Shintō and *kokutai*:
Religious Ideology in the Japanese Context

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1. Introduction[1]

The subject of 'Shintō' marks one of the essentials of Japanese cultural history. Inside and outside of Japan, Shintō is not only seen as the Japanese national religion, but it is often used as a metaphorical expression for the alleged immutability of the Japanese culture or even for the Japanese 'national polity' (*kokutai* 国体) itself. To give a popular example of this common view, let me cite Joseph M. Kitagawa, who wrote in the *Japan-Handbuch* (translation by Ludwig):

> *"Shintō ist im eigentlichen Sinne die dem japanischen Volk zugrunde liegende Wertorientierung, denn er ist das Zusammenwirken der divergierenden und doch einzigartigen japanischen Sensitivitäten, der religiösen Überzeugungen und der kulturellen Haltung, die seit der frühesten Zeit bis auf heute ganz und gar das Erleben des japanischen Volkes geprägt haben."*[2]

Definitions like this one show the great dilemma of an approach, which tries to preclude the historical aspect and unreflectingly postulates an ahistorically valid Shintō. Yet, this religious system has developed historically, and has united most heterogeneous elements throughout the course of its development up to the ideology of the religiously based Japanese nationalism of the modern age (*kokutai-shintō* 国体神道).

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[1] For a more detailed and expanded German version of this article see Antoni (2001); for an elaborated argumentation on the whole topic cf. Antoni (1998).

[2] Hammitzsch (1981), p. 1633. Eng. transl.: *"Shintō is in fact the underlying value orientation of the Japanese people, because it is a combination of divergent and yet unique Japanese sensitivities, religious principles and cultural attitudes, which have shaped completely the experience of the Japanese people from the earliest time until today.".*

A generally valid Japanese 'national religion' as postulated by Kitagawa and others, can therefore only be verified as an ideal and a construction of modern times. One author remarks in that context restrictively, that the term 'Shintō' might only be used for the designation of religion in a narrower sense. He elaborates that "*Der Begriff 'Shintōismus' hingegen wird nur dann verwendet, wenn es sich um die durch Ideologisierung bzw. die Politisierung entstanden shintōistisch orientierte Sozial- oder Staatsgedanken handelt*"[3] [Miyasaka (1994), p. 236, n. 214]. Yet, such a differentiation, which sets a politically free Shintō – in the sense of a religiously indigenous folk religion – apart from its negative ideologically contaminated counterpart – the Shintō of modern times –, misjudges in my opinion the facts relating to its (ideological) history. The political aspect is constituent for the 'Shintō' system from the beginning on, and it cannot be separated from an idealized Japanese religion – both are the two sides of the same coin.

Precisely such seemingly value-free assertions, like the one brought forth by Miyasaka in his recent work of scientific standard, show how in the present time it is absolutely necessary to have a historical-critical study of this subject.

Dealing with 'the' Shintō, much more than with any other subject, means to question Japanese culture and its self-conception: Is it a national religion or a construct of the modern age? Is it archaic ancestor worship or an all-Japanese folklore? Is it an esoteric doctrinaire religion or syncretistic ritualism? Or, is it eventually an ethno-centrist nationalism or peaceful nature worship?

Any cliché with regard to Japanese culture will also be found in the debate over 'the' Shintō: Shintō in the ideological development of the modern age has to function as a nativist synonym for the 'unaltered', 'homogeneous', 'unique', and finally 'ultimate' Japanese culture, which is freed from all foreignness, allowing a view into allegedly 'true' Japan. In this respect, the postulation of a Japanese national religion implicitly freed from all foreign elements, is already a product of this modern Japanese auto-stereotype, which, as the allegedly authentic form of cultural self-expression, is able to shape Japan's image – also abroad – until this very day.

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[3] Eng. transl.: "*The term 'Shintōism' on the other hand is only to be used if it concerns the shintōistic oriented social or national thought which developed out of ideologization and politicalization, respectively.*".

On the whole, it demonstrates that an evaluation of the claim made by Shintō to represent Japan's virtually natural 'national religion' is not possible without a thorough examination of the historical development.

2. Historical development: The "primeval religion of Japan"

Let us begin our short trip through the history of Shintō with yet another definition. Here it is no longer the question of a homogeneous religious ethno-centrism, but rather, as the Japanese scholar Ōbayashi Taryō 大林太良 defines the alleged national religion of Japan: "*Shintō [ist] im weiteren Sinne die Urreligion Japans, im engeren Sinne ein aus Urreligion und chinesischen Elementen zu politischen Zwecken ausgebautes System*"[4] [Ōbayashi (1982), p. 135].

If we take this definition as the basis of our considerations, two questions are brought up: ① What is to be understood by a Japanese 'primeval religion'?; and ② What does the scholar refer to by 'political purposes'?

Let us therefore go back in time as far as resources allow. This is where the oldest written records of Japan are of critical importance: the *Kojiki* 古事記 ('Records of ancient matters') from the year 712 AD and the *Nihongi* 日本紀 ('Chronicles of Japan') from the year 720 AD. These works – conceived as historical works – supply information on the official conception of history at that time by describing the country's history from the mythological primal beginnings until the time of recording. Simultaneously, they, especially the *Kojiki*, are to a certain degree regarded as the 'holy books' of Shintō by traditional Shintō circles of modern times. How is this circumstance to be explained?

There is no doubt to the fact that pre-Buddhist religious forms did exist in Japan, but it should not be ignored that the source material available is not sufficient in order to be able to draw an unambiguous – and above all, homogeneous – picture. On the contrary, all information has to be arduously concluded and interpreted from the handed down records. A fundamental study of these prob-

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[4] Eng. transl.: "*Shintō [is] in the broader sense the primeval religion of Japan, in the narrow sense a system constructed for political purposes from primeval religion and Chinese elements.*".

lems has been presented in Nelly Naumann's research of the primeval religion of Japan.

Besides deductions from results of archaeological research – it is for instance possible to conclude specific afterlife ideas from the conducted type of funerals –, the myths in the old records such as *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, provide the underlying approach to understanding. Precisely these myths, arranged by statesmen of the 7th and 8th century in a systematic order for the purpose of legitimizing the imperial rule, permit valuable findings on the earliest Japanese belief systems – hence 'primeval religion(s) of Japan' – by examining single elements.

The mythology of the *Kojiki* was only later made a sacral tradition by Shintō theologians and ideologists, such as is shown in the historical analysis. A homogenous 'indigenous religion' as postulated by the *kokugaku* 国学 (National School) of the Edo period, cannot be found in the old records. 'The' Shintō at the dawn of its well-known history presents itself in an ambiguous and manifold appearance – at this point, there was no hint of a uniform thread of a homogenous indigenous religion of Japan. Thus, by a thorough examination, the source materials show the diverse origins and homogenous character that were made into this allegedly single, uninterrupted 'tradition' of mythological tradition by the compilers of official documents in the 8th century.

In this context it is remarkable that the mythological matter is presented considerably much more differentiated in the second of the mentioned old records, the *Nihongi*, than in the *Kojiki*. The whole matter in the *Kojiki* is presented as a single, continuous purposive plot, whilst the *Nihongi* usually also presents differing variations of a specific episode. The different variations in the Nihongi proof that one was aware of different branches of traditions, which showed great variances. The modern Shintō doctrine of 'one homogenous tradition' primarily referring to the *Kojiki* – which was adopted by the *kokugaku* of the modern times and realized in the Meiji period – is an illusion from its beginning on: something that was made artificially for the purpose of political authentication.

The modern Japanese ideology of an incomparable 'unique' national polity (*kokutai*) was eventually entirely based on legitimatizing statements of handed down mythology from records of the 8th century. Apparent from several cases, an objective scientific research of these myths – especially in an ethnological-comparative sense – was predestined to collide with the sacrosanct under-

standing of the state from the Meiji period to the year 1945: Any proof of connections between the native mythology to traditions of the continental mainland or the southern archipelago shook the dogma of a self-sufficient 'land of gods'.

Thus, the liberal effect of free scientific research in mythology after the war, cannot be over-estimated. Without this critical, cultural-historical analysis [for instance, Matsumura et al. (1954-58), Naumann (1971, 1988), Ōbayashi (1973, 1988)], dogmatic doctrines of modern State Shintō might, left unexamined, apply even today. These researches provide the comprehension of an extremely complex and historically thoroughly graded genesis of the Japanese culture, whose origins have been liberated from the artificially constructed isolation of the modern age after the year 1868 and put in an overall context, not only of the east-Asian human history but also of human history in general. Therefore, the idea of Japan's homogeneity, ideologically justified and rooted in the traditionalistic constructions of pre-modern times, cannot be upheld anymore. Japan is indeed geographically an island (*shimaguni* 島国), but not so in respect of culture.

3. Legitimation of the imperial house

With regard to 'political purposes' as stated by Ōbayashi, the beginning chapters of both, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*, are of eminent importance, because they contain the already mentioned mythological traditions of the country and thereupon the religiously binding foundation of the 'official' Shintō. Here we can find the records of the creation of the world, of the gods and their deeds, of the origin of the imperial house and the strengthening of its power. This shows already one characteristic feature of Japanese mythology: it primarily serves the purpose of legitimizing the power of the imperial house, and as such it indeed serves 'political purposes'.

The center of China's Confucian state doctrine was always the ideal state, led by an equally ideal ruler, the *t'ien-tzu* 天子 (jap. *tenshi*, 'Son of Heaven'). Yet, only a truly virtuous ruler could secure the prosperity of the state – and thus the basic principles of Confucianism –, because ruler and state were deeply interlinked in mystical ways. If an emperor lost his individual virtue, he lost the right way, in which case the people did not only have the right but practically the

moral obligation to dethrone this ruler who had suddenly become hazardous to public welfare. These thoughts were clearly represented by the Confucian philosopher Meng-tzu 孟子 (Menzius; jap. Mōshi) and also came to Japan in ancient times as a result of Japan's penetration with Chinese ideas.

Typically enough, it was precisely in this respect – the dethronement of an emperor – that Japan did not follow the Chinese role model. The Japanese rulers – meanwhile called tennō 天皇 ('Heavenly Ruler') – felt entirely equal in rank to the Chinese emperors.[5] Accordingly, the court invented its own kind of legitimation of imperial power, which was deliberately disassociated from Confucianism.

This legitimation was found in the handed down myths of the ruling family, which reported of the heavenly origin of the imperial house and designated the living emperor as a direct descendant of the Sun Goddess. Thence, the Sun Goddess gave her grandson and his descendant, the first human emperor, the heavenly order (shinchoku 神勅) to rule over the land of Japan. To be more precise: to rule for all times as one single dynasty.[6] Never ought there to be a change of dynasty, such as it was common in China, and they ought never to renounce their claim to power. The more the state became Sinicized, the clearer the court invented an image of a specific Japanese ruler in the sense of a divine descendant of sacred nature – and everything else descended and derived its meaning from him and his ancestors, respectively.

This deification of the emperor and eventually of the whole country (shinkoku, kami-no-kuni 神国, 'land of the gods') is the substance of what is called Shintō – the 'Way of the Gods' of Japan. Nelly Naumann stated already thirty years ago that "Die Bedeutung des Wortes shintō kann [...] konkret erfaßt werden in der Idealvorstellung des japanischen Gott-Kaisertums, welche die Göttlichkeit der regierenden Kaiser und ihren von der Sonnengöttin verliehenen Herrschaftsauftrag umfaßt." [Naumann (1970), p. 13][7].

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[5] This is already shown by the famous letter Empress Suikō 推古 wrote to the Chinese Emperor, addressing him as the Emperor of the West who respectfully is greeted by the Emperor of the East, i.e., Suiko-tennō counts herself as equal in value to the Chinese Son of Heaven. Cf. Nihongi, Suiko-tennō 推古天皇, 16/9 [NKBT, vol. 67, p. 192].

[6] Cf. Nihongi [NKBT, vol. 67, p. 147]; Kojiki [NKBT, vol. 1, pp. 126f.]; Kogoshūi [GSRJ, vol. 25, p. 5]; Florenz (1919), p. 246 and Antoni (1998), p. 77, n. 48.

[7] Eng. transl.: "The meaning of the term shintō can concretely be [...] comprehended in the ideal concept of the Japanese heavenly emperorship, which comprises the reigning emperors' divineness, and their ruling mandate bestowed upon them by the Sun Goddess".

An individual theology of Shintō did not develop until the Japanese middle ages. Although the emperor lost the direct ruling power to the military aristocracy and the bakufu 幕府, which ruled nominally in the name of the imperial house and continued to maintain this rule until the year 1868, a more and more prominent idea of Japan as a country under special protection of the gods (shinkoku) developed among circles of the Shintō-theology. Extreme supporters of this way of thinking eventually concluded from the handed-down myths that not only the imperial house is of divine descent, but the whole Japanese nation.[8] For them, Japan was a country whose nature was different from all other parts of this world, being endowed with a unique, indigenous Japanese spirit – Yamato-damashii 大和魂, the 'spirit of Yamato'.

On this basis, Shintō-theology again turned to politics since the 18th century at the latest. We will deal with these questions in the following.

4. Shintō in modern times and modern age

4.1 Confucian Shintō

At the beginning of this development stood Shintō-Confucian syncretism or Confucian Shintō (juka-shintō 儒家神道)[9], which on a level of theoretical-theological discussions to a large extent succeeded the Buddhist Shintō of the middle ages.[10] The conception of a unity of Shintō and Confucianism (shinju-itchi 神儒一致)[11] made (neo-) Confucianism the spiritual core and developed a definitely opposing attitude towards Buddhism (haibutsu 排仏).

Influential Confucian philosophers of that period like Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窩 (1561-1619) and Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583-1657), were representatives of this newly Confucian oriented Shintō. The doctrines of Watarai- 度会 (Ise- 伊

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[8] On the concept of human beings and mankind within the context of Japanese mythology, cf. Antoni (1991), pp. 60-75.

[9] Cf. Sugiyama/ Sakamoto (1994); Abe (1972); Boot (1992); Kishimoto (1993), pp. 47-69 and Kracht (1986). For the philological sources cf. Taira/ Abe (1972), pp. 9-262; KJRE, Jingi-bu 神祇部 II/44, Shintō vol. 2, pp. 1359-1455.

[10] Concerning the jingūji of the Edo-period cf. Seckel (1985), pp. 29f. and 74-77.

[11] Cf. Kishimoto (1993), pp. 49-58; Sugiyama/ Sakamoto (1994), p. 16.

勢)[12] and moreover Yoshida-Shintō 吉田神道 of the middle ages were reinterpreted as well, and hence further developed in the sense of the new power relations in Edo period. The house of Yoshida considerably shaped the development of Shintō in the early Edo period under the influence of new social and political structures. The Yoshida doctrine logically also went through far-reaching developments in that context, at the end of which stood a Neo-Confucian shaped Shintō of modern times that hardly showed any correspondence to the medieval doctrines of Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼倶 (1435-1511).

Moreover, the Yoshida house received its outstanding importance for Edo period's Shintō due to its particularly powerful position in the system of Shintō shrines, as well as due to its fast achieved closeness to the Tokugawa's center of power of.[13]

4.2 The 'National School' (kokugaku)

Confucian Shintō, on the one hand, which flourished together with Confucianism of modern times, developed into the mainstream of Edo period Shintō.[14] Yet on the other hand, a new interpretation of Shintō in the context of the 'National School' (kokugaku 国学) did slowly develop since the middle of the Edo period.

The kokugaku originated in a countermovement to the increasing advancement of Japan's Sinicization. This school – represented by its main supporters Kada no Azumamaro 荷田春満 (1668-1736)[15], Kamo Mabuchi 加茂真淵 (1697-1769)[16], Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801)[17] and finally Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776-1843)[18] – developed in the course of the Edo period

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[12] For an introduction to the medieval Watarai-Shintō cf. Teeuwen (1993, 1996), Naumann (1994), pp. 29-56; Picken (1994), pp. 306-310; Kishimoto (1993), pp. 31-37.

[13] Cf. Antoni (1998), chap. II. 2. 2. 1. 2. 2.

[14] Cf. Sugiyama/ Sakamoto (1994), p. 17.

[15] On Kada Azumamaro cf. Dumoulin (1940); Nakamura (1984).

[16] On Kamo Mabuchi cf. the works of Heinrich Dumoulin (1939b, 1941a, 1941b, 1943a, 1943b, 1953, 1955, 1956a 1956b).

[17] On Motoori Norinaga cf. Allessandro (1964); Brownlee (1988); Dumoulin (1939a); Hino (1983); Matsumoto (1970); Motoori (1919-27); Nishimura (1987, 1991); Satō-Diesner (1977); Stolte (1939).

[18] On Hirata Atsutane cf. Devine (1981); Hammitzsch (1936); Keene (1953, 1978); McNally (1998); Miki (1990); Odronic (1967); Schiffer (1939); Tahara (1990); Watanabe (1978).

from a purely philological-literary school to a deliberately political-agitatorial ideology.

The kokugaku mainly chose native classical literature of Japan as their research objective. The study of the literature of Japanese ancient times, especially the Kojiki, by Motoori Norinaga, a student of Kamo Mabuchi, led to the pushing aside of hitherto syncretistic interpretations of Shintō. Thus a nativist doctrine developed, i.e., a philosophical-political Shintō, which began to contest with the Confucian-Shintō syncretism over predominance.

On the basis of its philological and theological studies, the kokugaku towards the close of the 18th century eventually tried to convert its postulates into politics by greatly emphasizing a renaissance of the Japanese emperorship according to the shintōistic doctrines of the imperial house's genealogical origin.

The kokugaku regarded the principle of historical truth and reality of the old records, including the chapters concerning the 'era of the gods' in the oldest Japanese documents, as their theoretical axiom.

These traditions were understood, in its lexical meaning, as 'facts' (jujitsu 事実): the accounts on the origin of the world, the gods of heaven and earth, the establishment of an emperorship, the origin of the powerful noble lineages – for the philosophers of the 'National School' all these mystic occurrences became descriptions of realities in a historical sense. When in that context Hirata Atsutane, an extremely influential theorist and ideologist of the late kokugaku, called Japan the 'land of the gods', he thus followed a literal understanding of the handed-down written records in the sense of a 'shintōist fundamentalism' – if it was more scheming or yet naïve remains to be seen. In Atsutane's case, this viewpoint led to fanatical nationalism and to the conviction of Japan's special status above all other countries. He was convinced, that "we all are undoubtedly descendents of the deities"[19]. Therefore, even the people were elevated to divine descendants, and they regarded themselves adopted into the lineage of the Emperor as an arahitogami 現人神 (or 荒人神), i.e., a 'deity that is presently visible as a human being'.

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[19] Hirata (1927-29), p. 1; cf. Hammitzsch (1936), pp. 20ff. and Antoni (1991), p. 66.

4.3 The conception of 'national polity' (kokutai)

By the end of the Edo period, *kokugaku* ideology entered into an astonishing combination with Confucian ideology, and again we meet the handed-down structures of Japanese syncretism. The core of those national-religious speculations of the Bakumatsu period was formed by the idea of a 'national polity' (*kokutai* 国体).[20] This idea described all those 'national characteristics' that a country ought to have. Japan's 'national polity' was seen to be based on the allegedly unique fact of being a 'divine country' (*shinkoku, kami-no-kuni*), founded by the Sun Goddess Amaterasu 天照, and being ruled by her direct descendants – the human emperors. Thus, the divine *tennō* became the personification of Japanese identity.[21]

Historical analysis shows that the usage of the term *kokutai* as a synonym for Japan was already common at that time, at least in the circles of the imperial court of Kyōto.[22] It should also be recalled that already Hirata Atsutane saw the 'true Shintō' (*makoto no shintō* 真の神道) embodied in the *kokutai*.[23] Yet, the adoption of this concept as a national religious state ideology by the majority of the people did not take place until after the Meiji restoration.

Three phases of *kokutai*-ideology can be clearly identified: ① formative phase (approx. 1825-1890); ② classic phase (1890-1937); ③ phase of hybris (1937-1945). The beginning of the formative phase was the early 19th century, documented by Aizawa Seishisai's 会沢正志祭 work *Shinron* 新論 of 1825.[24] The end of that period came in 1890, the year of the proclamation of the *Kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語 ('Imperial Rescript on Education'), which was decisive for the further development and which marked the beginning of the second, the classic phase.

By looking on these particular dates, it becomes clear that this first, formative phase falls into the era of the great transformations of Japanese history: the decline of the Tokugawa state, the opening of the country to the outside world, the

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[20] Cf. Antoni (1987, 1991, 1998).
[21] Cf. Stanzel (1982), pp. 53ff.; concerning the Japanese identity debate, cf. also Naumann (1987).
[22] Cf. Meyer (1997), p. 135, p. 140 and p. 141, n. 23.
[23] On Hirata's opinion of the 'true kami way' (*makoto no shintō*) being embodied in the Japanese *kokutai*, cf. Hirata (1976), p. 87 and Schiffer (1939), p. 227.
[24] Concerning the *Shinron*, cf. Stanzel (1982) and Wakabayashi (1982).

establishment of a modern Japanese empire with the *tennō* being the sacrosanct head of state – even placed above the constitution – as an incarnation of the state itself.

As is generally known, the philosophers of the so-called Mito school (*mitogaku* 水戸学) had a substantially spiritual and political influence. Through their interpretation of the national school, they broadened the land-of-the-god-doctrine of Shintō by the canon of Confucianist maxims, which dominated at that time. Herein lies the intrinsic difference to the purist national school, which strictly opposed all things of Chinese origin.[25]

In combination with the shintoist land-of-the-gods-ideology of the national school, this ended in a familistic conception of *kokutai*: a definition of the Japanese nation as a society of real descent, as a family of commonly divine origin with the emperor being the natural head.[26]

4.4 Religion and ideology in the Meiji period

The spiritual core of modern Japan's? national idea was therefore least but not last given in the ideological-religious postulate of a homogeneous Japanese family state. This idea found its formulation since the Meiji period in the concept of 'familism' (*kazoku-shugi* 家族主義), i.e., through the comprehension of Japan as a nation state whose people are united by being one single family. At the head of this family, in the role of the father, stood the *tennō*.[27] It seems remarkable that the most radical version of familism did not understand this intimate relationship between *tennō* and people as family in a figurative sense, but more as a real ethnical-genetically defined extended family whose members are connected with each other through their same origin in the divine ancestors.

The picture of a Japanese culture that we can find with philosophers such as Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎[28], as being manifested in Shintō and excelling due to

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[25] Cf. Antoni (1998), p. 170. For an introduction into Mito thought cf. Imai (1973), Koschmann (1987), Kracht (1975) and Webb (1958).
[26] Even the *Nihongi* (Yūryaku 雄略 23/8/7) knew a comparison between the relationships of ruler/vassal and father/child. The effective identification of both pairs of relationship was completed only in the 19th century. Cf. Lokowandt (1978), pp. 60ff.; Tsurumi (1970), pp. 103-109; Fridell (1970), pp. 828-833; Bellah (1985), p. 104 and van Straelen (1952), p. 83.
[27] For an introduction into the ideology and thought of the Meiji period cf. Gluck (1985) and Harootunian (1995).
[28] Cf. Antoni (1990, 1998) and Nawrocki (1998).

its history throughout which at its core stood the person and institution of the *tennō* who is inseparably connected with the – homogeneous – people by a quasi genetically transmitted national ethic (*kokumin dōtoku* 国民道徳), was spread especially by the commentaries on the Imperial Rescript on Education from 1890 until its nationalistic climax with the publication of the *Kokutai no hongi* 国体の本義[29] in the year 1937.

Insights into the historical reality, which stood apart of the ideology of *kokutai*-Shintō, remained to a large extent unheard in this context. In the Meiji period it has been successfully ideologically dismissed that throughout the whole course of its historical development Japan always was a country mainly marked by complexity and disintegration in cultural, social, territorial, and especially religious regards – to an extent that the new view of an ethnically and culturally homogenous country could rise to the absolute dogma of *kokutai*-Shintō.[30]

Precisely because the country was always divided in particular groups, the utopia of homogeneity appeared very promising from the viewpoint of a new, central state in the Meiji period. In that context Shintō occupied a key position, because this religious world that used to be heterogeneous and complex, comprehended now as the only authentic Japanese religion, was more and more identified as spiritual core and foundation of the Japanese culture. Logically, this ended in a concept of Shintō embodying Japanese culture itself, as it shaped the country from late Meiji period until the decline in the year 1945.

Despite the official renunciation of his divine status by Shōwa-tennō 昭和天皇 on January 1, 1946, the Japanese emperorship receives its whole spiritual and religious authority, now as before, from the religious-political ideology of Shintō. On a regular basis opinion polls proof the Japanese people's great approval of the institution of the *tennō*.[31] But almost none of the interviewed people seemed to consciously think of 'religion' in that context, because the *tennō* for most Japanese citizens is just what has been attributed to him by the constitution: a 'symbol' of Japan. According to this concept, Japan can be sure

[29] Cf. Monbushō (1937); Gauntlett/ Hall (1949). Partial translations in: Tsunoda (1964), vol. II, pp. 278-288; Wittig (1976), pp. 127-130, doc. no. 33. See also Antoni (1998), p. 219 and Miller (1982), p. 92.

[30] On the term *kokutai*-Shintō in Inoue Tetsujirō's writings, cf. Nawrocki (1998), pp. 152-158, pp. 162f. and pp. 220f.; Antoni (1998), p. 229, pp. 274-277, p. 309 and p. 330. Even Gerhard Rosenkranz [(1944), p. 100] uses this term; cf. Antoni (1998), p. 309.

of its inner unity as long as the emperor resides in his palace's mysterious seclusion, like on an island in the middle of Tōkyō, and performs his daily rites.

5. Résumé

In the present context, the historical development could not be considered in more detail. Let me instead point to my summarized description of neoteric and modern developments [Antoni (1998)].

Yet it remains to be hoped for that this short introduction to the problem field of Shintō conveyed at least an impression that an ahistorical-static approach cannot contribute to the understanding and explanation of this question. It shows that Shintō just like Buddhism, Confucianism and other complex systems, is neither clearly defined nor an invariable entity. However, it is still possible to determine characteristics, which document an undoubted continuity of the system 'Shintō'. In the center of this continuity lies the function to legitimize the ruling position of the imperial house since the days of *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. This 'political purpose' – which outshines everything else – is the actual core of what we call Shintō. It can be seamlessly followed through the history of Shintō: from the constructions of a standardized mythology of ancient times, via the *shinkoku* ideology of the middle ages and the nativist ideological concepts of the *kokugaku*, up to the modern conception of *kokutai*. Of central importance in this context is the perception that the philosophical structures of modern age Japan have their own differentiated development, reaching far back into pre-modern times, and are only to be comprehended from there.

Thus, the philosophical structures of the Japanese modern age are founded on the development in Japanese pre-modern times – drawn up by theological and philosophical circles of Buddhism, Confucianism and Shintō – and were put into practice only since the Meiji period together with imported conceptions of the Western modern age. The world of Shintō was attributed with a decisive importance for the identity formation of modern Japan.

As cultural scientists, we are called upon to undertake the arduous work to reveal these lines of tradition. In order to understand the constructions of the modern age, we have to turn to the authentic sources of pre-modern times: the

[31] Cf. Antoni (1991), p. 24.

language and literary-documentary traditions of ancient and classic Japan. Thus, the hermeneutical analysis of pre-modern times supplies the most certain basis for the comprehension of the present. Even though such a philological-hermeneutical approach is much more complicated on the whole than a great ahistorical design in the sense of Kitagawa's definition of Shintō quoted in the beginning, science cannot withdraw from this challenge. Most of all, Japanology has been attributed with an extremely important function. As a science about Japan, it is supposed to pursue unbiased fundamental research about this subject. A Japanology however, which closes its eyes to the research of historical processes and their philological resources, cannot accomplish this task.

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