

# Japanese Religions

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# Japanese Religions

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Klaus Antoni \*

## Religion and Commercialization: The Shintō Wedding Ritual (*shinzenshiki*) as an “Invented Tradition” in Japan

### 1. Introduction

The image of Japanese religions in the West is widely dominated by exoticism and stereotypes. The range of perception varies from Zen Buddhism, often understood as a kind of incarnation of the Japanese soul, to bizarre religious incidents like the recent Aum Shinri-kyō terrorism. An essential component of this view is given by the idea that the Japanese generally seem to be quite indifferent about their personal religious affiliation, adhering to Buddhism, Shintō and even Christianity at the same time. Japanese wedding ceremonies fit perfectly into this pattern. A Japanese couple may marry in Western Christian style (without being Christians themselves), as well as according to Buddhist or Shintō rituals. All these ceremonies can take place, without any sense of incongruity, either in commercial places like wedding halls or large and luxurious hotels or in religious surroundings such as churches, temples and shrines.<sup>1</sup> Among these ceremonial events the Shintō style wedding (神前式 *shinzenshiki* “ritual before the gods”) is said to express Japanese tradition best, and most wedding ceremonies are held in this manner. An official Shintō interpretation is given in the belief that “marriage is realized through the protection of the gods and that children are born after receiving the spirit of the gods.”<sup>2</sup> Although this still represents the most popular type of marriage ceremony in Japan, its use has been declining constantly in recent years in comparison with church weddings in the Christian style. According to information given by the Main Association of Shintō Shrines (*jinja honchō* 神社本庁), both forms have been practiced nearly equally since 1996,<sup>3</sup> but according to Ōbayashi (1997: 39), Shintō wedding ceremonies account for 70% of all weddings in Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition some private associations, like the alumni group of Imperial Universities (Gakushi-kaikan), make their own halls available for wedding ceremonies; cf. Ōbayashi 1997: 39.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Basic Terms of Shintō* 1958: 63. In the revised edition of this book (1985: 60) this sentence is omitted.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Jinja shimpō*, June 17, 1996 (no. 2370).

As Helen Hardacre (1989: 143) points out, Shintō wedding ceremonies have become a major source of income for the shrines after the war and the end of state Shintō:

Shrines have had to create commercial enterprises to survive in the absence of state patronage and virtually compulsory parishioner support. Larger shrines have frequently opened wedding halls featuring Shintō weddings, often performed in sequence with Christian or Westernized ceremonies for the same couple. Combined with a lack of effective proselytization, this commercialization of the shrines contributes to society's impression of Shintō as ethically and intellectually bankrupt.

Without wanting to comment on an alleged 'ethical and intellectual bankruptcy' of Shrine Shintō in postwar Japan, it is clear that the wedding industry forms a major part of income for many shrines.<sup>4</sup> Since the shrines operate with the arguments of antiquity and genuine tradition in advertising their wedding ceremonies it seems to be highly relevant to examine the problem of tradition within this field of commercialized religious activities.

## 2. The Conduct of *shinzenshiki*

### 2.1 Venues

Today, the business of wedding ceremonies provides the main source of income for many Shintō shrines in Japan. The shrines were released from the patronage of the state and were made autonomous religious institutions after 1945, when State Shintō ceased to exist. They have had a permanent financing problem since that time. Other sources of income include offerings and donations, trade with devotional objects and the fees and contributions of community members. Many shrines have begun intensive advertising campaigns for wedding ceremonies. Even the internet – now widely used all over Japan – is becoming an increasingly important medium for this purpose. It allows an insight into the diversity of offers and structure of costs for the performances provided by shrines and commercial places like large hotels and wedding halls. Systematic access is offered by the Japanese internet through a webpage called *kekkon-net* ("marriage-net").<sup>5</sup> In the categories listed there, one finds a rubric for weddings in Shintō style (*shinzenshiki*) which provides not only detailed information on commercial wedding organizers across the whole country, especially in Greater Tōkyō,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bocking 1997: 179; for the financial background of Shintō shrines cf. Nelson 1997.

but also on various Shintō shrines as well.

In this context, the homepage of the Tōkyō-daijingu, because it claims to be the place of origin of the modern *shinzenshiki* ceremonies, must be mentioned first. The custom of Shintō weddings began with the marriage of the former crown prince and later Emperor Taishō at this shrine in the year Meiji 33 (1900).<sup>6</sup> We will deal with this historical aspect later.

While the homepage of the Tōkyō-daijingu is relatively restrained, other shrines make considerable advertising efforts. This is the case with the venerable and nationally famous Kanda-myōjin in Tōkyō. This shrine introduces itself as an organizer of complete wedding ceremonies including the lavish (and expensive) reception of guests. The luxurious ambience will satisfy the most discerning customer. Their homepage includes a detailed list of prices to show that complete arrangements can be booked at various (price-) levels, from "Yukari" style, 40 persons at a price of ¥888,000, up to the most luxurious "Kanda matsuri," 60 persons for ¥2,060,000.<sup>7</sup> Some shrines, like Takase-jinja in the prefecture of Fukuyama, offer the possibility of an online inquiry regarding available dates for ceremonies.<sup>8</sup> The Ōkunitama-jinja in Tōkyō allows persons interested to plan and book a complete ceremony in every detail, including photos, via the net.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, the Grand Shrine of Izumo (Izumo-taisha) is of central importance as its deity, Ōkuninushi no mikoto, is regarded in folk belief as *en musubi no kami* (縁結びの神), a divinity interlinking human destinies.<sup>10</sup> Therefore the deity of Izumo-taisha is seen throughout the country as a deity of felicitous marriage. In the advertisement for its own wedding-hall, Izumo-taisha refers to Ōkuninushi with great emphasis, characterizing him as initiator of conjugal bonds. This notion, however, is not a conception from within traditional Izumo belief but a product of modern times belonging to the 'missionaries' (*onshi* 御師)<sup>11</sup> of Kizuki- (that is Izumo-) shrine of the late Tokugawa period at the earliest (Inoue 1994: 318).

There are commercial suppliers who also take advantage of the name of famous Izumo in order to offer their own wedding ceremonies in Shintō style.<sup>12</sup> The Izumo-kaikan, a wedding hall located in Ōmiya, Tōkyō, refers

<sup>6</sup> Cf. <http://www.kekkon-net.or.jp/daijingu/index.html>, February 4, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://www.kekkon-net.or.jp/kmj/04.html>, February 4, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <http://www1.coralnet.or.jp/takase/sikijyou/month.html>, February 3, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <http://www.kekkon-net.or.jp/0092/>, February 5, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. some personal reports in *Asahi-shinbunsha* (1979: 5, 48).

<sup>11</sup> Most *oshi*, or *onshi*, served Ise jingū (cf. Bocking 1997: 141-142) during the Edo period, but there existed "missionaries" in the service of other major shrines, too (cf. Antoni 1998: 96 for further evidences).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. <http://www.izumo-kaikan.com/>

visually to the Grand Shrine of Izumo in its homepage. But the commercial 'Izumoden Group' of Hamamatsu, which has branches all over Japan, emphasizes more its gorgeous facilities for marriages.<sup>13</sup> This shows just how wide business interests in the wedding industry in Japan are.

It is to be pointed out that the ceremonies performed in wedding halls or hotels are generally equal in validity to those of the shrines. Many of those places possess their own areas not only for the *shinzenshiki* but also for the performance of Christian and Buddhist rituals. Famous hotels in particular offer complete wedding ceremonies in the Shintō style. Potential customers are provided with detailed offers again via the net. For example, the Akasaka Tokyu Hotel in Tōkyō quotes an exact calculation of costs for a *shinzenshiki* marriage which comes up to ¥1,238,000 for 50 guests.<sup>14</sup> In other comparable hotels we find similar costs; for example in the Tōkyō Grand Hotel, which both cooperates with an external shrine (Shiba Daijingu) for the performance of the *shinzenshiki* ceremony and also has its own area for Shintō style weddings.<sup>15</sup>

I think it is remarkable that the arrangement and course of Shintō wedding ceremonies are widely uniform, regardless of the locality, i.e. shrine, wedding hall or hotel. The course of the ceremony is not dependent on the place. The place of a marriage does not affect the religious "validity" of such a ceremony, since the ceremony is without legal standing in Japan. As Ōbayashi Taryō (1997: 39), an eminent scholar in this field of research, points out,

The main feature of a Shintōist wedding ceremony is, however, that the ceremony is held by a Shintō priest in front of a Shintō altar. Altars which are outside of a shrine are accepted as temporary branches of a shrine.

## 2. 2 The Ceremony

As Walter Edwards (1989: 15) points out, "although composed of elements rooted in Japan's ancient traditions, the Shinto ceremony has only recently become a standard part of wedding. Accordingly, it is unfamiliar to most." The *shinzenshiki* ceremony takes place in the altar room of the respective place (shrine or wedding hall) (Hendry 1981: 178). On the altar are placed food offerings as well as three cups and three small bottles of *sake* which are necessary to perform the main part of the ceremony called *sansan-kudo* (三三九度). The rings, if used by the couple, are also placed on the altar. The Shintō priest stands on the right side of the altar, on its left there

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <http://www.izumoden.co.jp/1st.htm>, February 5, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <http://www.kekkon-net.or.jp/akasaka/ath03.html>, February 5, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <http://www.kekkon-net.or.jp/t-grand/index.html>, February 5, 1998.

are two *miko* (shrine virgins) dressed in white and red garb. The groom and his family are placed on the right and the bride and her family on the left side of the altar. Usually, a small table with offerings in Shintō style, i. e. a cup of *sake*, a small quantity of dried cuttlefish, and some seaweed, are placed in front of each participant. The food has been blessed by the deities beforehand. First of all, the priest welcomes the guests and starts the ceremony with the cleansing ritual (Hendry 1981: 180).

A prayer is read by the priest to call the deities, especially those of the Izumo-shrine. After these introductory rituals, the most important part of the ceremony takes place: the common *sake* ritual (*sansan-kudo*) of the bridal couple as well as the groom's reading of the pledge of marriage before the deities. The bride simply adds her name at the end of this oath. It is possible to exchange rings at this point. Hereafter, *sake* is given to the guests to affiliate the two families. This part of the ceremony is called *oyako-sakazuki* (親子盃). It is followed by the *shinseki-sakazuki* practice, when all the guests drink to the couple's health (*kanpai*). After drinking *sake* the presentation of a branch of the sakaki-tree, which is regarded as holy in Shintō belief, takes place at the altar to show gratitude to the deities: the bridal couple receives the blessing of the *kami* and expresses its gratitude by offering the *tamagushi* (玉串), a branch of sacred sakaki tree, one of the major offerings in Shintō (cf. Bocking 1997: 198). Since the *sake* was blessed by the *kami*, it differs in spiritual nature from common drinks. This contains a reference to the originally high religious importance of *sake* in ancient Japanese culture.<sup>16</sup> After offering the branch, the audience must clap their hands and bow to the deities twice, as in any shrine visit.

After finishing the ceremony with this ritual, a celebration takes place to announce the event (*hirōen* 披露宴, Announcement Feast) to the guests (Hendry 1981: 181). The bride will change her clothing at least once. For the *hirōen*, the audience adjourns to a restaurant if it is a wedding in Shintō or Buddhist style.<sup>17</sup> In case of a home- or restaurant-wedding, the *hirōen* takes place after finishing the ceremony.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Antoni 1988; cf. Bocking 1997: 23, 110, 121, 150, 170.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hendry 1981: 182-83: The Buddhist form of the wedding ceremony (*butsuzen*) is far less popular than the Shintō ceremony. It is led by two priests; the younger strikes the drum while the older enters the room and sings, occasionally striking a bell. Afterwards a proclamation is read, which declares the purpose of the meeting. The younger priest brings the cups and serves *sake* to the couple. The ceremony of the *sansan-kudo* is conducted as within the *shinzen* ceremony. Afterwards the parents of the bride drink with their son-in-law, then the parents of the bridegroom with the bride. Then the couple drinks with the *nakōdo*. Afterwards exchange of the rings takes place, followed by a second proclamation of the priest. With further singing the ceremony is terminated. The *hirōen* is performed as in the Shintō ceremony.

The wedding ceremony has changed only slightly since its introduction in 1900. The exchange of rings has been subjoined to it, as has been the reading of the marriage oath by the groom himself. Before this it was the responsibility of the mediator (*nakōdo* 仲人) who had to vouch for the success of the marriage. Many different elements were combined to form this new ritual that was first seen in 1900. Several elements were adopted from the West (rings, reading of marriage oath). Other elements, such as the ceremony of the *sansan-kudo* and the function of a mediator, were taken from Japanese schools of ceremonial etiquette developed by the samurai during the Tokugawa period.<sup>18</sup> Other elements, however, are of an older origin, for example the invocation by the mediator, the cleansing ritual (*harai* 祓い) and the offering of the *tamagushi*. These elements of the traditional Shintō cult are to give the ceremony the image of being “Shintōist,” but they do not represent original components of a wedding-ceremony, as they were celebrated on other occasions as well. This clearly shows the heterogenous character of the *shinzenshiki* ceremony in general, being constructed in eclectic manner out of a fund of traditional and modern elements, and finally emerging as a “new tradition” in modern and contemporary Japan.

### 3. The History of *shinzenshiki*

As already pointed out, Shintō style wedding ceremonies have their origin in the wedding of crown prince Yoshihito in May 1900, the first imperial wedding after the Meiji Restoration.<sup>19</sup> The political idea behind this was to install the emperor and the whole imperial family as a symbol and metaphysical source for the new national order. So the emperor was promoted as a public figure. Edwards (1989: 104) states in this context:

The wedding ritual devised for the Crown Prince reflects the several emphases present in this political use of the imperial institution. As a religious ceremony it served as an analogue to the Christian weddings of European royalty.

After the invention of this Shintō ceremony there developed an enormous

<sup>18</sup> In this context, Ōbayashi (1997: 46) remarks: “Many elements of traditional weddings have been adopted. I will only mention one example: The *sansan-kudo no sakazuki* of the groom and the bride as well as their families roots in the Ogawara School of etiquette which influenced the ceremonies of the *bushi* significantly.”

<sup>19</sup> Edwards 1989: 103. Cf. Ōbayashi 1997. A detailed account of the beginning of this kind of ceremony is given in vol. 9 of the series *Kindai-shūmin seikatsushi* (Minami 1986: 25-90).

demand for such ceremonies among the general public, and it was especially in the great Shintō shrines that this new kind of ritual was widely performed.

As Ōbayashi makes clear, this newly created ceremony and others were invented for the glorification of the imperial family. It also corresponded to the life style of a modern urban elite in imperial Japan, an elite of young people grown up after the Meiji Restoration and the victorious wars against China and Russia, working in government posts, in the military and elsewhere. “The Shintōist wedding ceremony met the demands of this new generation” (Ōbayashi 1997: 47).

Before the year 1900 nothing like a wedding before the gods or the ancestors existed in the imperial house. The whole ritualistic standardization movement of that time must be seen and understood in the context of the newly proclaimed Japanese Constitution of 1899 and the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 (Cf. Ōbayashi 1997: 42). Here we find the intellectual and ideological source of all the new rituals which gave the imperial Japan of those days its mental structure.

The advocates of an imperial restoration in Japan elaborated this ideological and religious system, called by the term ‘state Shintō’ and having the idea of the metaphysical uniqueness of the Japanese nation and its polity (*kokutai* 国体) at its center. In the later Meiji period this became the official concept of the state. Japan was regarded as a great family, and since all Japanese citizens were thought to be descendants of the mythical ancestors with the imperial family at the top – an idea based on the Shintō mythology and elaborated by the *kokugaku* scholar Hirata Atsutane – the Japanese nation was presented as a real family. The famous Imperial Rescript on Education, (*Kyōiku (ni kan suru) chokugo* 教育に関する勅語), dating from October 30, 1890, states in this respect (official translation):

Know ye, Our Subjects: Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire.<sup>20</sup>

Most important in this context is the fact that state Shintō officially was not regarded as a religion. All state Shintō ceremonies were seen just as “customs” and manners in accordance with Japanese culture and tradition, but not as religiously based rituals. Of course, this official view was debated

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gauntlett and Hall 1949: 192; for the Japanese version see Ōkubo 1965 (1969): 425. For discussion of the problem of *kokutai* ideology in Modern Japan and further references cf. Antoni 1998: 208-256.

at that time, but mostly by foreign scholars, such as Basil Hall Chamberlain (see below). Officially it did not change until the end of the state Shintō system in 1945. Therefore all the new Shintō ceremonies of that time were also regarded as non-religious rituals. Brian Bocking (1996: 179) writes on the Shintō-style wedding in this context: “The custom of involving a shrine priest spread in the Meiji period with the permeation of official ‘state Shintō’ (*kokka shintō*) into civic life.” For the interpretation of the *shinzenshiki* ceremony this nevertheless represents the crucial point: A ceremony that never was regarded as “religious” in character before the war could not lose such a character after the war!

### 3. 1 *New Shintō Rituals after the Meiji Restoration*

Thus the wedding ceremony belongs to a large complex of those Shintō rituals and ceremonies which were invented by the new imperial government after the Meiji restoration in the context of building up a modern Japanese nation state. While in Edo times Shintō had supported the local ties of the population, the Tokugawa government found an ideal means of monitoring the people through Buddhism (Cf. Antoni 1998: 74). The major task of regulating the rites of transition like births, marriages<sup>21</sup> and funerals were given to Buddhist institutions such as temples in Edo (Kaneiji in Ueno) and in the castle towns of the local daimyō. But after the successful Meiji restoration of 1868, Shintō shrines took over many of these functions from the Buddhist temples.<sup>22</sup> In particular, the imperial palace was purged of all Buddhist influences: all Buddhist altars were relegated to temples, the annual Buddhist ceremonies ceased, and those members of the imperial family who were Buddhist monks had to give up this function.

In a core area of Buddhist ritual, the funeral, the new government undertook intensive attempts to develop a comparable Shintō rite. Regarding the origins of such funeral customs, a contemporary observer mentioned:

State funerals in Japan are a construction of the modern times; the Shōgunate did not know them. This kind of funeral was, as so many other items, transferred from the Western culture in the Meiji era. The first state funeral took place in the year 1883 after the death of prince Iwakura... State funerals have to be carried out in Japan according to Shintō ritual; this was also the case after the death of Count Itō, although he himself had

<sup>21</sup> On premodern wedding ceremonies cf. Kawashima Takeyoshi (1965, part I); Ema Tsutomu 1975; Nakayama Tarō 1966. For an interpretation regarding the general view of weddings and marriage in Japan cf. the work of Kamishima Jirō (1964).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Antoni 1998: 184, Hardacre 1989: 83 f.

been Buddhist and his parents were buried according the ritual forms of this religion.<sup>23</sup>

In the case of the Shintō funeral, the intentions and methods were aimed to conform absolutely to the spirit of the time: to construct a set of Shintō rituals within the context of the allegedly non-religious state Shintō and *kokutai* system.

In this context I would like to refer to a rather provocative essay written by the British scholar Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), one of the founders of historical-philological research on Japan (Cf. Antoni 1998: 304). In his essay titled “The Invention of a New Religion,” which was published for the first time in 1912, Chamberlain deals harshly with the intellectual and ideological development of contemporary state Shintō. He already uses the term ‘invention’ of a new religion, thus anticipating an expression which would become so important in our days with the writings of Eric Hobsbawm as we will see later. Chamberlain criticizes the general tendency of contemporary Japan: “Such is the fabric of ideas which the official class is busy building up by every means in its power, including the punishment of those who presume to stickle for historic truth” (Chamberlain 1927: 563), and states that Japan supplied a good example of how religion could be manufactured in order to serve worldly purposes (Chamberlain 1927: 559). Regarding the newly invented Shintō style funerals and wedding ceremonies the author writes:

Shintō, because connected with the Imperial Family, is to be alone honoured. Therefore, the important right of burial, never before possessed by it, was granted to its priests. Later on, the right of marriage was granted likewise – an entirely novel departure in a land where marriage had never been more than a civil contract. (Chamberlain 1927: 561)

Thus the term of *invented* ceremonies and traditions in Meiji Japan has to be understood as being fundamental in this connection. And we realize that the *shinzenshiki* ceremony too is part of this process.

### 3. 2 *Shinzenshiki as an “Invented Tradition”*

The term “invented traditions” deals with the question of whether any traditional elements, incorporated into the modern nation state to prove its historical continuity and thus legitimation, are really as old and authentic as they are assumed to be. Discussing this aspect of nation building in Japan, we are to have a look into a fascinating book, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in the year 1983 under the programmatical title *The*

<sup>23</sup> Ohrt 1910 : 123 (author’s translation).

*Invention of Tradition*. It provoked something near a sensation in the academic world since it made clear that most of the allegedly old national traditions of the European countries under consideration were in fact quite recent, mainly products of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his Introduction Hobsbawm wrote:

Nothing appears more ancient, and linked to an immemorial past, than the pageantry which surrounds British monarchy in its public ceremonial manifestations. Yet...in its modern form it is the product of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1)

Hobsbawm and his co-authors illustrate in a series of brilliant articles how, for example, the British Empire, Imperial Germany, and the new Italian nation state of the late nineteenth century developed a whole set of ceremonies, rituals and traditions that in fact were quite recent and therefore not really traditional but “invented” ones.

Reading this book the Japanologist will have a very “familiar” feeling. Who would not think of Meiji Japan in this context with its huge amount of newly invented Shintō ceremonies, ritual, nation-wide festivals and the like? Studying the development of national ceremonies since Meiji gives the historian an unequally clear picture of what “invented” traditions are, and how they are blended with “real” traditions to form a cultural amalgam that creates the basis for Japan as a modern nation state.

Fujitani Takashi, an historian of Japanese intellectual history, for example, analysed in his doctoral thesis at the University of California (1986) some of the Meiji era ceremonies from this point of view. His work obviously was written under the influence of Hobsbawm’s studies. Fujitani shows with some striking examples to what extent the Japanese case fits into the general paradigm of modern “invented” traditions. As a kind of initial summary the author states:

National ceremonies, the symbols and emblems of which they were made, the space in which they were performed, the sacred places which gave the ceremonies their cosmological meaning – had not existed in their early-twentieth century forms since ancient times. (Fujitani 1986: 3)

As we can see, Japan forms not just a single example of the blending of real and artificial traditions within the context of modern nation making but in fact provides the historian with a central pillar for understanding and documenting this universal paradigm.

In this respect I want to refer to another author, Dietmar Rothermund, historian of Modern Indian history at Heidelberg University, who asks historians and Orientalists to work together in a field of study that he calls the “hermeneutics of the other” (*Hermeneutik der Fremde*). His insights

formulated over a period of more than twenty years, can in my opinion be understood as a kind of dialectic synthesis of the relation between “real” and “artificial” traditions in modern nation states. Rothermund describes the tension between “real” traditions and artificial ones, and refers to the ideological product of these by the term “traditionalism.” The author writes:

Traditionalism is a phenomenon that can be observed in many nations in a transitional phase of cultural and political development. Tradition is a many splendoured thing, it encompasses a variety of social structures and ideas which are frequently contradictory. Traditionalism, however, is a conscious attempt at streamlining tradition so as to fit a particular need for a useful past. This need arises when a people wants to acquire a national identity and looks for some common denominator. This common denominator is usually found in a reconstructed tradition of social, cultural and religious solidarity. (Rothermund 1970: 35)

It is especially the intellectual, religious and ritualistic history of Japan that could contribute enormously to the study of “traditionalism” by analysing Japanese history in the sense of studying the relationship between original traditions and artificial ones within the context of a developing national ideology.

#### 4. Conclusion

Let us finally return to our initial question, the business nature of recent Shintō wedding ceremonies and the enormous commercialization of this ritual. The observer might ask if this fact must be seen as an indication of a general lack of importance of religion in Japanese society. But such an interpretation of the commercial nature of today’s *shinzenshiki* ritual would not fit the problem. As we have seen, the invention of a specific Shintō style wedding ceremony in the year 1900 happened in accordance with a general shintōization of Imperial Japan, based upon state Shintō ideas of ritual and society which lasted until 1945. And historical analysis showed that the *shinzenshiki* ritual belongs to a set of “invented traditions” which were products of the modern Japanese nation state in the days of the Meiji era. Since the Shintō style wedding belonged, from its beginning, to the allegedly non-religious state Shintō, no authentic religious feelings could be hurt by the commercialization of the ritual after the war. Being regarded as a kind of “traditional” Japanese custom in the form of Shintō ritual, it continued to play the role of state Shintō rituals perfectly even after the war. Commercialization of this ceremony as well as that of “Christian” or other styles does not constitute a problem in this context, since it never happened to be religious in nature before.

The attempts of the present Shintō world to provide the ritual with a personal religious aspect are therefore not very persuasive. As Chamberlain already pointed out, in Japanese history weddings never had a religious meaning. So the Japanese attitude against different forms of religious ritual in the context of wedding and marriage can be understood quite well. Since marriage was not religiously based in authentic Japanese tradition, the idea of a wedding “before the gods,” as a *traditionalistic* concept, became open to any kind of change and interpretation.

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