

## Redefining the Gods

### Politics and Survival in the Creation of Modern Kami

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*Interpretations of the gods change with each succeeding political transformation as ritualists redefine the objects of their worship in order to survive. In early seventeenth-century Japan, priests at sites of sacred power enshrined their deities as combinatory gods supportive of the Tokugawa regime. In the face of the threats and opportunities of late 1867 to 1874, ritualists asserted and supported the exclusive legitimacy of the emperor by redefining the combinatory gods as imperial kami and stripping them of other associations. After the Meiji regime became securely established, however, many added back earlier associations to the gods to appeal to worshippers and ensure the continued survival of their institutions. Thus, priests of the Shinto shrines of Meiji—officiating at the hitherto combinatory worship sites of the Tokugawa era—reintroduced selected elements of that combinatory tradition under the auspices of the purportedly “pure,” exclusive Shinto of the imperial regime.*

**Keywords:** *kami* — Shinto — Meiji — *kitō* — *gongen* — Shugendō — legitimacy

GODS CHANGE. In colonial Peru, native Americans merged motherly goddesses with the Catholic Mary; later in India, Ramakrishna and his followers devoted themselves to a universalized Kali; more recently still, Jewish mystics have interpreted the masculine “Adonai” as a feminine “Shechinah.” No matter how justified as reclamations of a truer past, such transformations are inexplicable outside the complex political and economic pressures of their times. For, as countless scholars have noted, it is through redefining their gods that people redefine themselves, their values, and their communities<sup>1</sup>—and, in the process,

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<sup>1</sup> The great founders of sociological thought—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—began

negotiate the rocky shoals of political, social, and economic change.

The proliferation of imperial kami in the wake of the Meiji Restoration constitutes one more example of this widespread human process, in which priests of preexisting deities redefined their gods in a rapidly changing world. The separation of kami and buddhas (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離), and the establishment of modern Shinto that it initiated, marked one of the sharpest breaks in the religious history of Japan. Longstanding doctrines, practices, and institutions came under often violent attack. “Buddhism” and “Shinto” became distinct intellectual and institutional entities. The Meiji state emerged, bolstered by an elaborate structure of priests, shrines, and patriotic teachings. Even these epochal transformations, however, grew out of behavior repeated countless times in the past, as ritualists reliant upon the support of one set of sponsors worked to survive and prosper through the transition to the next, redefining their gods to do so.

Such transformation through accommodation is a twofold process. First, religious practitioners seek political recognition; then, having established their institutional right to exist, they pursue economic security. When both authority and wealth are held in a single, lordly hand, the strategy is simple: ally with the ruler. As political and economic power diverge, however, the cash of commoners increasingly plays a role. Through the adjustments of the priests, then, gods soon conform to the politics and people of their time.

The loyalist coup of January 1868 set in motion a series of political and economic accommodations that would change the gods of modern Japan. Within just a few years, priests at sacred sites ranging from tiny roadside altars to sprawling mountain complexes renamed the objects of their prayers. By invoking new identities for the sacred powers, they removed them from the esoteric pantheon of bodhisattvas, kami, avatars, and guardian kings that had hitherto sustained a complex system of divination, healing, and protective magic. Instead, they placed them within a world of ancient, creator deities linked to an august, imperial past. Between 1868 and 1874, priests at minor and prominent sites alike aligned themselves with the newly ascendant political authorities, ensuring their survival and, indeed, prosperity by linking the reputations of their gods to the fledgling imperial regime. After the consolidation of the Meiji state, they then turned again to the demands of the people. In doing so, they created the shrines—and the kami—of modern Shinto.

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much of their work with the insight that societies make gods in their image, as their reflection, or as beings to forge unity out of diverse individuals. Historians and scholars of religion have elaborated upon this insight ever since.

*The Politics of Combination*

The centuries from the Ōnin War until the consolidation of the Tokugawa-led *bakuhan* 幕藩 order in the seventeenth century were plagued by repeated military and political upheaval. Rulers conquered new territories, relied upon new ritualists to help them legitimate their rule, then gave way to other rulers and ritualists in turn. There is evidence that during the late sixteenth century, for instance, Oda Nobunaga sponsored the cult and the priest of Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王, identifying himself with the powers of the Bull-Headed Heavenly King (AKAGI 1991). In a similarly symbiotic relationship, Toyotomi Hideyoshi's advisors worked with the head of the Yoshida priestly family, Yoshida Kanemi 吉田兼見, to enshrine the ruler after his death as Toyokuni Daimyōjin 豊国大明神 (SCHEID forthcoming). On the island of Shikoku, the Tosa warlord Chōsokabe Motochika 長宗我部元親 introduced his own ritualists into conquered territories, sponsoring rites to the Thirty Protecting Deities (*sanjūbanjin* 三十番神) of the *Lotus Sutra*. When a vassal of Hideyoshi ousted Chōsokabe, the priests proposed replacing the Thirty Deities with a shrine to the guardian king Konpira 金毘羅 instead (MATSUBARA 1987, p. 63). Given the volatile politics of the years from 1467 to 1665, it should come as no surprise that, according to one count, more than ninety per cent of temples extant during the Tokugawa era had been either founded or rebuilt during this tumultuous time (TAMAMURO 1962, p. 32).

As befit institutions established to pray for military victory, prosperity, or peace—in other words, for protection of the realm (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家)—many of these temples performed *kitō* (祈祷): ritual prayers for practical benefits. Esoteric priests and practitioners of mountain worship (*shugenja* 修験者) petitioned the deities for health, safety, and other popular concerns. In the midst of ongoing war, both lords seeking to guard their domains, and villagers seeking protection or escape, valued and commissioned the prayers of such priests.

With the rise of Tokugawa Ieyasu to unrivaled power throughout the islands, the most prominent religious professionals of this *kitō*-style worship vied to ally themselves with the new regime just as other ritualists throughout the provinces had secured sponsorship from local lords. The success of the Tendai priest Tenkai 天海 (1536–1643) in identifying a deified Ieyasu with the sun and sun goddess Amaterasu confirmed the dominance of combinatory thought and practice in the ideological support structure of the emerging *bakuhan* system. Tenkai and his sponsors thus established the ideological foundations of the Tokugawa regime upon precedents long utilized by Japanese rulers and sanctified by ancient history.

Many of the oldest texts known in Japan revealed a world of combined deities. Sutras from India displayed a pattern of association in which Indian gods (*kami* 神) became guardians of Buddhist teachings. Histories within Japan supported combination or association as a strategy for political legitimation.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the first reference in the official histories to the Buddhist affiliation of a local, Japanese kami occurred amid the contested introduction of new, combinatory strategies of imperial legitimation. In the middle of the eighth century, Emperor Shōmu and his Buddhist supporters built the Tōdai-ji and its Great Buddha to bolster imperial prestige, identifying the emperor not only with Amaterasu but also as a manifestation of the Cosmic Buddha central to esoteric thought. According to the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, the kami Hachiman 八幡, whose cult in Kyūshū already included Buddhist elements, supported this endeavor with donations and oracles—a dedication to the Buddhist ideological program that was eventually rewarded with the granting of the title “Great Bodhisattva” (*daibosatsu* 大菩薩) to the deity (BENDER 1979). Such merging of kami and Buddhist identities was not limited to the realm of imperial politics. Esoteric ascetics and magicians identified powerful beings of the land with a variety of minor Buddhist deities, linking the god of Gion 祇園 with both the kami Susano’o and the bull-headed Gozu Tennō, for example, or the deity of Mt. Kinpu 金峰山 with a new, esoteric avatar, Zaō Gongen 蔵王権現.

In the early ninth century, the priests Kūkai and Saichō provided both doctrinal and institutional support for these syntheses as they established teaching and meditation centers in mountain retreats and turned to local deities (*kami*) to protect them. Over the years, scholars at both Mt. Kōya and Mt. Hiei worked to understand the relationship between local kami and the larger Buddhist cosmology. They developed theories such as Ryōbu Shintō, linking kami to the deities of the Shingon mandalas, and Sannō or Hie Shintō, identifying the kami of Mt. Hiei with the buddha Śakyamuni, preacher of the *Lotus Sutra*. Kami ritualists of the Yoshida school continued this logic of multiple identities, confirming the basic ideas of combination and manifestation even as they altered the details.

This acceptance of multiple identities, in which one deity could be seen as a manifestation of another, helped ritualists secure their shrines and temples within larger systems of meaning supportive of their political sponsors. Beginning in the fourteenth century, for

<sup>2</sup> GRAPARD (1988) convincingly set this process of ‘combination’ and ‘association’ within the contexts of political structures, while READER and TANABE (1998) set it in the context of practical benefits.

instance, members of both the Yoshida school of Shinto and the Hokke (Lotus or Nichiren) sect espoused a system of correlations known as the Thirty Protecting Deities that emerged from Tendai thought.<sup>3</sup> Loosely based on beings thought to protect the *Lotus Sutra* on each of the thirty days of the month, these Thirty Deities merged kami with buddhas for protection of the directions, the ruler's castle, the imperial court, and other sites. Thus, the imperial kami Amaterasu was associated with Kannon, Dainichi, or Śakyamuni Buddha and the tenth day of the month, while Hachiman (as both kami and buddha) was linked to the eleventh day. Likewise, the kami Gion Daimyōjin in the capital, identified with the guardian king Gozu Tennō, protected the twenty-fourth day of each month.<sup>4</sup> Such equivalencies tied the time and space of both everyday existence and supernatural power to an intimately linked cosmology that merged kami and buddhas into a seamless whole. This system, although only intermittently visible to the everyday layman, both underlay many of the divinatory, healing, and magical practices of the time and situated them within a structure supportive of the political rulers.

It was through a similar kind of combinatory thought that the Tendai priest Tenkai, and the third shogun, Iemitsu, legitimized the Tokugawa regime. After Ieyasu's death, they enshrined the first shogun at Mt. Nikkō and identified him for worship as Tōshō Dai-gongen 東照大権現, the Great Avatar that Shines in the East, thus associating the founder of the shogunate with both the ancestor of the imperial house, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, and the Great Sun Cosmic Buddha, thought to encompass all of existence. Tenkai dubbed the combinatory doctrine that justified this cult "Sannō Ichijitsu Shintō," or the "One True Shinto of (Hie) Sannō," clearly linking it to the great Tendai center of Mt. Hiei (OOMS 1985, pp. 173–83).

In the ensuing years, Tendai and other Buddhist lineages came to occupy an established place in the Tokugawa system. The third shogun, Iemitsu, established a twofold system of religious control intended to root out sects such as Ikkō, Fujufuse and, of course, Christianity, which all refused to acknowledge the ultimate authority of the government. The system of mandatory population registration at temples virtually guaranteed the livelihood of priests who performed funerals. Those ritualists who relied more upon the miraculous reputation of their gods—performing *kitō* to deities of often indeterminate identity—were forced to affiliate with a recognized denomination, acceding to the oversight of a main temple of the Shingon, Tendai, or other

<sup>3</sup> The following information is drawn in large part from DOLCE forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> See KAWAGUCHI 1993, pp. 350–52, 443 and DOLCE forthcoming.

denominations. Due to the insularity and instability of the Shinto houses, as well as the broader institutional advantages of Buddhism under the shogunate, priests of local kami as well as independent diviners, healers, and ascetics found it advantageous to obtain licenses and recognition as *bettō* 別当 or *shasō* 社僧—Buddhist-credentialed priests of shrines to the minor combinatory deities of the esoteric pantheon (TAKANO 1989, pp. 280–81). Many of these practitioners received credentials not only from a Buddhist denomination but from a Shugendō or Shinto lineage as well, thus acquiring both institutional and doctrinal support for the divination, healing, and magic that relied upon combinatory ideas and provided their livelihoods (TOGAWA 1969, p. 10).

Not only did registration temples stand in every village in the land, but villagers also enjoyed access to the rituals of *kitō* temples throughout their lives, with the great avatar Tōshō Daigongen answering the prayers of the shoguns. Tendai, Shingon, Nichiren, Shugendō, and other lineages known for their *kitō* thus prospered under the Tokugawa regime, as did the *gongen* 権現, *myōō* 明王, and similar combinatory deities that they enshrined. Continuing the intellectual project of earlier centuries, scholars studied the role of local kami (Shinto) to understand the dynamics of *kitō* and their wonder-working, combinatory gods. Intra-institutional rivalries added fuel to their research. Priests and altars to both kami and buddhas coexisted, with Buddhist temples (*jingūji* 神宮寺) alongside shrines, and guardian kami (*chinjunokami* 鎮守神) within monasteries. Rival ritualists thus jostled for influence, each seeking sponsors or theories to support his own position as temples and shrines alike faced new challenges in the changing context of the early modern era. Indeed, the role of kami and buddhas, of teachings, and of priests, came increasingly under scrutiny as social and economic issues turned attention away from the legitimation of lordly rule to the maintenance of it.

### *Gods and Policy*

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Tokugawa shoguns and domainal lords presided over a land challenged more by drought and disease than by war and invasion. As the coins of the governing houses found their way to the purses of those they ruled, concerns for economic stability overshadowed the need for military protection. *Kitō*-lineage institutions, at the center of both political ideology and popular worship, figured prominently in the solutions proposed.

Within decades of the shogunate's institutionalization of Buddhist privilege in the seventeenth century, economic and political advisors to select domainal lords already targeted the "wastefulness" of Buddhist temples in their proposed economic reforms. Some suggested a streamlined system of only one temple per village, devoted to funerary services and population registration, instead of the myriad sites where residents prayed for practical benefits. Administrators of the Mito domain, in particular, embarked in 1663 on a three-decades-long campaign to abolish purportedly redundant temples, primarily those with a constituency based upon the performance of *kitō*: they encouraged esoteric priests of such institutions to redefine themselves as officiants of the shrines of local kami.<sup>5</sup> Economic retrenchment policies elsewhere prompted criticism of *kitō* for distracting people from laboring for the prosperity of their lord and domain. Between 1666 and 1675 in the Okayama domain, Kumazawa Banzan and his followers urged the suppression of esoteric practitioners who, they said, preyed upon the lower classes, accumulating untoward wealth by telling them that they could perform *kitō* to avoid the curses of "illness, disaster, and possession by foxes."<sup>6</sup> Tamamuro Fumio has calculated that in the Okayama domain, ninety-seven per cent of all abolished temples in the seventeenth century belonged to the combinatorial, *kitō*-lineage denominations of Shingon, Tendai, and Hokke (Nichiren) (TAMAMURO 1989, p. 345). In effect, domainal reformers sought to remove the "misleading" claims of *kitō* from the landscape altogether.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this theme of the wastefulness of *kitō*-style worship dominated Confucian strategies for reform, whether critics focused on the temples' occupation of valuable land, their extraction of hard-earned resources from believers, or their unprofitable reliance on magic instead of human effort. In 1833, for instance, an influential work on political economy attacked Buddhism as "useless," its priests as "selfish," and its rites for practical benefits as "wasteful"—criticisms that, by then, had become commonplace.<sup>7</sup> When the Satsuma domain sought to follow Mito's lead in closing temples in the late 1850s, for instance, it began by closing the largest religious institution in the domain: the Shingon temple Dajō-in (KETELAAR 1990, p. 57). *Kitō*-lineage institutions thus bore the brunt of attacks rooted in Neo-Confucian economic, utilitarian, and moralistic policies.

<sup>5</sup> TAMAMURO FUMIO 1989, pp. 338–44. Tamamuro notes that seventy per cent of the abolished temples claimed fifty or fewer parishioner households, with those households generally sponsoring *kitō*, not registering births and deaths there (p. 340).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in TAMAMURO 1989, p. 346.

<sup>7</sup> Shōji Noriyoshi, *Keizai mondō hiroku*, quoted in KETELAAR 1990, pp. 37–40.

While the Confucian advisors of those few domains mounted their attacks, hoping to shore up the finances of their lords, a second group of people—ritualists at sites throughout the country—worked instead to take advantage of the shifting economic balance. *Kitō* priests often lacked stable income from registered parishioners, but they controlled a potentially more lucrative asset: the reputation of their god for performing miraculous feats. At the height of shogunal influence in the seventeenth century, many priests parlayed such reputations into privileges from their domainal lord and, ultimately, the shogunate, receiving land grants (*shuinchi* 朱印地) from the *bakufu* 幕府 that provided a modest basis of economic stability. As the *bakufu* and *han* 藩 faced straitened circumstances during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, priests who relied upon official patronage of prayer rituals were forced to seek additional sources of revenue. Their solution: to tap the growing wealth of the marketplace, selling their rituals to prosperous farmers and merchants, shippers and producers.

The *kitō*-performing priests thus turned their attention to the wealth of commoners, sending representatives beyond domainal borders to advertise the efficacy of their gods. *Shugenja* from Dewa 出羽, Konpira, and Akiba Daigongen 秋葉大権現 joined *oshi* 御師 from Ise on the road, selling amulets to believers around the country and encouraging them to make a pilgrimage themselves. It was in part to facilitate such promotion that many priests sought sponsorship from an increasingly assertive imperial court. Not only would imperial recognition attract the patronage of courtiers, but it would confer wider visibility throughout the land. Moreover, the emperor could grant legal monopolies, protecting the recipient's right to raise money in the name of his god through the display of images or the sale of amulets—an important defense against the tactics of competitors and frauds (TAKANO 1989, pp. 117–24). In seeking security in the marketplace of worship, then, ritualists increasingly wooed imperial favor. During the late eighteenth century in particular, they identified their gods with imperial kami such as Susano'ō or Miwa, with imperial heroes such as Yamato Takeru, or with emperors such as Sutokuin, Nintoku, or Ōjin (Hachiman) (INOUE 1993). By advertising these imperial affiliations in local histories and gazetteers, the priests and their allies found favor with the court, enhanced their prestige with the populace, and ensured their continued prosperity.

The growing literature in support of imperial identities proved indispensable to a third network of reformers: the nativists. Amidst the foreign and domestic tensions of the 1790s and early 1800s, Motoori Norinaga and his disciples found the solution to society's

problems in the powers of the gods. Kami shaped the course of events, they asserted. Yet, worried Hirata Atsutane, the most powerful deities had been offended by misguided worship according to foreign, usually Buddhist, rites. Using time-honored texts to identify the powerful kami purportedly sullied by combinatory names and rituals, Hirata and his followers railed against diviners, shamans, and the like “who do not know the true way of the world ... who delude people into [imitating] the sideways scuttling of crabs.”<sup>8</sup>

Fixated on overcoming the deluded esotericism of the “middle ages” (*chūko* 中古) to reclaim the pure essence of an “ancient past” (*ōko* 往古), Hirata worked to unearth the original kami of popular and powerful sites. Adding his voice to local histories that hinted at imperial identities for wonder-working gods, Hirata analyzed histories and gazetteers to demonstrate how “vulgar diviners ... misled the people” at Gion Shrine, identifying the kami Susano’o as the Buddhist guardian and calendrical deity, Gozu Tennō.<sup>9</sup> He consulted “secret transmissions” as well as contemporary miracle tales to identify the vastly popular Konpira Daigongen as a dual enshrinement of both the creator kami and ruler of all the gods, Okuninushi, and the spirit of the twelfth-century emperor, Sutoku.<sup>10</sup> In these and other works, Hirata diligently excavated purportedly original gods by identifying their powers with the Age of the Kami narrated in the ancient, imperial texts. For Hirata and his followers, these kami were not so much to be worshiped as grantors of contemporary benefits but to be revered as creators of the land, protectors of its people, and guardians of moral behavior.<sup>11</sup> Writing amidst circulating rumors of foreign ships sighted off the coasts, Hirata conveyed the urgency of purifying worship of both foreign and “vulgar” elements, implying that peace, prosperity, and protection from the foreign threat would be possible only when all kami were worshiped according to the ancient rituals he identified as the pure Way of the Gods (Shinto). Confronted by a foreign threat at sea and economic instability on land, educated people throughout the countryside welcomed Hirata’s theories, attracted to both their promise of a comprehensive solution and their assurance of divine protection.

<sup>8</sup> See the introduction to “Gozu Tennō rekijinben” (Bunsei 6.8) in HIRATA 1977, vol. 7, p. 339. James Ketelaar, focusing on Hirata’s *Shutsujō shogo*, traces Hirata’s fixation on finding an unadulterated, original essence (and thus, his attacks on combinatory gods) to the influence of Tominaga Nakamoto’s treatise of the same name (KETELAAR 1990, pp. 20–36).

<sup>9</sup> See “Gozu Tennō rekijinben,” 339–60.

<sup>10</sup> “Tamadasuki,” 225–26 and “Tamadasuki sōron tsuika,” 1–11, in HIRATA 1912.

<sup>11</sup> Hence, Hirata’s emphasis on the creator kami Ōkuninushi and his never-ending supervision of human and divine activities—see, for instance, “Tamadasuki” and HAROOTUNIAN 1988, pp. 154–56.

As nativists espoused a purified worship, priests cultivated ties to the imperial court, and domainal advisors counseled retrenchment and reform, the Tokugawa shoguns worked valiantly to maintain the combinatory cult that supported their regime. The twelfth shogun, Ieyoshi, in particular, when he sought to reassert shogunal authority over the increasingly autonomous domains in the midst of the Tempō crisis in 1843, revived the symbolic official procession to worship at Nikkō Tōshōgū, site of the deified Ieyasu associated with the imperial sun goddess (BOLITHO 1989, pp. 152–53). With symbolism from all traditions combined into one, the shoguns and their advisors worked to include worshippers of kami and buddhas alongside diviners, philosophers, and *shugenja* in support of their faltering regime. At Nikkō, at least, they sought to keep the powers of *kitō* associated with the shogunal government.

By 1867, the centrality of the gods in political life had become strikingly evident. Nativist poets crisscrossed the country advocating a return to an ancient and sacred past. Domainal advisors criticized the extravagances of worship. Emperor Kōmei weighed in by commissioning prayers and conferring titles, simultaneously raising the profile of both prayer sites and the imperial court (FUKUCHI 1974, pp. 229–40).<sup>12</sup> *Kitō*-lineage priests wooed the patronage of commoners who, in 1867, found themselves caught up in a flurry of magical and political promises, celebrating both the falling of amulets from the sky and vague suggestions of a forthcoming change in the political order. The power of *kitō* had become unmoored from shogunal supremacy: the legitimizing authority of the wonder-working gods stood open to whoever could claim it.

### *Ancient, Imperial Shinto*

In many ways, the months surrounding the loyalist coup of early 1868 resembled the years of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. No one could confidently predict the ultimate outcome of the imperial takeover. Many ritualists found themselves and their institutions in the path of occupying forces; others heard of fighting only months afterward. But all were forced to make a decision—to wager on the long-term success or failure of the upstart loyalists and, based upon that wager, determine how best to cultivate the favor, and thus the sponsorship, of the ultimate victor. Depending upon the particular

<sup>12</sup> Takano Toshihiko emphasizes a shift in the *bakumatsu* period from the bakufu to the emperor as the authority who ordered prayers, similar to an earlier shift in the fourteenth century from the *kuge* to the *buke* (TAKANO 1989, p. 279).

position of each, every priest chose differently, forming alternative plans and possible solutions.

The victorious loyalists at least made the decisions clear-cut. Like Tenkai and countless ritualists before them, nativist supporters of the coup worked to secure privileges, status, and an influential role for themselves by putting their scholarship to work in the interest of the new leaders. They articulated an archaic, imperial ideal that sought to bypass the “middle ages,” reaching back to the origins of the ancient imperial state for both the legitimizing rationale and—at least at first—the structure of the fledgling government. Well aware of the need for priests around the country to support the new regime voluntarily, the leaders of the coup and their nativist supporters clarified not only the actions that would gain priests political favor, but the criteria that would be used to judge them.

The first task of the new leaders was to establish the legitimacy of the new regime, a task for which nativist scholars and their allies in the imperial court came well prepared. The nativists thus took the initiative in early government announcements, helping to construct a rationale for the coup. They established a rhetoric of imperial restoration, proclaiming the reconstruction of an idealized past, when the first emperor, Jinmu, ruled according to the will of his divine ancestor, Amaterasu. Thus, when loyalists seized control of the imperial palace on 3 January 1868 (Keiō 3.12.9), they proclaimed the “revival of kingly rule” (*ōsei fukko* 王政復古) “based upon the origins of Jinmu’s founding work, and washing away contaminated customs”—a policy that they elaborated three months later, amid the fighting that ensued, as “returning to ... unity of rite and rule.”<sup>13</sup> Within days, the new claimants to rule embarked upon an ambitious project designed both to make such ancient purity possible and to discredit the combinatory ideas that had allowed the Tokugawa to usurp imperial power. They began to issue a series of edicts to “separate the kami from the buddhas” (*shinbutsu bunri rei* 神仏分離令), meant to ensure the worship of nativist kami through rituals carefully purged of all foreign “contamination.”

On 9 April 1868 (Keiō 4.3.17), the new rulers began elucidating this process of identifying the powerful gods of the land solely with imperial kami, and thus solely with imperial rule. The Office of Rites ordered the purification of all shrines of the kami (*jinja* 神社) by decreeing the laicization of the priests with Buddhist credentials (*betto* or *shasō*) who served at them. This was to be the first step in “cleansing the evil customs of old and restoring kingly rule.”<sup>14</sup> Since only a few

<sup>13</sup> Edict 153, 4 April 1868 (Keiō 4.3.13), *Hōrei zensho*.

<sup>14</sup> *Jingi Jimukyoku* 165, *Hōrei zensho*.

gods could unequivocally be identified as kami, however, the Dajōkan clarified this order eleven days later: “Since the middle ages (*chūko*), not a few shrines (*jinja*) have been called by Buddhist terms fitted to the names of the kami, such as the various avatars (*gongen*) or Gozu Tennō.”<sup>15</sup> This edict directly attacked the legitimizing deification of the Tokugawa family—one of the most prominent avatars, Tōshō Daigongen—and the combinatory logic that could justify rule not only by the Tokugawa but by Hideyoshi, Nobunaga, and, in effect, anyone other than the emperor himself. The edict commanded shrines (*jinja*) to submit evidence of their origins and their links to the imperial house, clarifying both the ancient and the imperial basis of their legitimacy. “Shrines” with Buddhist images as their main objects of worship were dealt with even more summarily: all Buddhist images, as well as temple gongs, bells, and other Buddhist implements, were to be removed from the grounds.<sup>16</sup> The authorities had clearly enunciated a policy of purifying both the political order and its sacred supports of the “contaminating,” combinatory customs that had allowed shoguns to rule in the emperor’s stead. In a break from earlier regimes, the loyalists of 1868 would not be satisfied with the addition of yet another, convenient identity to preexisting gods. Instead, they would insist on the discarding and delegitimation of all other identities—leaving only the kami, and imperial rule, supreme.

During the following months, as ritualists disputed whether or not their institutions belonged to the category of “*jinja*,” thereby putting off the need for change, nativists in the government clarified their intentions. First and foremost, they singled out the Tendai-derived school of Sannō Shintō that underlay the cult of Tōshō Daigongen. Only days after the edict banning Buddhist images at kami shrines, an official of the Office of Rites led a group of violent activists in burning scrolls, decapitating images, and otherwise “purifying” the site of Hie Sannō.<sup>17</sup> The men in the Dajōkan then turned their attention to the Buddhist category of bodhisattvas (*bosatsu*), soon focusing in particular on Hachiman, the purported origin of the combinatory trend. Disregarding the legend that the kami itself had sought a Buddhist affiliation, the rulers forbade references to the bodhisattva Hachiman (Hachiman Bosatsu), insisting upon the kami identity of this prominent god and deified emperor.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Dajōkan 196, 20 April 1868 (Meiji 1.3.28), *Horei zensho*.

<sup>16</sup> Dajōkan 226, 2 May 1868 (Meiji 1.4.10), *Horei zensho*.

<sup>17</sup> 5 May 1868 (Meiji 1.4.13), *Horei zensho*; KETELAAR 1990, pp. 9–10. Although the new government soon denounced the violence of the attack, the early focus on Hie Sannō was indicative of the priorities of nativists in the Office of Rites.

<sup>18</sup> Dajōkan 260, 16 May 1868 (Meiji 1.4.24) and 366, 22 June 1868 (Meiji 1.5.3), *Horei zensho*.

A government directive of 1 December 1868 (Meiji 1.10.18) to the main temples of the Hokke sect made clear that powerful kami were to be associated only with the new, imperial regime. Aimed at the cult of the Thirty Protecting Deities—that Tendai-influenced synthesis espoused by the combinatory traditions of both the Hokke sect and Yoshida Shinto—the order emphasized that the identities of the imperial kami espoused by the state should not be exploited for personal or sectarian purposes. “On the occasion of the restoration of imperial rule and the ensuing reforms, the confusing of kami and buddhas was abolished,” stated the edict.

However, this [Hokke] sect has long worshiped the imperial ancestral kami and other gods, writing the sacred names of the Great Imperial Kami Amaterasu, the Great Kami Hachiman, and others in something they call a mandala, and placing the sacred names on corpses, as well as on sutras and hats. Truly, this is an unspeakable occurrence and has been forbidden. Convey to all branch temples of the sect that they cannot adulterate any name of the kami.<sup>19</sup>

No name of an imperial kami was to be polluted by contact with the dead or used in other Buddhist or magical contexts. The sacred, legitimizing symbols of the new, imperial state were to be reserved for “purified,” state-recognized uses, instilling reverence toward the imperial regime.

The new Meiji leaders had, at least on paper, enunciated a sacrosanct cult of imperial kami to legitimize rule in the name of the emperor alone. As repeated in edicts throughout the year, they sought to eliminate both combinatory practices and the political structures they supported. Denying the sutra-based identities of the gods, avatars, and guardian kings, they tied the most powerful deities instead to the oldest histories focused on the imperial house, simultaneously relegating the miracles of *kitō* to a past Age of the Gods. In so doing, they established (at least in theory) the divinely mandated legitimacy of the new, imperial regime while discrediting any potential opposition supported by either miraculous benefits or uncondoned association with imperial symbols. In the halls of state ideology, the esotericism of *kitō* fell to the nativism of imperial history.

### *Strategies for Survival*

As men in the fledgling imperial government worked to clarify the

<sup>19</sup> Gosata 862, *Horei zensho*. The “mandala” here refers to the Hokke *gohonzon* (御本尊). See DOI.CE forthcoming.

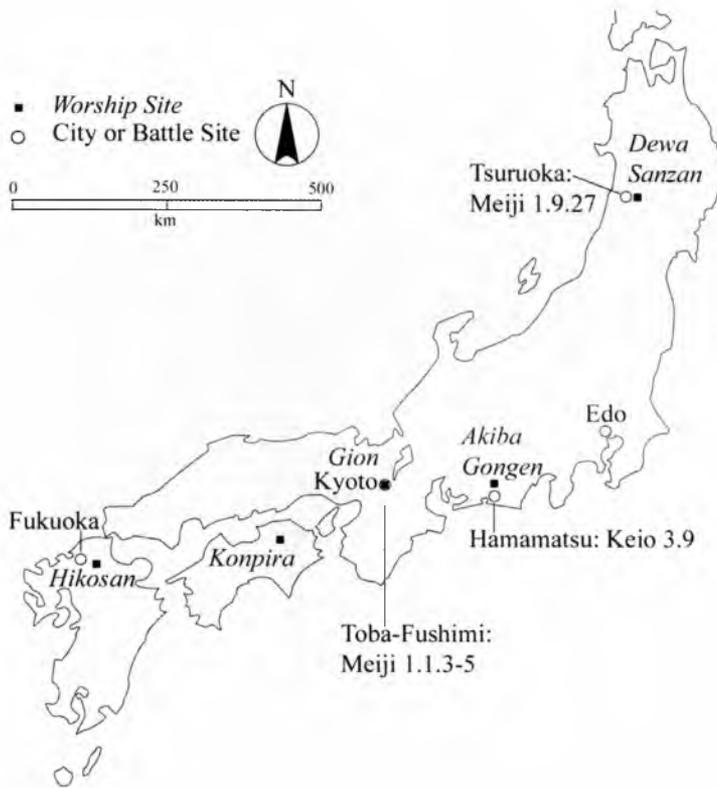
basis of their exclusive right to rule, priests and ritualists around the country maneuvered to survive and, if possible, prosper through the uncertainties of the time. Because of the centrality of the gods in the fight for legitimacy, no one could simply stand on the sidelines. Instead, all ritualists—and the priests of *kitō*-performing institutions in particular—faced the troublesome task of balancing the exigencies of the present with their prognostications of the future. Responding to the problems of a shaky political system, military threat, and economic instability, many priests actively sought to redefine the multifaceted deities worshiped at their institutions, at least temporarily, in order to align themselves with the unitary ideology proclaimed by the new men in power.

Just as ritualists in earlier eras responded to military conquest by appealing to the victorious rulers, so too did their successors in the nineteenth century. As loyalist forces marched through eastern Japan during late 1867 and early 1868, priests at prominent worship sites in their path began to consider the advantages of appealing to the conquering troops.<sup>20</sup> (See Map.) As early as 21 January 1868 (Keiō 3.12.27), for instance, three months after loyalist forces emerged victorious at nearby Hamamatsu, and less than a month after the Meiji coup, one *shugenja* from the Sōtō Shugendō center of Akiba Gongen established a branch enshrinement of the deity, renounced his Buddhist affiliation to become a Shinto priest, and received imperial rank from the court.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, there is evidence that in occupied Kyoto itself, both a month after the battle of Toba-Fushimi and a month before the Dajōkan's attack on *gongen* and Gozu Tennō, the main Buddhist ritualist at Kanjin-in 感神院, also known as Gion Shrine, preemptively shed his Buddhist robes to transform himself into a priest of the kami (KUBOTA 1974, pp. 6–7).

By the later stages of the Boshin War, after the new imperial government had clarified the revolutionary ritual purity demanded of those wishing to affiliate with the new regime, such appeasements came to require more than the simple invocation of a kami-related identity. Ambitious ritualists needed to remove their sites and deities from the hitherto combinatory cosmology of avatars and essences (*honji* 本地), instead placing them exclusively within an imperial framework linked back to the oldest native texts. Thus, three months after having declared his Shinto identity—and two months after the

<sup>20</sup> I would like to thank Conrad Totman for his helpful comments highlighting the significance of this dynamic.

<sup>21</sup> “Akibadera haiki no tenmatsu,” pp. 407–8, and Takayanagi Kōju, “Akibasan shinbutsu bunri jiken shirabekaki,” in TSUJI et al. 1984, p. 479.



government edict banning the use of the name Gozu Tennō for the enshrined deity—the recently converted *kannushi* of Gion Shrine perforce renamed his institution. No longer could it be the shrine of “Gion,” referring to the Jeta grove monastery built for the historical Buddha in India. Nor could it boast the name “Kanjin-in,” invoking as it did a subsidiary institutional identity (*in* 院) long associated with combinatory sites. Instead, the priest, with encouragement from the new rulers, created a new name for the shrine, adopting a local place name that appeared, linked to both sacred and imperial powers, in the *Man'yōshū* and other ancient texts: Yasaka 八坂 (KUBOTA 1974, pp. 3–12).<sup>22</sup>

As news of the government’s separation policy gradually spread beyond the vicinity of Kyoto, hindered at times by domainal lords still skeptical of or opposed to the new regime, other ritualists likewise

<sup>22</sup> Kubota also shows how Gion Shrines elsewhere in the country adopted similar names invoking local identities from the ancient texts.

learned that neither claims to imperial ties nor mere monetary support of the coup could ensure survival. Renunciation of combinatory titles and adoption of an ancient, mythic name were also required. In Shikoku, for instance, where loyalist forces had already confiscated the lands of Konpira Daigongen, the *bettō* of Konkō-in 金光院 sought to save his institution and sidestep the issue of conversion by pledging funds to defray imperial expenses.<sup>23</sup> When this strategy failed, however, and allies in the capital impressed upon him the urgency of joining the nativist camp, the *bettō* renounced his Buddhist ties on 2 August 1868 (Keiō 4.6.14), declaring himself a priest of the kami, and—on paper at least—transforming Konpira Daigongen into the Great Kami Kotohira 金刀比羅大神. In doing so, he drew upon the detailed analyses of none other than Hirata Atsutane himself, identifying the new Kotohira as a joint enshrinement of Ōmononushi (also known as Ōkuninushi) and the spirit of Emperor Sutoku. At the same time, the newly converted priest emphasized to the government both the historical privileges accorded by emperors to the god and the role of the deity in protecting the realm. In return, the laicized *bettō* requested his appointment as head priest (*daigūji* 大宮司) of the site and confirmation of Kotohira's special status as a "shrine for imperial prayer" (*chokusai no yashiro* 勅祭の社).<sup>24</sup> His conversion of Konpira Daigongen to a site for kami worship clearly constituted part of a larger bid to retain control over his institution and secure the protection and privileges of the new government: the *bettō* found in conversion a way to avoid ceding his authority to the occupying, loyalist forces.

Similarly, at Hikosan 英彦山, a prominent Shugendō center near Fukuoka, the *zasu* 座主 of Reisen-ji initially pursued a strategy of emphasizing imperial ties in lieu of conversion. In response to news of the separation edicts that reached him in March 1869, the *zasu* tried to maintain the combinatory traditions of his independent Shugendō stronghold by emphasizing its imperial connections, namely its designation as an imperial prayer site (*chokugansho* 勅願所) in 1863. The government immediately replied that if he and the other *shugenja* did not give up their Buddhist identities (i.e., as *shasō*), then they must leave the service of the kami, and thus, Mt. Hiko itself. In the ensuing months, the *shugenja* thus reestablished themselves as priests (e.g., *negi*) of the shrine (NAGANO 1978, pp. 891–912).

Farther north, at the Shugendō center of Dewa Sanzan, after loyalist troops had defeated forces in nearby Tsuruoka, and after receiving

<sup>23</sup> "Keiō yonen gojōkyō nikki," in KOTOHIRAGU, vol. 30. On the case of Konpira, see THAL 1999.

<sup>24</sup> "Kinchiken," in KOTOHIRAGU, vol. 85.

news of the separation edicts from the now loyal domain, the *bettō* of Nichigetsu-ji 日月寺 on Mt. Haguro held a meeting of more than thirty *shugenja* in July of 1869 (Meiji 2.6). After long deliberation, they decided to throw their lot in with the new government, took new names and announced their conversion to service of the kami—a decision shaped not only by their evaluation of the political expediency of the move, but by concerns over economic stability in the wake of confiscation of their land, and by the complicated politics of rivalries among ritualists on the three mountains of the complex. A proactive conversion, in other words, might offer the ritualists of the newly named Dewa Shrine more privileges than their rivals—a strategy that did, indeed, pay off in subsequent years (TOGAWA 1969, pp. 42–43).

Thus, the spread of the military and political authority of the new government throughout the country prompted ritualists to reevaluate their cosmological affiliation with the *bakuhan* order. Having repeatedly added new deities at their sites, or added new identities to existing gods over the years, it did not seem entirely impossible to entertain the idea of making similar alterations yet again. What differed in 1868, however, was the need not only to supplant but to actively renounce their earlier interpretations of sacred power. Adoption of a kami identity now meant adhering to the imperial gods alone.

The change of government offered enough opportunities to make even such sacrifice attractive. By cultivating an alliance with the new regime through support of its ideological and cosmological agenda, a single man like the lone *shugenja* of Akiba Gongen or the *bettō* of Dewa Sanzan could establish the groundwork that might enable him to seize institutional control from rivals who stubbornly retained their Buddhist identities.<sup>25</sup> Or, for those already in positions of dominance at their institutions such as the *bettō* of Konpira Daigongen or the *zasu* of Hikosan, invocation of nativist kami identities promised the continuation of autonomous privileges held under the previous regime. In short, for the benefit of both themselves and their institutions, ritualists throughout Japan actively claimed—at least on paper—to worship only the purified, ancient, and imperial kami of the new, Meiji regime.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This conversion to Shinto *in order to* challenge Buddhists and *shugenja* adds a more fluid dimension to interpretations that emphasize (longstanding) Shintoists' eagerness to move out from under the thumb of Buddhist dominance (cf. YASUMARU 1979, pp. 53–57 and TAMAMURO 1977, pp. 14–15).

<sup>26</sup> In his study of the regional development of the separation, Murata Yasuo cites an edict from Meiji 1.9 warning Buddhists not to convert “recklessly” as evidence that many Buddhists actively chose to renounce their Buddhist vows (MURATA 1999, p. 11).

*Prerogatives of the State*

While such initial identification with the Way of the Kami made possible new privileges under the imperial government, it also paved the way for that government to guide the internal affairs of the new shrines. In short, by appealing to the Meiji rulers, many priests unwittingly invited government interference. Having transformed their sites into “shrines,” thereby placing their institutions under the jurisdiction of the centralizing state, these new priests of the kami found themselves subject to direct regulation by the new men in Tokyo.

Beginning in 1871 and early 1872, leaders in the Dajōkan set about undermining the economic and hereditary basis of shrine and temple autonomy in order to strengthen their own authority. By asserting government jurisdiction over shrines and their personnel, then setting up centrally-controlled structures that offered the promise of advancement to Shinto priests and their shrines, the men in the Dajōkan secured the active involvement of priests in a national system of doctrine and ritual. In early 1871 (Meiji 4.1.5), the Dajōkan announced the confiscation of all shrine and temple lands (the former *shuinchi*) beyond the most confined sacred precincts, thereby depriving the priests of land-based tax and tribute income. As ritualists at Dewa and elsewhere recognized, this forced them to rely solely upon donations and fees from worshippers—a particular hardship for those combinatory institutions that did not cultivate ongoing ties through funerary rituals.<sup>27</sup> Soon, the independence of the new shrines was further compromised when the Dajōkan announced a revolution in the legal position of shrines and priests. On 1 July 1871 (Meiji 4.5.14), it announced that shrines were for state, not private worship; that priestly offices would therefore be governmental, not hereditary, appointments; and that all shrines would be ranked hierarchically, with the oldest, most imperially connected, and powerful shrines granted imperial or provincial rank (*kanpeisha* 官幣社 and *kokuheisha* 国幣社, respectively), with an accompanying stipend.<sup>28</sup>

Like other such edicts of the new government, the initial pronouncement had little immediate effect, due to the fragmented administrative jurisdictions around the country. However, two months later, the leaders in Tokyo announced the abolition of the domains and establishment of prefectures, and shortly thereafter began to appoint governors to prefectures throughout the country, supported by newly formed units of prefectural police.<sup>29</sup> Between the initiatives

<sup>27</sup> GOTO 1999, p. 26 and TAMAMURO 1989, pp. 351–52.

<sup>28</sup> Dajōkan fukoku 234 and 235, *Hōrei zensho*.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, KAGAWA-KEN 1987, p. 98.

of newly appointed governors and the Ministry of Doctrine, officials intent upon carrying out directives from Tokyo soon transformed the nominal authority of the government over Shinto shrines into a more direct control.

Prefectural governors and leaders of the Ministry of Doctrine's Great Teaching Campaign alike secured the ideological, social, and economic support of shrines around the country through an aggressive policy of personnel appointment and incentives. Governors from Tokyo arrived in prefectures and immediately began carrying out previously issued directives of the state. Not long after the governor arrived in newly formed Hamamatsu Prefecture, for instance, in late 1871, he issued a prefectural edict to the temple of Akiba Gongen that decreed it was actually Akiba Shrine, citing the precedent of the single *shugenja* who had secured imperial rank for himself when he moved off the mountain five years before. Prefectural officials subsequently oversaw the removal and destruction of all Buddhist images and objects at the shrine as well as the laicization of the Buddhist-affiliated *shugenja* who remained.<sup>30</sup> Where other priests had already announced the Shinto identification of their sites, prefectural governors exercised the prerogative to appoint governmental, not hereditary, priests. By assigning dedicated and often locally renowned nativists to the shrines, they ensured that the new priests would work for the complete "purification" of the sites from within. At Kotohira Shrine in Shikoku, therefore, it was five men appointed by the new governor who finally burned and sold the Buddhist statues and funneled income from the site to the state, decisively and permanently "separating" kami and buddhas on the mountain (THAL 1999). The centralizing Meiji state, through such appointments of governors and priests, thus stepped through the door opened by ambitious ritualists seeking to secure their positions.

The process of personnel-based reform only accelerated with the formalization of the Great Teaching Campaign under the auspices of the Ministry of Doctrine. Under this program, Shinto priests were to serve concurrently as Doctrinal Instructors (*kyōdōshoku* 教導職), ranked and paid according to both the status of their shrines and their attainment on examinations of nativist, state teachings, and scholarship. Like the Dajōkan did with governors, the Ministry of Doctrine, which was responsible for the oversight of the shrines, appointed the highest priests of prominent sites. Thus, new head priests arrived at Dewa and Kotohira Shrine, among others, with directions to ensure the com-

<sup>30</sup> "Akibadera haiki no shimatsu," 409–13, and Takayanagi Kōju, "Akibasan shinbutsu bunri jiken shirabegaki," 414–20, in Tsuji et al. 1984.

plete conversion of Mt. Dewa and its *shugenja* to imperial Shinto and to secure the vast donation-based income of Kotohira for the use of the Great Teaching Campaign.<sup>31</sup>

Where local nativists had not already overseen the removal and destruction of Buddhist remnants, these centrally appointed priests set about doing so. The new head priest of Dewa Shrine, for instance, removed and burned the Buddhist images at the site after his arrival in late 1873, then effaced stone inscriptions to the Great Bodhisattva Shōken 照見大菩薩 in 1874, enforcing the “purified” Shinto identity of the deity (TOGAWA 1969, pp. 53–54). At Hikosan, another government-appointed priest likewise oversaw the disposal of all Buddhist images in mid-1874 (NAGANO 1978, pp. 913–14). At the major pilgrimage sites, the government appointees—aided by the former hereditary priests, now demoted to assistants under their control—also established new lay associations around the national teachings: the Sincere Patriotic Association (Sekishin Hōkokukai, 赤心報国会) at Dewa Shrine and the Reverence Association (Sūkei Kōsha, 崇敬貢社) at Kotohira, for example. Through strategic appointments, as well as promotions based upon demonstrated dedication and nativist qualifications, representatives of the central government took advantage of the nominal authority voluntarily ceded by ambitious ritualists. By incorporating converted priests into the hierarchical incentive structure of Shinto ranks and salaries, Meiji leaders ensured ever more dedication to the rituals and rhetoric of the new regime, enhancing the increasing authority of the government throughout the land (THAL 2001). The priests had thrown their lot in with the nativist Shinto of the imperial regime, bringing the renowned powers of popular gods to support the growing Meiji state.

Indeed, the efforts of the Meiji leaders to harness the miraculous reputations of powerful gods in the service of the state was a remarkable success. During the years from 1868 to 1874, a vast number of institutions that focused on the performance of prayer rituals to combinatorial, wonder-working deities disappeared, to be replaced by shrines for the reverence of nativist kami. As Tamamuro Fumio has noted, many of the largest shrines popular today—including Nikkō, Yoshino, and Sumiyoshi—were the sites of sprawling Shugendō and Tendai Buddhist temple complexes before 1868 (TAMAMURO 1989, p. 352). Of 136 prominent Shugendō sites investigated by Nagano Tadashi, more than sixty per cent were either abolished or transformed into Shinto shrines in the early Meiji era (NAGANO 1978, pp. 910–11). Conversions from Shugendō created the ranks of new Shinto

<sup>31</sup> Tokoyo Nagatane, “Shinkyō soshiki monogatari,” in YASUMARU and MIYACHI 1988, p. 387.

priests as well. In Yamagata Prefecture, where *shugenja* admittedly predominated, 5,538 of 5,722 Shinto priests surveyed in the late Meiji era (that is, 96.8 per cent) reported that either they or their predecessors had been *shugenja* (TOGAWA 1969, p. 9). More recently, Murata Yasuo has consulted records of four present-day prefectures, finding that in some regions, such as Saitama and Gunma, esoteric, *kitō*-lineage sites constituted the bulk of those temples that disappeared from the Buddhist rolls.<sup>32</sup> The connection with protective prayer was explicitly drawn in Nara, for instance, when a circular in 1869 dictated that all sites associated with “*chinju*” or protective deities be identified as shrines to the kami (MURATA 1999, pp. 24–25).

This targeting of *kitō*-lineage sites included innumerable shrines dedicated to the kami as well. The combinatory esotericism not only of Buddhist lineages but also of Yoshida Shinto and other schools attracted the ire of nativist purifiers. Hachiman, Gion, and countless other combinatory Shinto shrines thus were forced to abandon their sutras, temple gongs, and performances of *kitō* rituals.

The transformation of Shinto, Buddhist, and Shugendō sites, as well as the predominance of *kitō*-lineage priests and institutions among the converted ranks, serves as a potent reminder that the “separation of kami and buddhas” entailed not simply a shift from an old Buddhism to a new Shinto. It also redefined Shinto, Buddhism, and Shugendō, changing their content amid the chaos of conversion. To legitimize the new regime—and to subvert the earlier order—the Meiji leaders invited eager ritualists to redefine their powerful gods and institutions for the sole promotion of the archaic, historicist, imperial cult.

### *The Ever-Changing Gods*

Modifications of the gods did not stop with the adoption of exclusively nativist identities. In fact, after ritualists had stripped their combinatory gods down to a purified imperial identity for political purposes, they added back further associations for economic survival. The financially strapped government, once securely established with the help of the kami, shifted its attention away from the shrines, reducing state support.<sup>33</sup> Priests of the shrines, now confident of their continued exist-

<sup>32</sup> According to Murata’s figures, 73.8% of the abolished temples in Saitama and 63.6% of those in Gunma Prefecture were made up of Tendai, Shingon, and Shugendō institutions alone. Comparable figures for Miyazaki Prefecture and Nagano Prefecture were 37.4% and 43.7% respectively (MURATA 1999, pp. 30, 140–41, 162–63, 202).

<sup>33</sup> Whereas in 1872 the Meiji government resolved to pay the salaries of priests at prefectural shrines and above, this policy was quickly reversed in 1873. Salary support and then

tence under the Meiji regime, turned to the needs and resources of the people. Like their Tokugawa-era predecessors, they continued to transform their gods, working to enhance the powerful reputations that served as the basis of their popularity and, hence, their prosperity in the ever-changing marketplace of prayer.

First, the priests emphasized not just the ancient genealogies but, once again, the combinatory powers of the gods. Despite their rhetoric, even the government-appointed, nativist priests recognized the economic value of promoting familiar signs and objects of power for this purpose. Thus, despite his dedication to “purifying” the site, the head priest of Dewa Shrine attempted to recruit members for his new lay association from among existing Shugendō parishioners.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, at Kotohira Shrine, the Reverence Association capitalized upon the reputations of amulets blessed and used in esoteric rituals (THAL 1999). At each site, worshippers continued to address the gods by their combinatory names, clearly imputing power to the older titles.

During the recession of the 1880s, priests increasingly found themselves re-incorporating *kitō*-based associations in order to combat rising competition for amulet sales and prayer fees. In 1881, the office of Dewa Shrine addressed the problem of competitors by officially recognizing leaders of popular, often Shugendō-based pilgrimage (TOGAWA 1969, p. 58). At Yoshino and other former Shugendō sites, temples that had converted to Shinto shrines returned to Buddhist rituals at the behest of their worshippers (MIYAKE 1986, p. 221). And, in 1887, the Home Ministry recognized the renewed trend toward combination, permitting the use of the title of *gongen* again in exceptional cases.<sup>35</sup> After the Sino-Japanese war, Shinto shrines actively identified with the revival of *gongen* and Shugendō symbols. Kotohira Shrine, for instance, constructed a new “inner shrine” on the mountain dedicated to a Shingon priest who supposedly turned into a powerful *tengu* 天狗. This priest-turned-*tengu* had been worshiped at the site before 1868, but now he was enshrined under a kami name reminiscent of the classic texts (THAL 1999).

New associations of the gods have come and gone in the century since. During the Pacific War, priests and textbook writers linked the protective powers of the kami to imperial heroes of the Age of the Gods. When such militaristic icons waned in popularity after 1945,

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funds for conservation continued to flow to the imperial and provincial shrines, but debates over their eventual abolition meant that longterm financial support from the state was not guaranteed (SAKAMOTO 1994, pp. 376–79).

<sup>34</sup> As Togawa notes, however, these early efforts were unsuccessful due to the priest’s misunderstanding of Shugendō organizations (TOGAWA 1969, p. 63).

<sup>35</sup> Naimushō jun 769, 13 October 1887, in *Shūkyō hōrei ruisan*, cited in AKAISHI 1982.

many priests revived combinatory, popular names of the Tokugawa era in order to profit from a wave of nostalgia, or linked the classical identities of the gods, such as Ōkuninushi, with more popular constructs, such as the Seven Lucky Gods. With each revision of the origin tales or legends of their shrines, priests have altered their deities to appeal to new constituents and supporters.<sup>36</sup>

The gods of Japan, even supposedly ancient and unchanging kami, have thus always been in the process of change. Once freed of the early Meiji politics of imperial exclusivity, priests quickly added new associations to the nativist kami, catering to the demands of worshippers throughout society. As they advertised new rituals, benefits, and indeed identities of the gods, they survived through political, economic, and social change by continuing the centuries-old strategy of combination, now less amid the niceties of esoteric cosmology and more within a marketplace of advertising and cultural tourism.

In the past, such strategies focused first on political legitimation and only then on the market. Since the Shinto directive prohibited state sponsorship of Shinto in 1946, however, the politics of legitimation has become a more democratic politics of the people, to whom priests have turned for both recognition and support.<sup>37</sup> Thus, priests have engaged with issues across the political spectrum—advocating environmentalism, promoting the flag, or offering their shrines as a staging ground for populist, nationalist groups. In a world where the distinction between politics and business has become increasingly unclear, the strategies of shrine survival encourage an almost infinite number of potential associations, limited only by the imagination and budgets of ambitious priests. Thus, the multiplying identities of the “pure,” “imperial” kami may serve as a bellwether of the ever-growing diversity of Japanese democracy. They point to a pluralistic Shinto, and a pluralistic nation, constantly in flux.

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<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century origin tales of Takayama Fudō in ARAI 1975.

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank Andrew Bernstein for his provocative comments on these contemporary implications.

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