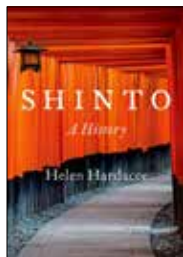


REVIEW



Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History*

Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017. 720 pages. Hardback, £29.99. ISBN 9780190621711.

THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE of Oxford University Press, the publisher of *Shinto: A History*, recommends this book with the words “The first comprehensive history of Shinto in any language, tracing the tradition’s ancient origins through to modern day practice.” I can almost agree with this statement, with the exception of the expressions “the first” and “in any language.” Students of Japanese religion probably know the fact that, although not so many, a number of works have been written in Japanese intending to deliver a comprehensive history of Shinto, such as *Nippon Shintōshi* 日本神道史 (ed. Okada Shōji 岡田莊司; Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2010). Of course, I do not mean to claim by this that Helen Hardacre’s work here is second to such Japanese works, most of which are written by multiple co-authors. On the contrary, I strongly expect that Hardacre’s scrupulous, sweeping work will become “the first” study—produced either inside or outside Japan—that comprehends the broad range of research on and interests in Shinto history.

There has been a wide gap between the academic interests and share of research on Shinto both within and outside of Japan. While the study of Shinto in Japan is, by and large, considered a single field, for students of religion outside Japan—particularly in the West—Shinto tends to have slightly less chance of becoming a major or central topic compared to the world religion of Buddhism. In research written in English, Shinto seems to be in the spotlight almost exclusively in two ways: as a sign signaling the boundary of the East Asian spheres of Buddhism, Confucianism, or Daoism (or their zone of contact with native religious culture in Japan); or else as a name given by some interpretations under nationalist policies to identify a wide diversity of folk phenomena as a single cultural category. Reflecting such views while giving an eye to world religions, several Japanese scholars also claim to regard Shinto not as Japan’s primordial, indigenous religion, but as an ideological

assertion upholding the secular order of the state and conceived sometime later in Japanese history—in the medieval, the early modern, or even the modern period.

Given this decades-long situation, Hardacre is a rare Western scholar who has worked on Shinto as a specialty within her overall major field of Japanese religion, while paying special attention to Japan's modern and contemporary sociopolitical situation. Undoubtedly she is the most suitable expert to write a sweeping history of Shinto, and this book will remain an indispensable English text for decades to come—for any student of historical Shinto.

While partially based on the author's earlier works, the book as a whole is new. As with Hardacre's other published works and her talks in the academic field, the style of this book is very plain and clear. I am afraid, however, that it may be difficult for one to read and understand the whole book due to its sheer size and scope. Hardacre has given us a wide and extensive view of Shinto history, and her efforts have borne fruit in this enormous, seven-hundred-page tome.

The sixteen chapters are divided into four parts of historical periodization, namely ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern, and the author addresses numerous historical topics and concepts in each section. In the following I attempt to summarize them, focusing on a limited selection from the whole.

The introduction serves as a sixteen-page summary of Shinto history, with a concise commentary on the studies on Shinto so far. The author introduces two kinds of dichotomy usually debated in the context of Shinto history, namely "indigenous/foreign" and "public/private" (5). She explains that the reason for adopting this framework is as an analytic tool to help the reader grasp the origins of ideas about Shinto and their historical continuity. In this review I employ the term "Shinto" casually in its conventional meaning in order to simplify the discussion regarding the history of Japanese kami worship. We should note, however, that in her book, Hardacre examines this term meticulously to disassociate herself from essentialist interpretations of Shinto as "indigenous" and "public" religion at all.

In the following four chapters the author discusses the ancient period, namely from the prehistoric era to the twelfth century. Chapters 1 and 2 treat the beginning of Shinto history and the flow of religious culture into Japan from the Asian continent in terms of institutions and concepts about kami found in the myths compiled in the eighth century. In chapters 3 and 4 the author examines the heyday of the Jingikan or the Council of Divinities in the Nara period and its decline in the Heian, examining the state ritual system under this ministry and addressing the changing concepts of kami that emerged from the process of combinations, assimilations, and so on, that occurred between Buddhism and Shinto. As a conclusion to her investigation in these chapters, Hardacre claims her position that Shinto originates with the Jingikan under the Ritsuryō system, as indicated by the expression seen in the title of chapter 3 "the coalescence" of Shinto.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 address the history of Shinto during the medieval period, meaning the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries. In chapter 5 the author exam-

ines the esotericization of Shinto and the development of concepts and rituals about kami within esoteric Buddhism, while also referring to other Shinto concepts, such as the idea of Japan as the land of gods and the appearance of Shugendō. Chapter 6 depicts how ideas about kami were expressed in the architecture, arts, and literature of medieval Japan. And a certain part of chapter 7 is devoted to a description of the revolutionary changes brought about within Shinto, both in doctrinal and ritual systems, by Yoshida Kanetomo and his descendants as they seized and maintained the de facto headship of the Jingikan during the period of the Warring States in the sixteenth century. Tackling medieval Japan's history—which cannot be understood simply—the author describes clearly the process whereby Shinto acquired its character as an embodiment of “the indigenous.”

Chapters 8 through 11 are devoted to investigating the history of Shinto in the early modern period, namely, the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. Chapter 8 depicts the general situation of Shinto during the Edo period, followed by an investigation into the influence of Neo-Confucianism on Shinto in the seventeenth century as Hardacre examines the thought of three scholars, Hayashi Razan, Yoshikawa Koretaru, and Yamazaki Ansai. The author indicates that in this period Shinto's relation to “the public” emerged in a Confucian framework, casting Buddhism as “the foreign,” although the effects of Confucian interpretations of kami themselves thereafter experienced a relative decline. In chapter 9 the author deals with the popular cults to the kami Inari, and the religious significances of the massive pilgrimages to the Grand Shrines of Ise, while, in fact, no one spoke of Shinto as a “religion” but as a faith. The author also points out that the term “Shintoist” (*Shintōsha*) emerged in this situation as a self-reference by scholars and teachers. Chapter 10 first introduces several Shinto popularizers of the Edo period, followed by a comparison of three religious movements, Kurozumikyo, Misogikyo, and Uden Shinto toward the end of the period. Chapter 11 examines the topic of Shinto and *kokugaku* or national learning, one of the most popular topics in Shinto research in Japan. As the author indicates, in works written in English, the term “nativism” is often used to describe *kokugaku*, even though it is not a direct translation of any Japanese term. I think the subtle difference in nuance between the generic term “nativism” and the Japanese *kokugaku* is worthy of note. At any rate, the discussion in these chapters appears to evidence the author's interest in historical sociology rather more than other chapters. As a result, these chapters provide the reader with an introduction to the issues regarding whether Shinto should be considered a “religion” or not, and the significance of the term “early modern” when applied to the Edo period.

In the final five chapters, beginning with chapter 12, Hardacre examines modern Shinto and its history from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 until today. In the first part of chapter 12 the author discusses the academic discourse on the concept of State Shinto, and then describes Shinto's history until 1900, the last year of the nineteenth century, and the year in which the Shrine Bureau in the Ministry of Home Affairs took over the state management of shrines. Chapter 13 treats the heyday of the Japa-

nese empire until its defeat at the end of World War II in 1945. The author notes that some recent scholars of Shinto studies (including the present reviewer) employ the circumlocution “state management” of shrines instead of the conventional “State Shinto,” and in these two chapters she inquires what “state management” might mean for shrine life. Since this is one of the few places my name appears in this book, I will later indicate my own position in response to the author’s perspective on modern Shinto.

Chapter 14 deals with the period from the beginning of the Allied occupation in 1945 to the death of the Showa Emperor in 1989. Championing the claim to represent the “indigenous” and “public” nature of Shinto, the National Association of Shinto Shrines (NASS) or Jinja Honchō plays the leading role here, and the author also discusses the Yasukuni Shrine issue, and the legal arguments surrounding religious freedom in postwar Japan. Chapters 15 and 16 also offer a very good model for students wishing for a general approach to religious phenomena in contemporary Japan. Chapter 15 investigates *matsuri* or shrine festivals in the postwar period, centering on the author’s own detailed fieldwork, especially regarding the Kurayami Matsuri or Darkness Festival of the Ōkunitama Shrine in Fuchū, Tokyo. In chapter 16, using tables and the statistical data from opinion polls, the author describes Shinto’s contemporary position in the discourse about religions in Japanese society. Finally, the author even provides a detailed chapter on Shinto in popular culture. As well as offering useful information for Japanese studies, these final two chapters also depict, in my opinion, the new relationships or confrontations of a culture claiming its own indigeness and publicness, with the “foreign” and “private” sectors of a maturing consumer society.

Following chapter 16, Hardacre includes several appendices: “Shrine Funding,” a “Selected List of (Sino-Japanese) Characters,” and a “Chronology.” Needless to say, such information composed by an expert in the field will be invaluable for readers of the next generation.

Now, while limitations of space prevent me from a detailed discussion, as a reviewer I would like to make just two comments. The first concerns my own perspective on modern Shinto. In her introduction, Hardacre describes chapter 12 with the words, “An alternative, ‘state management’ has been proposed, and in this chapter I experiment with it, to question its usefulness and limitations as an alternative to State Shinto” (12). In the chapter itself the author introduces the historical arguments concerning the expression “State Shinto” in a way that I find generally acceptable, noting that most “Shinto historians who are also priests mostly reject the idea that a state religion that could be called State Shinto existed” (356).

Then, following a reference to my name in a note as a user of the circumlocutive expression “state management” she states:

I hope to contribute to that endeavor in this chapter and the next by examining how Shinto formed new relations with government, and how those relations

affected shrines, the priesthood, and shrine communities. Through that interaction, some of the most fundamental characteristics of modern Shinto were formed, including its politicization, its inextricable position in local social organization, the idea that it is a nonreligious tradition that has no doctrine, and the notion that it is the core of Japanese ethnicity. (357)

To begin with, I am one of those Shinto priests who also identifies with the camp of academic Shinto studies in Japan, and the author is a liberal Japanologist living in the United States. In spite of a difference in perspective on “in/out” (*uchi/soto*), my interests and research aims with regard to modern Shinto are totally in agreement with her statement above. Unfortunately, it is my opinion that the conventional discourse on “State Shinto” has become bloated and unwieldy, involving claims extending across numerous conceptual boundaries, including institutions, intellectual history, periodization, and so forth, and one of the conclusions of my own research—based on this segmented approach—has been to suggest the expression “state management of shrines” in place of the conventional “State Shinto.” I assume that what Hardacre is attempting in these chapters, at least in part, possesses the same rationale as mine, even though I do not claim to approach her more comprehensive endeavor.

It is true that a certain segment of Japanese Shintoists is represented by essentialists. At the same time, because Shinto has obviously been constructed in history and society—as detailed in the present book—and is not generally considered a revelatory religion, I believe the use of social constructivism is also an effective methodology, even in studies by Shintoists. On the other hand, in the case of Shinto theological claims made in the context of interreligious dialogue, I may start my argument by asserting that Shinto has “indigenous” and “public” aspects. It totally depends on what is important in the context.

My second comment is with regard to the possibility of further examination by non-Japanese scholars of the issue of Sino-Japanese characters (*kanji*) in Shinto terminology and contexts. For example, the characters making up the expression *kokugaku* 国学 have nothing innately connecting them with “native” or “indigenous” (*dochaku* 土着), with the result that in an English context the expression *kokugaku* is a foreign term possessing no inherent association or connotation by itself. For Japanese speakers, on the other hand, the character *koku* 国 forms part of numerous other related words, like *Kuninotokotachi no mikoto*, *kunitsukami*, *kunitsumi*, *kokuheisha*, *kokka*, *kokutai*, and so forth. These terms appear historically in different ages, and, like *kokugaku*, the meanings often undergo change through the historical process. In this case, the character *koku* or *kuni* 国 can be translated in several ways, namely “terrestrial,” “country,” “provincial,” “nation,” “state,” and so on. Now how can we express the connotation of the character *koku* in English? (This, by the way, is a hurdle similar to the case of a non-Western student facing the root “patri” in terms like “patriot,” “patriarch,” “patriciate,” “patrilocal,” and “patrimony.”)

Moreover, these terms frequently appear in the current Shinto vocabulary, and the character *koku* or *kuni* included in those terms is still open to new interpretations. I think this flexibility to interpret classical, or even mythological terms almost extra-historically within the breadth of connotations possible to the Sino-Japanese ideographic system is, indeed, one of the sources which lets essentialists claim Shinto as “indigenous.”

Concerning this point, I would like to make one quick suggestion. The author translates both *kokuheisha* 国幣社—both those under the ancient Jingikan and those regulated by the Meiji government—as “National Shrines” (34, 374). However, I believe the ancient *kokuheisha* regulated in *Engishiki* in 927 should be interpreted as “provincial shrines.”

The author describes the dividing of the official shrines or *kansha* 官社 into the *kanpeisha* 官幣社 and *kokuheisha* in 798 like this: “While the Jingikan was originally responsible for all these shrines, as of 798 it began delegating responsibility for the National Shrines to provincial governors” (35). In her chronology, she writes, “798: After 798, provincial governors assume responsibility for the provincial shrines” (575). On the other hand, the character *koku* 国 in *kokuheisha* was given a double meaning, that is, both “provincial” and “national,” when the official shrine system or *kansha seido* was revived by the Meiji government. This duality was already pointed out as the explanation of *kokuhei* in *Shintō daijiten* (Heibonsha, 1937). And this fact may be important for understanding the government’s modernizing intentions in that revival.

According to my understanding, within Hardacre’s view of Shinto’s historical continuity, the Jingikan’s existence as an official institution, even in periods when that existence is only nominal or virtual, seems to form a crucial axis. This view of history is well worth consideration for scholarly work on Shinto regardless of the researcher’s status inside or outside Japan. But to tell the truth, I feel that what Hardacre depicts is not merely a historical description of Shinto, but an overall image of the relationship between kami and the Japanese people. Again, I expect that Hardacre’s magnum opus will be recognized for many years as an unprecedented work that most successfully comprehends the breadth of Shinto studies both inside and outside Japan.

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