

Makiko HAMAGUCHI

## Epilogue

### Japanese Religions and their Contributions to One Woman's Identity

I was born in northern Kyushu in 1995 and grew up there with three siblings. I have been living in Vancouver, Canada, since 2014. This autobiographical article is my attempt to examine how my worldview has been shaped, and how I have come to be who I am today, through an emerging sense of Japanese identity. My current learning environment has enabled me to be aware of what have often been styled as the distinct virtues of the Japanese people, which have been passed on to me by way of the embodied memories of their past lives. Yet those are quickly disappearing in contemporary Japanese society, and I have found my role through investigating histories that resurrect those virtues for collective rebirth.

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ON 23 MARCH 2013, I met a female diviner in Japan called Meigakushi Fujihō 命学師富士峰 living in a city nearby. I was in my senior year of high school. It was time to think about the next stage of my life, and my mother took me to her to seek spiritual insight. My mother had been introduced to the diviner in 2008 by Mrs. Nemoto, a housekeeper who worked for our family for more than two decades. Mrs. Nemoto, in turn, had been found by my maternal grandmother who had been in search of a helper for my mother after my mother returned from two years living in Maine with my father due to his work and was about to give birth to her second child. Mrs. Nemoto also worked with my grandmother's friend, the first person to spread the word about the diviner and the accuracy of her divination. This person has a daughter who lives in New York City who would phone and speak to the diviner. In the wake of the global pandemic in recent years, the diviner seemed to have stopped taking in-person appointments. The most recent visit that my mother made was two years ago. I saw her on three separate sessions between 2013 and 2014 before leaving Japan for Canada.

When my mother and I arrived at her old apartment, the diviner welcomed us into a room filled with objects and ornaments that created an otherworldly atmosphere. She made green tea for us, and we sat at a kotatsu. Males and children were not allowed to enter her space, but she would do divination for males based on the date and time of their birth if they were somehow connected to one of her female clients. She explained that children should not enter the room because there are various energies (*ki* 気) that circulate around the room that could negatively affect them. The divination methods that she used were a combination of the Four Pillars of Destiny (*shichū suimei* 四柱推命), palm reading, physiognomy, and the wooden *sangi* 算木 (divination sticks). In my session, she first looked at my face and asked personal questions like whether I groomed my eyebrows or not.; I had no idea what she was looking for, but I gathered that she wanted to point out to me how my facial features contribute to the impression that my appearance makes. She then asked my date of birth and looked at the chart in her file and noted down two characters, *hinoto tori* 丁酉, on a piece of paper. The diviner seemed surprised when she found out that my mother and my brother were also born on the dates under the same two sexagenary cycle characters. She said that the chances of being born with the same combination of the characters are rare, one out of sixty-four to be exact. She used the old calendar (that is, the *tenpō reki* 天保曆 used in Japan until 1872), and I learned that, based on her

calculation, my birth date is 8 June according to that calendar. The accuracy of the timing of birth seemed important for her divination because it reveals much about one's personality. The diviner applied statistics to analyze me and offered words of advice regarding types of relationships and a direction in life that would be good for me. The divination gave me a different perspective on how I saw myself at that time as a high school student and that being the youngest child in my family had dominated my sense of individual identity. It also made me realize that knowledge about the self was not something that comes naturally to me, but rather takes a conscious effort to learn as I experience the world. Eight years later, and having lived through the moments that she had foreseen, her words started to gain a meaning that I could not see back then. When she read my palm, the diviner saw someone from previous generations present in me, but it was not until I immersed myself in an entirely unfamiliar environment that a spiritual connection to my ancestors seemed important.

Meigakushi Fujihō began her studies of Japanese and world histories when she was twenty-two years old with her Jewish mentor. She views life in terms of fate (*un* 運), effort (*doryoku* 努力), and relationships (*en* 縁). She mentioned that Zou Yan 鄒衍 (305–240 BCE), an ancient Chinese yin-yang philosopher, Yasuoka Masahiro 安岡正篤 (1898–1983), a Japanese neo-Confucian thinker, and fortune teller Hosoki Kazuko's 細木数子 (1938–2021) Six Star Astrology (*rokusei senjutsu* 六星占術) influenced her thought and practice. She also said that her divination practice was something to “graduate” from (*sotsugyō suru* 卒業する). The explanation was that the role of divination is to offer spiritual insight to those who are in search of their life's direction or possible solutions to a certain situation in the material world, and it is best if individuals are one day able to understand themselves so that they can trust their own inner wisdom without depending on her divination. It seemed like relationship issues were the most common reason for her clients to visit and consult with her. For me, when at major transitional moments in my life, the divination played a significant role in making decisions that were right for myself while ignoring the skeptics who said that leaving Japan for Canada was too adventurous.

### *Where I Come From*

I was born in Ōita 大分 City on the island of Kyushu as the youngest of four children. My father studied medicine and taught at Ōita University, and my family lived on the university campus for the first six years of my life. I spent my days playing outside in a park with my siblings and their friends until sunset. We feasted on wild berries and listened to the wind and the birds while nestling in a hammock. We called the playground our secret base.

My mother studied Japanese literature at Sophia University in her early twenties, and her decision to send her children to a kindergarten founded by a Methodist missionary in 1909 meant that my early childhood education was influenced by Christianity. I spent three years in the kindergarten, which organized activities and events according to the cycle of the liturgical seasons. In the Nativity play that was held annually at a local church before the Christmas break, I played one of the three wise men. As a child, I used to hide in the *oshiire* 押し入れ closet to pray for my older sister who was studying for university entrance exams. Later in my early teens, I traveled in Europe, accompanying my father on business trips. There I saw gorgeous churches in Vienna, Austria, for the first time, and I was so mesmerized by the cultural offerings of Western civilization that I got feverish during the trip. I kept a travel diary to write down everything I saw that interested me, and after coming back from Europe, I told my parents that I hoped to further pursue my studies abroad. I did a home-stay for a few days at a farm in Cairns, Australia, as part of my high school field trip, which solidified my wish to go to an English-speaking country for higher education.

By the time I was in high school, all my siblings had left home for Tokyo to go to university and then work, and my parents decided to live separately. I was living with my mother, who had just started a new business. My life was filled with multiple after-school activities like fencing club, piano practice, and the study of English, math, and Japanese with home tutors. I was disenchanted by how things were taught at my high school and soon figured that I would not thrive in an environment that is not open to nurturing individual differences. I skipped classes, except World History, to search for alternative ways of learning. In doing so, I came across a book that my mother got for me from a bookstore (KITAGAWA 2013). In that book, the author described her life at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and how she got there from being a Japanese high school student in northern Kyushu. Her story gave me the idea that I might be able to fly away and start afresh abroad just like her.

When I was nineteen, after leaving high school, I came to UBC's Vancouver campus. Transitioning to a new learning and living environment shook me both physically and mentally. It provided significant freedom to explore my identity and who I wanted to become. The experience of living with other international students from the Middle East, Europe, and South America forced me to think about my cultural and national identity as a Japanese person in almost all interpersonal and living situations. More importantly, learning to think and express myself in my second language opened my eyes to new ideas and perspectives of seeing the world, and that has shaped much of who I am today.

My undergraduate studies in Art History and Visual Art introduced me to the world of spirituality and theories of psychoanalysis. At the same time, I learned the value of experiential learning through practice at my art studio and

by meeting visual artists in Vancouver. I saw the lifestyles that the artists had created for themselves and thought it possible for me to also create this kind of lifestyle. Overall, by relying heavily on visual and sensory information and having a limited ability to speak fluent English allowed me to experience the world with a fresh mind.

### *Japanese Religions and Knowing Who I Am*

Around the time I completed my undergraduate studies, the relationship between gender identity and ethnic identity had become a pressing issue in my life as well as Canadian and Japanese societies. I spent the first year of my graduate studies learning about contemporary social justice issues in a postcolonial global context, attracted to indigenous peoples' land-based thought and wisdom that honors the diversity of beings and continuous rebirth of life on the planet (SIMPSON 2015). When I learned about the cosmologies of First Nations in North America, I realized that the ways in which we experience this world are informed by one's personal worldview. Learning about the efforts to recenter indigenous people's thought in the postcolonial present presented me with a view from the margins of society. Within indigenous communities, shared histories and myths strengthen collective identity and shape new understandings of sovereignty.

On New Year's Day 2020, I had a conversation with my mother about the creation stories of indigenous peoples in Canada as we walked towards Sumiyoshi Shrine in Hakata Ward for *hatsumōde* 初詣, the first visit of the year to a shrine to pray to the gods. I was back in Japan for the winter break for the first time in six years. On that day I realized that I wanted to learn about Japanese folklore and mythologies. These stories hold cultural knowledge unique to their people, and, with this in mind, I returned to Canada and took a survey course on Japanese religions at UBC. Peter Nosco not only introduced me to invaluable concepts in the study of Japanese religions but also enabled me to think about and envision my way of living. What I had once thought remote and taboo quickly became significant to my spiritual growth, and I decided to pursue my studies in Japanese religions and history. I have faced many challenging situations, as many others do in figuring out their true path, and I have been fortunate to have guidance, protection, and support in the process of transformation of the self thus far in my life.

During the semester that I took the Japanese religions course, I recalled how I grew up surrounded by Zen Buddhist ideas. My uncle was born in a Rinzai Zen family and became the *jūshoku* 住職 (chief priest) of Enmeiji 延命寺. My paternal grandfather, who was also a Rinzai Zen Buddhist, was delighted when my aunt married a Zen Buddhist. Enmeiji is close to my heart because I often played there with my cousins during my childhood and youth. I remember the darkness

and the eerie sounds of wildlife at night when my sister and I stayed at the temple. The architecture of the temple complex was too intricate for us. I participated in the ceremonies and rituals that were held at the temple, and when I think of those times, details like my uncle's voice chanting the *Heart Sūtra*, the scent of incense burning, the numbness of my folded legs on the cushion, the sound of the New Year's Eve bell, and rolling mochi rice cakes with people that belonged to the temple come to mind. I found beauty in the way the temple officiants appeared to effortlessly perform their duties. During Obon お盆, after my grandfather's death, my uncle came to visit our home and chant before the *butsudan* 仏壇.

When UBC transitioned to online teaching and learning in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, I returned to my home city of Ōita for six months. There I talked about my academic interest in Japanese religions to people around me, and in August I was invited to visit a local *dōjō* of Mahikariyō (for a study of this group, see DAVIS 1980). I participated in a three-day seminar and received an amulet called *omitama* おみたま. In an initial interview with the *dōjōchō* 道場長 (head of the *dōjō*), he told me that what brought me to the seminar was not my personal interest in Japanese religions but the soul of my ancestors. After encountering this New Religious group and scratching the surface of their teaching and practice, I began to think about what his words meant for me.

The lives of my maternal grandparents have been repeatedly told by my grandmother, and writings and photographs complemented the stories that enabled me to access some of my family history. My maternal great-grandmother, Katō Tsuneko 加藤経子 (1911–1999), wrote numerous *tanka* 短歌 (short poems) that were never published. According to my grandmother, Tsuneko was a very emotional, sensitive, yet warm and considerate person who taught that everyone should be treated equally and humanely regardless of their occupation or social class. On the first anniversary of her death, her children selected *tanka* from her notebook, and I was given a copy from my mother that I have carried with me till today. My grandmother thinks that it was Confucian ideology that contributed to the patriarchal structure of the household (*ie* 家), and Tsuneko accepted the idea that it is a bride's duty to devote herself wholeheartedly to the household into which she marries. At that time, the lives of young women were dependent almost entirely on parental authority, especially fathers. Moreover, Ōita is a place in which the lineage of Confucian scholars including Hirose Tansō 広瀬淡窓 (1782–1856), Mōri Kūsō 毛利空桑 (1797–1884), and Abe Ikkō 阿部一行 (1840–1904) and their teachings at private schools have been active since the Edo period. My grandmother holds a rather negative perspective of the Confucian ideas of kinship and family association. She believes that if Tsuneko had the freedom to choose to pursue further education for herself, she may have

had a writing career instead of marriage and motherhood taking over her life. However, she left many poems that speak of the loss of her husband, and instead of leaving the impression of her dissatisfaction or regret about marriage, what I know about her and her life tells me the extent to which Confucian ideology had impacted individual lives at the time. Tsuneko wrote the following verse in 1975, the year of my great-grandfather's death:

直き心	A correct heart-mind,
広き心	a broad heart-mind,
子等受け継げよ	these are carried on by the children.
己等父は	Our own father
世にもまれなる	was rare indeed.

My great-grandfather, Katō Hatsuo 加藤初夫 (1892–1975), was born in Matsuoka 松岡 City in Ōita Prefecture, as the only child to his parents. His father, Katō Kuritarō 加藤栗太郎 (1868–1941), was a *mukoyōshi* 婿養子 (adopted son-in-law) and served the role of village head. Hatsuo was expected to follow in his father's footsteps and succeed the position; however, he lived a “curious life,” in the words of Tsuneko, by refusing to remain in the village and pursuing higher education in Tokyo to become a government official during the 1920s through the first half of the 1940s. After Japan's defeat in World War II, he lost his position and was prohibited from engaging in public service for six years. When his children, including my grandmother, saw the drastic social change around land reform in 1947, he taught them that “giving paddy fields to peasants (*kosakunin* 小作人) is a good thing.” I can only imagine what “a correct heart-mind” and “a broad heart-mind,” the virtues that my great-grandmother wished for her children to inherit, may have been, other than the egalitarianism in the stories my grandmother tells me. According to my mother, Tsuneko believed in the existence of Okudo no kami おくどの神 (a kami that inhabits the stove in the kitchen) and introduced her grandchildren to the kami when they stood in front of the stove. It seems that the belief in kami in one's surroundings persists in the spiritual lives of people in Japan.

### *Mountain Worship*

There is a small mountain called Ryōzen 霊山 in Ōita City. In summer 2020, I climbed it several times with my former English teacher, who is an exceptional hiker, in Kunisaki 国東 Peninsula. It is known as a center of Tendai and local folk practices called *rokugō manzan* 六郷満山, and it was there she witnessed *shugenja* 修験者 dressed in white robes (*shiroshōzoku* 白装束) running up the mountains. Mountain worship in Japan has a long history, and Ryōzen is no exception. The Tendai temple Hiraisan Ryōzenji 飛来山霊山寺, which was founded in 703, is

located 360 meters up the slope of the mountain. According to a pamphlet supplied by the temple, mountain worship on Ryōzen originates with Shichirō Yūsei 七郎祐世 (d.u.), who was a member of a powerful clan in the early ninth century. According to legend, Shichirō had an oracular dream and climbed the mountain, where he found a 1.8-meter-high shining statue of the Eleven-Headed Kannon (Jūichimen Kannon 十一面観音). After he built a thatched hut to enshrine the image, the locals began witnessing miracles. Later, when a Buddhist monk from India visited the mountain, the monk saw the ridgeline of the mountain as being identical to Vulture Peak in India, which is how the mountain came to be called “Ryōzen” (an abbreviated form of the Chinese translation of Vulture Peak 靈鷲山). Vulture Peak is where Śākyamuni Buddha preached the *Lotus Sūtra*, and it is believed that part of the peak flew to Japan and landed as this mountain, which is why it is also called Hiraisan 飛来山 (“the mountain that flew”).

In addition to the Buddhist temple on the hill, one can easily find small stone shrines (*hokora* 祠) that enshrine mountain kami and two stone Jizō statues in the forest. The trails appear to be for locals to socialize while engaging in physical activity. In turn, visitors to the mountain must be mindful of their surroundings; we stopped to bow in front of the *jizō* upon our safe return on the way back.

My former English teacher is also a member of the Eastern Kyushu division of the Japanese Alpine Club (Nihon Sangakukai 日本山岳会), and, on 2 August 2020, I was invited to participate in a hiking event that took place on Mt. Kujū 九重. It was hosted by the club and the Hokkein Onsen San 法華院温泉山 to remember two medical students from Kyushu University who died on the mountain in 1930, the first accident since the mountain began to be used for modern recreational hiking (*kindai tozan* 近代登山). Mt. Kujū, also known as the Kujū mountain range, is made up of a collection of volcanic mountains that are the highest mountains in Kyushu. It is part of the Aso-Kujū National Park, extending from Beppu 別府 City in Ōita Prefecture to Aso 阿蘇 City in Kumamoto Prefecture.

There were sixty participants, including the relatives of the deceased, who climbed the mountain and gathered near Nakadake 中岳, the highest point in the park at 1,791 meters. There is a stone monument that was first built a year after the accident and repaired ten years ago by the members of the club. In front of the monument, a Buddhist priest from Kujūsan Ikaraji 久住山猪鹿狼寺 recited the *Lotus Sūtra*, which was followed by offerings of incense by those who participated in the ritual. According to the hosts of the event, the students lost their way due to heavy rain and strong winds on the day that they climbed the mountain, and they were found dead near a pond called Miike 御池 where, today, visitors can see its beautiful light blue water. The requiem has been held annually in August for the last decade, and the year 2020 marked the ninetieth year since





FIGURE 1. A stone shrine on Ryōzen. The inscription says that it was built in 1995 to replace an older wooden structure dated to the Edo period that enshrined Kinouemura no yama no kami 木上村の山ノ神. Photo by author.



FIGURE 2. Two stone Jizō statues sitting quietly in the forest on the slope of Ryōzen. Photo by author.

the accident. The force of nature felt very real on that day as we learned about the accident and by seeing the damage to the highway roads and trails that lead up to the mountain due to heavy rain in July.

### *Urbanized Religion*

This section describes my observations of a Shinto wedding ceremony for my sister at Meiji Shrine in Tokyo in December 2020. The first line in the *Shinzen kekkonshiki* 神前結婚式 (“wedding ceremony before the kami”) booklet provided by Meiji Shrine reads:

The wedding ceremony before the kami represents the shape (*katashi* かたち) of Japanese people’s heart-mind (*kokoro* 心) that derives from the world described in the epic of ancient Japanese mythology.

The booklet explains its origin in the practices of “distant ancestors” (*tōi sosen* 遠い祖先) who lived in nature, found the presence of kami in nature and everyday life, and worshiped them. It also refers to the mythological account of Izanagi and Izanami in the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 and states that the genesis of Japanese-style marriages can be found in the idealized union between the two gods imagined by our ancestors.

Meiji Shrine is one of the most popular shrines in Japan, and more than three million people visit the shrine in the first days of the New Year for *hatsumōde*. In 2020, the shrine celebrated its one hundredth anniversary. It enshrines the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji 明治 (1852–1912) and Empress Shōken 昭憲 (1849–1914). The shrine symbolizes a time of drastic change in Japanese national identity that formed along with the emergence of the modern Japanese Empire, and today it seems that Meiji Shrine is an attractive site for newlyweds, like my sister and her husband, to hold their wedding ceremony.

Walking along the forest and through the enormous *torii* 鳥居 gate, the sound of the bustling city faded, and I found myself surrounded by a quiet atmosphere where I could hear birds singing in the trees. After all the members of the bride and the groom’s families gathered in a room and were introduced to each other, everyone walked together in a line to a building called *hōsaiden* 奉斎殿 located next to the main building in the shrine complex. The ceremony lasted for about forty minutes and involved various rites to announce their marriage to the kami: the bride and the groom exchanged small cups in which two *miko* 巫女 (shrine maidens) poured sacred saké, took an oath, offered *tamagushi* 玉串 (a *sasaki* wand) to the kami, watched the *miko* dance to Japanese classical music (*gagaku* 雅楽), and received the blessing of the kami in the form of the sound of bells. Although there was something moving about being immersed in the performance of these rites and rituals at the shrine, I am not sure if I considered it to be

a sacred religious feeling. The promotional rhetoric used in Meiji Shrine's booklet emphasizes the shape of Japanese people's heart-mind, drawing from ancient Japanese mythology, even though the shrine symbolizes a new identity for Japan beginning in the Meiji period. I wonder why this rhetoric succeeds in reaching audiences in present-day Japan.

### *Conclusion*

Readers of this article are now witness to moments in my personal life in which religions and religious ideas have contributed to my sense of individual identity. Living in Canada for seven years and seeing Japan from a distance has brought me an awareness of numerous oft-cited characteristics of Japanese culture. I have learned by writing this autobiographical article that my life is so much a part of the broader collective life that spans a very long time.

Words of advice from the diviner at one of the first major transitions in my life certainly broadened my worldview and helped me to make a decision that was right for me. My upbringing and exposure to Christian ideas and culture in my early teenage years, in retrospect, acted as catalyst for moving abroad and propelled by my desire to see the world outside a familiar environment when I was nineteen years old. Moreover, I have found seeds in my heart that were planted in my early childhood from when I attended a kindergarten founded by a Methodist missionary and my time spent playing with my cousins at the Rinzai Zen Buddhist temple.

Learning about various worldviews of peoples in Canada has made me reflect on my own life experience, especially the cosmologies and the land-based thought and wisdom of indigenous peoples. The conversation with my mother on New Year's Day almost two years ago became the second turning point in my life as she has been a major influence on my outlook on life. Returning to my home city in the wake of the global pandemic provided me with the opportunity to explore religious activities that take place locally today. The importance of a spiritual connection to my ancestors was suggested to me by the diviner as well as the *dōjōchō* of Mahikariyō. I have attempted to trace the lives of my maternal great-grandparents based on the memories of hearing their stories from my grandmother. My great-grandparents' egalitarianism coexisted with the Confucian ideas that surrounded their lives. Reading my great-grandmother's verse taught me the virtues that she wished to be carried on by her children. Moreover, through my mother's recollections, I became conscious of her awareness of what surrounds our lives by learning about her belief that kami inhabit living spaces.

I witnessed the longstanding tradition of mountain worship when I walked trails in my home city as well as the ongoing practices of the locals. Participation in my sister's Shinto wedding ceremony offered me an opportunity to closely

observe religious rites at Meiji Shrine, the ancestral home to Japanese people's heart-mind in the heart of downtown Tokyo. Each moment that I have described here might represent a kind of epiphany that continues to unfold as a work in progress.

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