief and *potentially* seeing some ecologically viable ideas.

• Fieldwork

- 1) Get an overall general idea, why Japanese people visit Shrines and what kinds of relationship are being maintained towards these institutions as well as towards the Shinto-belief system. Also understand tendencies, future evolutions and transformations within the belief system. (Understanding the belief and tendencies)
- 2) Seek out people who may speak about the relationship between Shinto and environmental topics. (Mainstream environmental discourse 主流環境言説しゅりゅうかんきょうげんせつ)
- 3) Seek out people, having a certain expertise in the domain, who may provide deeper knowledge behind the meaning of Jinjas, Kami, praying and worshiping. (Alternative environmental discourse)

I would like to share briefly, due to time constraints, some points which I put together from the diverse informations that I received through the conversations I have had.

I. Shinto, Kami and Jinja

1. Japanese population and Jinja Mairi

General population

- Several interlocutors (対話者たいわしや) from different regions shared the idea that there is a loss of the ancestral meaning of the Kami belief in present days, and there are actually not many people who are aware of this meaning anymore. Most people nowadays visit shrines on Hatsumoude, Omiyamairi, Shichigosan or just occasionally, when they are at some tourist destination. Mostly they go to shrines to pray for good fortune, success in business, family life or traffic safety and draw Omikujii, expecting worldly benefits as already stated (述べた) by Horie. Some people (人によっては) appear to value the connection to their birthplace Shrine and would go there once a month to express their gratitude towards the Ujigami for protecting their area. Most of the people I interrogated about their relationship towards Jinjas, answered, that they never really think about the meaning of Kami, Jinja and Shinto.

Unconscious belief

- Most people who I talked to were aware of the fact that the Japanese culture is based upon the idea that Kami resides in everything, the notion of Yaoyorozu no Kami. The idea, that we all possess the Wakemitama of Kami, has been shared by many interlocutors, including several Kannushi. Several have agreed upon the fact, that Japanese people do have their ethics deriving from the Kami belief, just that it is not conscious. That's why many Japanese people can't give definite answers.

2. Loss of belief, deeper meaning and tendencies

Loss and tendency

- Several interlocutors, experts and more profound believers state, that there is a small rising tendency amongst some Japanese people to reevaluate the meaning of Kami. For instance, in circles of organic farming Kami awareness appears to be high. The awareness, that there is a general loss of the original meaning of Kami belief is equally being highlighted (強調) by some people. There is a wish that is being expressed to protect the Kami belief but also the original Japanese culture from disappearing. Many also regret the fact, that something as extraordinary (素晴らしいもの) as Jinja and Kami is not valued anymore correctly. It is being thought, that Shinto Shrine worshipping is generally undergoing a transformation from loss of original meaning (Meiji restoration, World War 2, but also Sarin Gas attack) towards today's reevaluation.

- According to Guji Ogasawara from Tosa Jinja in Kochi, there is a general decline amongst young people, not only for the understanding of ancestral meanings, but for the interest 関心 in Jinjas in general. He think that it is important, however that Shinshoku help young people rediscover their interest and link to the Shrines, which is not a religious but a cultural thing.

- Mister Mihara, a Shinto expert from Fukui-Shi, told me that he has a promise with Kami (神との約束), which is somewhat related to a homework of the Earth, but which he may not reveal. He believes in the extraordinary capacity of the Kami belief, so extraordinary that the American GHQ were scared of the Shinto Kami and thus undermined (衰弱すいじゃく) the practice of a pious

Kami-belief in its original sense. He states, that Kami belief is much older than Chinese culture, and that Japan is a very special country, where such a belief has originated.

Jinja and Kami

- Jinjas are, according several people I have talked to, places which can connect to the energy of the universe (宇宙エネルギー) and the universe consciousness (宇宙意識). Thus Jinjas are places which permit the visitors to approach the Kami and get into touch with them.

- As to the work of Shinshoku, according to a Jinja worker from Matsuyama, Mister Yanagihara, a Guji should not be called as such, if he can not manipulate the energy of the universe. Otherwise it is just forms without content. It is only when the Guji knows how to manipulate this energy, that the Jinja can become what it is meant to be, a place of purification for the population, a place of proper worship of Kami and guiding 導 the people to the way of becoming Kami. He wishes that people understand again the idea (観念かんねん) of 聖地 which situates itself inside of a 結界.

- According to several interlocutors (一部の対話者によると) who appeared to be interested in Shinto on a deeper level, the proper way of doing Omairi is approaching the Jinja with gratitude. According to Mister Mihara, there is no need to wish for anything, since the Kami knows it already. The only thing one needs to do, is to express gratitude.

- The idea of Powerspots, for example according to the Guji Ogasawara, is a concept that is being welcomed in order to attract more people, in a similar manner as the Goshuin Boom. I have seen many 看板 at Konpira-san stating that it is a Powerspot, which shows that Jinja Shinto integrates this discourse, as already mentioned by Horie. Ogasawara says, that originally the boom has been spread by Women magazines. However, it distorts the original meaning of the Jinja, and Shinshoku should not use this notion. Historian Mister Tanaka from Oono historical museum, Fukui, says, that he hates the word Powerspot exactly for this reason. According to some experts I met, Powerspots are sacred places where the energy of the universe can be felt. I was told that not all Jinjas have power, some have more some have less. These places have the ability to neutralize agitated spirits and put people in a purified, meditative state. It is then in this state that people can realize their own Kami or the connection to Kami. This leads to the environmental discourse within the Kami belief.

II. Environmental discourse

1. Kami and environment

- Originally in the Japanese ethics (道徳観) there is the idea of following the way of Kami. It is a way of taking care of other people and of the Earth. There is a wish amongst the world of the Kami, that human beings strive to act after the ideal of a Kami, which is the Japanese ethics. In this sense, there is a direct and profound relationship between environmental awareness and Kami belief, since becoming Kami comes down to taking care of the Earth and bearing a straight attitude (真) of love. The Kami idea is one of holding things, the Earth and other people as valuable. A Kami society is one which is aware of the cycle of Nature and lives in accordance. At the moment, the Earth's population is very different from Kami. Especially a consumerist and capitalistic society looks into exactly the opposite direction as the Kami.

- Nature is the expression itself of Kami. Kami manifests itself in two forms: Nigimitama and Aramitama. Nigimitama is the facet of Kami which needs to be venerated for its beauty and its abundance it offers to human beings, hence a feeling of gratitude arises. Aramitama is the ferocious facet of Kami, which can express itself in forms of calamities and environmental disasters. Hence, according to Mister Mihara, people feared the anger of Kami. If a certain Kami, for example the fire Kami is not worshipped correctly, fire calamities may be the result. The same idea goes for water and other elements. In ancient times people had much greater knowledge about this, which he regrets. Several interlocutors explained natural phenomena in terms of these two sides which compose the Kami. Hence *Matsuru*, worshipping, meant the pacification of Aramitama and the expression of gratitude towards Nigimitama.

- According to Ogasawara, the Jinja can be a place of environmental education. He believes that the natural setting of this kind of provincial Jinja helps to make people feel the closeness to Nature. He thinks that in present days, Jinja grounds can become a place for all kinds of events, other than Matsuri. Moreover, Tosa Jinja has been a place which has seen a lot of effort put into its restoration since 25 years. Ogasawara put a lot of effort into making this place sacred again, thus believing in

the strong role of the Guji to contribute to the perceived sacredness (神々しさ) of a site by keeping it clean and welcoming.

- Mister Nosaka, CEO of an organic farming company and SystemBank corp. in Fukui, has taken over several years ago a platform called Kami spot network, where he endeavors to list up all shrines of Fukui prefecture. He says, that linking all Shrines may create something extraordinary in the end. His wish today is to create the awareness around sacred sites and offer the population sacred experiences. Mister Nosaka estimates that there may reside a strong relation between universal ecological consciousness and the experience of sacred sites. Mister Mihara agrees upon this fact, but also highlights the fact, that there needs to be an educational component as to how to approach these places in a correct manner

2. Jinja & Ecology

1) Jinjas are places of healing and purification, helping people to neutralize and get in touch with their proper Kannagara no Michi or the Consciousness of the universe. They are sacred places surrounded by a spiritual barrier. Jinjas are places of profound ecological awareness in the sense of Kami no Michi.

→ Spiritual-ecological paradigm

2) Jinjas are places of worshipping of Nigimitama and Aramitama of the enshrined Kami for harmonious existence of human beings within Nature: Expressing Gratitude and Reverence.

→ Ritualistic-ecological paradigm

3) Jinjas are: Community spaces, sometimes in a natural setting, which are symbol of the Japanese ethics, culture and arena of diverse cultural-spiritual events, as well as potentially environmental education.

→ Social-cultural and potential environmental paradigm