



**Anna Andreeva, *Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan***

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017. 420 pages. Hardcover, \$49.95. ISBN: 978-0-67-497057-1.

EVER SINCE the groundbreaking and pioneering work of Kuroda Toshio in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars of Japanese religions have accepted the notion that before the fifteenth century Shinto was not an autonomous, independent, and self-conscious tradition that was clearly separate from Buddhism. Rather, it was found in combinatory and amalgamative interactions with Buddhism. With the emergence of Yoshida Shinto, Kuroda noted the first instance of a Shinto movement that saw itself as non-Buddhist and purified of foreign elements. For Kuroda, the constellations of praxis and dogma of premodern Shinto were subsumed under the exoteric-esoteric system (*kenmitsu taisei*), largely spearheaded by the *kenmon taisei* system of ruling elites and undergirded by esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*). While there have been many studies on Shinto in recent years, Kuroda Toshio's paradigm remains unchallenged, with the exception of a few minor criticisms. Moreover, the idea that Shinto was just an extension of Buddhism in premodern times made its theoretical and practical boundaries confusing for many, not to mention a *terra incognita* for scholars of modern Japan.

Anna Andreeva's new study on medieval kami-buddha interactions in the ancient cultic site of Mt. Miwa, *Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan*, echoes Kuroda's understanding that Shinto is "the worship of kami based on the concepts and practices of Esoteric Buddhism" (4). As Andreeva puts it, the "book offers a case study through which the key stages of 'assemblage' (that is, the process of assembling) and the medieval pedigree of Ryōbu Shinto, a major forerunner to modern Shinto, ought to become clear" (5). In fact, Andreeva's coverage of Shinto is wider than "Ryōbu," and she expands the focus of the book to include documents produced by Miwa-related personalities that laid the foundation for the latter medieval Miwa-lineage movement. The Miwa lineage was concerned with a wide array of doctrinal engagements, including, but not limited to, Buddhist ideas on the *Yugikyō* and *Rishukyō* scriptures (bound together by devotional worship of Aizen Myōō), esoteric conceptions of "enlightenment in this very body," as well as kami-centered objects and rituals such as the three regalia (*sanshu no jingi*) and esoteric kami consecration rites (*jingi kanjō*). Through the trope of "assemblage," Andreeva challenges the idea of a monolithic and stable Shinto tradition and argues that it was

formulated through dynamic interaction between different groups. Here, Andreeva goes beyond Kuroda's idea that it was merely Buddhist functionaries that shaped medieval Shinto and paints a much more complex picture: it was the interaction "between different agents and institutions and multiple strands of religious thought and practice" (15) that assembled medieval Shinto.

Andreeva shows that before the end of the twelfth century, kami were often understood as manifestations of transcendental buddhas as part of the *honji suijaku* doctrine. By the end of the twelfth century, the kami were understood to epitomize ignorance, but, at the same time, would be used as vehicles for attaining Buddhist awakening. Then, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, perhaps the most illuminating part of the book, ideas about the kami began to expand and became increasingly mobile. According to Andreeva, during this period new forms of kami worship were devised, not only in elite temples or shrines such as Mt. Hiei or Mt. Kōya but also in Miwa Shrine, a seemingly neglected establishment in the Yamato basin. Andreeva's research demonstrates that, contrary to what scholars may think, the Miwa Shrine, and especially the private Buddhist facility (*bessho*) on Mt. Miwa, served a crucial role in the production and dissemination of knowledge and rituals concerning kami by casting them in an esoteric framework. These developments stand as a backdrop to the rise of Miwa Shinto as an eclectic gathering of Buddhist-Shinto teachings and rituals that evolved well into the early modern period.

Miwa was part of a vast network of temple-shrines where eminent monks hailing from various backgrounds, such as Eison (1201–1290) and the Saidaiji movement he spearheaded, would often visit. Yet, it was actually lesser-known religious figures who were active in the creation of kami-buddha knowledge. These were institutionally unaffiliated figures, such as mountain ascetics (*shugen*), holy men (*hijiri*), and other itinerant religious specialists. They developed kami theories and rituals at Miwa, and it is very likely that later on such ideas were carried on into elite temples. *Assembling Shinto* suggests that Miwa was not a final destination in these popular routes of pilgrimage and travel. It was a node, albeit in a complicated and major network. In short, the book demonstrates that the nodes of a religious network were just as important as the primary sites. Andreeva's network-theory-driven approach is unique; she provides a decentered account of an oft-overlooked religious space, which serves as a case study for the complex interweaving of kami-buddha concepts that took place throughout the medieval era. It highlights the interstitial quality of Shinto, as being formed through constant dialogue, negotiation, and sometimes conflict.

Since several book reviews were already published about this monograph, and most of them offer a succinct summary of the book's arguments, I will touch upon a few aspects worthy of mention. First of all, it is important to note that *Assembling Shinto* is the first ever monograph published on the study of the Miwa

lineage. There are no other books dedicated to this religious phenomenon, apart from edited volumes in Japanese and collections of primary sources. In this regard, the book is an achievement on an international scale. Moreover, Andreeva's breadth of sources is impressive. Most of the documents were borrowed from well-known archival sites such as Kanazawa Bunko at Shōmyōji in Kanagawa, Shinpukuji in Osu Kannon, Nagoya, and many other institutions. Andreeva conducts a major portion of her research on handwritten primary sources from a variety of temple repositories and archives across Japan, also incorporating iconological analysis to her work. Additionally, Andreeva's investigation and theoretical discussions are driven by philological rigor and an acute attention to theological considerations. For example, she identifies the importance of certain religious concepts, such as original enlightenment thought and *sokushin jōbutsu*, Buddhist ideas that carried increasing weight in the development of doctrines in which ignorance (*mumyō*) was harnessed in order to trigger enlightenment under the guise of kami theology.

If there is any issue with the book, it is the fact that it can be too successful in revealing how multifarious, site-specific, and ultimately ambiguous Shinto is. Readers may accept too readily that "Shinto should be understood as multiple attempts to invent its meaning depending on the specific historical circumstances" (303) without always fully comprehending all the complexities discussed throughout the book. The contours of Shinto are still blurry, and many questions are left unanswered. If much of the kami-buddha discourse is centered on the cult of Ise, then why was Miwa, an old rival, mobilized in its favor? Moreover, the network model, while raising new perspectives on Miwa, also raises questions about the degree of Miwa's prominence in the development of Shinto. Considering the substantial attention paid to Ise's worship of Amaterasu and its appropriation of the double mandalas as pervasive elements of medieval religiosity, this reader cannot help but wonder about the influence of other sites and especially the *kenmon* institutions more commonly studied. Additionally, while the *Miwa daimyōjin engi* indicates that the Miwa deity achieved the prominent symbolic role of a supreme deity, how can we be sure that this status was not limited to Miwa-related establishments? After all, Miwa did not enjoy the same geographical spread in Japan like other deities such as Hachiman, Amaterasu, Inari, and Sannō. It is likely that the book will not put to rest the many controversies involving the study of Shinto, but its insights provide new directions for reexamining the central issues that lie at the heart of Japanese religion. These quibbles aside, this is by far one of the best studies on kami-buddha interactions, and I wholeheartedly recommend it to scholars in the field of Japanese Studies.

Or Porath  
University of Chicago