

Aspects of Shinto in Japanese Communication*

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A person's religious view is one of the elements that strongly influences his or her guiding principle in daily communication. In this essay, the author focuses on Shinto and attempts to conceptualize its influence on aspects of Japanese daily life and communication. First, the author reviews Shinto's definitions, types of modern Shinto, the concept of *kami* (gods), the-other-world-views, reverence of nature, worship of ancestors, *musubi* (the mystical power of becoming or creation), and purity. Then, the author proposes two communication models based on a Shinto perspective: (1) *kan'no* (responding to nature as a deity) as intrapersonal communication; and (2) the sense of oneness with *kami* achieved by carrying *mikoshi* (a portable Shinto shrine) in *matsuri* festival.

Introduction

Sound human communication is being confronted with crises because of environmental disruption, superficial human relationships in society, or inhumane crimes. In such a time, it seems meaningful to rethink what we live by, and to what we owe our appreciation for our existence in this world. A person's religious view is one of the elements that strongly influences his or her guiding principle in daily communication. For example, Wakimoto (1990) states that religious worldview not only inspires a person's way of life, but also sways his or her value judgment and decision making. Among various religious and cultural views held, for most Japanese people, Shinto¹ has had the greatest influence on their communication as the nucleus of their mental and behavioral culture with its simplicity (e.g., Irwin, 1996; Tsujimura, 1987). In the multiplex structure of Japanese culture and communication, Ishii (1997) argues that the sense of awe to the souls of the deceased and worshiping nature come first and then based on them, Shinto comes.

Since Shinto does not have any doctrine written in words and is so taken for granted in life, it is difficult for Japanese people to explain clearly what Shinto is. Shinto, however, has been a faith ingrained in most Japanese people. For example, in the rice-growing society in ancient Japan, Shinto was a faith that every member in the community had when they prayed for the success of the

harvest. Modern Japanese people also give thanks to *kami* for their rich rice crops, and pray at the Shinto shrine for their desires to be met or their sickness to be cured. In this sense, Shinto might be “this-life-oriented.” Its fundamental faith is simple: to appreciate deities as a consolation of mind and feel honest delight to feel oneness with deities.

In many Japanese peoples’ minds, Shinto also lives in harmony with other religions. For example, many Japanese go to the Shinto shrine on New Year’s Day, celebrate Christmas, and attend Buddhist style funerals, and believe in fortune-telling stemming from the philosophy of *Yin* and *Yang*. In this regard, Yanagawa (1991) points out that the Japanese are not particular about the doctrine of a religion and do not take it seriously as a system for which to argue. Therefore, a Japanese person can be both *ujiko* (local residents worshipping the same guardian deity) of a Shinto shrine and a supporter of a Buddhist temple. Furthermore, Earhart (1984) contends that “[f]or Japanese, religion is not a mathematical addition of individual components, it is a way of life that is constructed and supported by most of the individual components. A Japanese person does not have to ‘join’ one religious tradition and thereby reject all others” (p. 23).

With the image of State Shinto, however, Shinto has a tragic history of being seen as radical. Especially during World War II, Shinto was used to support militarism. In this regard, Earhart (1982) claims, “[t]he emphatically national character of Shinto was overexaggerated by Western scholars who have studied Shinto during its nationalistic phase from about 1867 to 1945. It is now time for reevaluation of Shinto in more balanced terms” (p. 36). In contrast with the image of State Shinto, Shinto’s worldview is essentially quite simple. According to Honda (1985), Shinto is a home of the spirit for most of Japanese, and is a religion to sense as it is. Shinto purely worships *kami* (gods), nature, and ancestors. Shinto additionally regards us as children of *kami*, and assumes that anything that is thought to have a spirit in this universe could be *kami*.

In this essay, the author will attempt to conceptualize Shinto’s influence on the aspects of Japanese daily life and communication of which Japanese people are “somehow” conscious. First, the author will review Shinto’s definitions, types of modern Shinto, the concept of *kami*, the-other-world-views, reverence of nature, worship of ancestors, concepts of *musubi* (the mystical power of becoming or creation) and purity. Then, the author will propose two communication models based on a Shinto perspective: (1) *kan’no* (responding to nature as a deity) as intrapersonal communication; and (2) the sense of oneness with *kami* achieved by carrying *mikoshi* (a portable Shinto shrine) in *matsuri* festival.

Shinto

Shinto, written in two Chinese characters *shin* (*kami* or gods) and *to* (way), literally means the way of *kami*. In other words, Shinto means “to live following the mind of *kami* as a way,” which is called *kannagara*. The ancient Japanese did not originally have a name for their own native religion. Kamata (2000) points out that the awareness of something like Shinto already existed in the Paleolithic era, and its trace began to be seen in the Jomon period (13,000-300 B.C.). For example, clay figures shaped like a wild boar, a snake, or a deer stood for the sense of awe and gratitude to *kami*. Additionally, the design of a whirl of thunder on the earthenware stood for the cycle or power of nature. In these works, the traces of faiths of animism and shamanism can be seen.

The origin of Shinto’s prototype seems to have been developed in the Yayoi period (300 B.C.-300 A.D.). For example, Anzu (1971) interprets the origin of today’s Shinto prototype as being from the Yayoi period, when the custom of rice growing, which needed the harmonious cooperation between human beings and nature, was widespread. Additionally, from the viewpoint of *matsuri* development in a rice-growing community, Asoya (1994) contends that it is appropriate to see the Yayoi period as the origin of Shinto since it is thought that people began to offer rice to *kami* to pray for abundant rice crops.

Historically, one of the important events for Shinto was the introduction of Buddhism from Paeché to the Yamato Imperial Court in the sixth century (538 A.D.). Since then, the word “Shinto” has been used to distinguish the native and traditional Japanese belief from Buddhism. After the late years of the Nara period, the tendency of amalgamation of Shinto and Buddhism (Shinto-Buddhist synthesis) came to be seen. Because Shinto was principally based on nature worship and Buddhism was not a theistic doctrine, there was no contradiction in synthesizing them. After the late Nara period, the Buddhist theory of *honji-suijaku* (the theory that gods in Shinto are Japanese incarnations of Buddhist deities) was pervasive. *Honji-suijaku* was based on the relationship between Buddha’s noumenal (*honji*) aspects and *kami*’s phenomenal (*suijaku*) aspects, and considered *kami* as manifest traces (*suijaku*) of the original substance (*honji*) of Buddha and bodhisattvas. For example, *Hachiman* was considered both *kami* for Shinto and bodhisattva for Buddhism. Later on, almost every Shinto shrine considered its enshrined *kami* as the counterpart of some Buddhist divinity. Furthermore, it became customary to enshrine statues of such Buddhist counterparts in Shinto shrines.

Shinto Defined

Shinto can be said to be, in one sense, Japan's indigenous, traditional, and folk religion. However, since Shinto does not have any founder or dogma and does not propagate, it is not a "religion" in the same way as Buddhism or Christianity is. For most Japanese people, it is a part of one's life rather than a religion. Hirai's (2001) definition will be helpful to make it clear:

Shinto is primarily a traditional religious practice which was born based on the concept of *kami* by ancient Japanese people and has been developed among Japanese people, and a person's attitude toward life and philosophy to support such a practice. Except in some schools of Sect Shinto, Shinto is a faith or belief spontaneously generated without any founder, and a folk religion born and grown on the soil of Japan. The concept of *kami* in Shinto is basically polytheism and includes the practices of prayer, festivals, asceticism, and social activities. (p. 674; Translated by Hara)

Hirai (2001) further states that Shinto is deeply interrelated with Japanese people's life as an essential value system and a way of thinking rather than established theology or philosophy.

Additionally, Hirano's (1997) definition contributes to Japanese people's image and awareness of their religious practices with regard to *kami*:

Shinto is the comprehensive term which describes the system of traditionally transmitted social behavior and its products which the Japanese people developed in the course of their communal life, as a means for expressing thanks to the *kami* for their blessings, while attempting to submit themselves to the will of the *kami*, as demonstrated through the celebration of *matsuri* (festival), folk performance, and in the ordinary activities of everyday life. (p. 57)

The point suggested in this definition is that Shinto can be seen as religious awareness and practices that naturally stay with modern Japanese people in their daily lives, rather than as a religion strictly to believe in and follow. To put it more concretely, Shinto refers to a religious awareness that puts the highest value on oneness with deities such as *kami*, nature, or ancestors' souls in order to live sincerely and to maintain our life energy.

Types of Shinto in Modern Times

Shinto is mainly classified into three types: Shrine Shinto, Sect Shinto, and Folk Shinto.

Shrine Shinto. Shrine Shinto, based particularly on worship of the *kami* at local shrines (*jinja*), is the oldest type of Shinto and has played an important role in the unification and solidarity of the nation and rural society. While the Shinto shrine has no founder, it possesses an organization by its parishioners, believers, and others. It also has festivals and other religious practices which are rooted in Shinto traditions and Japanese myth, all centered on the spiritual unification of the shrines (Eliade, 1987). In this sense, as Picken (1994) explains, "Shinto is indeed a religion that is 'caught' rather than 'taught,' its insights 'perceived' before they are 'believed,' its basic concepts 'felt' rather than 'thought'" (p. xxxii). According to Asoya (1996), there are two types of roles in Shrine Shinto. The first type refers to the shrine as a community with village, town, or nation, which is called *ujigami*, *ubusuna-gami*, or *chinshu-no-yashiro*. The second type is individual or family-based, and called the Shrine of *kanjo*, such as the Shrine of *hachiman* (the word hachiman originally means absolute) or the Shrine of *inari* (a tutelary deity of rice cultivation and the five grains), where *kami* and *hotoke* are worshiped.

Sect Shinto. Sect Shinto can be classified into two categories: Sect Shinto and New Sect Shinto. Sect Shinto is the term for the Shinto movement centering upon 13 sects, each with its own leader, formed during the 19th century. These are classified into five types based on their characteristics (e.g., Eliade, 1987; Hirai, 2001). The first is the mountain-worship sects such as *Jikkokyo*, *Fusokyo*, and *Ontakekyo*, which grew out of the cult of Mount Fuji or Mount Ontake. The second is faith-healing sects, which are groups formed around a founder and his religious experience and activities: *Kurozumikyo*, *Konkokyo*, and *Tenrikyo*. The third is purification sects, which are groups that perpetuate the traditional purification with water to cultivate body and mind: *Shinshukyo* and *Misogikyo*. The fourth is Confucian sects, which are groups arising from the combination of Confucianism and Revival Shinto: *Shinto Shuseiha* and *Shinto Taiseikyo*. The fifth is Revival Shinto sects, those which grew out of Restoration Shinto or in which its influence is strong: *Izumo Oyashirokyo*, *Shinrikyo*, and *Shinto Taikyo*.

Sect Shintos' membership was based on an individual's religious experience or on Revival Shinto. These groups generally do not have shrines, but use churches as the center of religious activities instead. Since the end of World War II and the dissolution of government control over the sects, these groups and their churches experienced repeated schisms combined with the appearance of new, Shinto-derived religions, producing a complicated picture (Eliade, 1987). In the case of New Sect Shinto, they are characterized by shamanistic leadership, syncretism of religious and philosophical beliefs, closely knit social

organization, and individualism. Some groups even show characteristics of monotheism, in the extreme case making a compromise among Buddhism, Confucianism, and folk faiths such as the *Yin-Yang* school.

Folk Shinto. Folk Shinto is a Shinto faith that was customarily practiced by common people without being systematized. It does not have any official teaching or social organization, nor does it have a doctrine or dogma. Thus, Folk Shinto is also connected to other types of Shinto. Folk Shinto is based on the aspects of Japanese folk beliefs, and derives mainly from three sources (Eliade, 1987). First are the survived ancient traditions such as divination, magical shamanic rituals, and folk medicines. The second aspects are basic elements of Shinto, such as customs of abstinence and purification rites as well as worship of house and field deities. In particular, the second aspects are believed in by many Japanese people. The third are syncretism of Shinto, with beliefs from foreign religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and medieval Catholicism. Among these three types of Folk Shinto, the second is the most common among ordinary people.

These three varieties of Shinto are mutually interrelated. The main difference between Shrine Shinto and Folk Shinto is a matter of scale and strength or weakness of organization. Festivals and the intent of their practices are indistinguishable in many cases. Furthermore, most Sect Shinto believers are also *ujiko* (parishioners) of Shrine Shinto, as well as practitioners of Folk Shinto.

The Concept of *Kami*

In ancient times, people seemed to stand in awe of the profound and mysterious supernaturalism, and worshiped such supernatural powers as *kami*. For example, ancient Japanese people thought that good rice crops were given by the blessing of nature, and they gradually felt that there was some kind of deity as *kami* in nature. When thunder was rumbling, they thought *kami* was angry. In addition, they felt that there was some kind of spirit in natural objects such as the sun, mountains, rivers, trees, and even rocks which gives human beings a source of life or a place to pray for good harvest. Such animistic beliefs created a sense of *kami* in their mind.

Kami, which is often translated as “god” in English, does not have the sense of “God” in the Judeo-Christian use. *Kami* in Shinto is polytheistic, and has been perceived by the Japanese as “something thankful and a merciful being” who bestows blessings on one’s life (Bunce, 1955, p. 100). Ono (1962) defines the term *kami* as “an honorific for noble, sacred spirits, which implies a sense of adoration for their virtues and authority” (p. 6). In Shinto, varieties of *kami* are classified into three types. The first is *kami* of nature, such as *kami* of mountain,

kami of water, and *kami* of fire. The second is *kami* in myths, such as *Amaterasu Omikami* or *Ohkuni Nushinokami*. The third is *kami* of holy persons, such as the Meiji Emperor, Ieyasu Tokugawa, or those who had made great contributions to our society. However, for ordinary people, as Earhart (1984) argues, “[t]he notion of *kami* is very flexible, including whatever within and beyond the world, that is extraordinary, in the sense of being sacred and providing the abundance of life. The term *kami* can be either singular or plural and may be translated as ‘gods,’ ‘spirits,’ or ‘the sacred’ in general” (p. 50).

The Japanese concept of *kami* has three unique characteristics. One unique point is that there is no almighty *Kami*; each *kami* has its specialized field. Mainly, *kami* could be categorized into two types, nature *kami* and human *kami* (Abe, 1990). For example, the former has been essential for an agricultural life and the latter includes worshiped ancestors or historical heroes. From the viewpoint of each *kami*'s profession, *kami* can be categorized into *kami* of function and *kami* of protection. The former includes *kami* of agriculture, *kami* of fishery, or *kami* of commerce or industry that protect human life. The latter includes *kami* of *uji* (lineage of a family) or *kami* of a village, that support human beings' prosperity and well-being.

Another point is that *kami* of different backgrounds polytheistically coexist in this universe. Additionally, *kami* could even make a group. One interesting example is the Seven *Kami* of Good Fortune, organized from the middle period to modern times in Japan. At first, there was only one fortune *kami*. Later on, however, it became *Ebisu* and *Daikoku*. Then *Bishamonten* and *Benzaiten* were added, *Hotei* followed, and finally *Jurojin* and *Fukurokuju* completed the group. *Ebisu* was the only Japanese *kami* that came from the sea; *Daikoku* was a *kami* of the kitchen in the Tendai Temple. *Bishamonten* and *Benzaiten* also belonged in the heaven of Buddhism. *Hotei* was a Chinese monk and an incarnation of maitreya. *Jurojin* and *Fukurokuju* were *kami* of a star in Taoism. These *kami* are prayed to together in some places, and individually in other places.

The third point is that Japanese people have created *kami* for themselves, and even added or changed its function depending on their needs. For example, Japanese people worship a holy or influential person as *kami*, besides worshipping their ancestors. Sugawara-no-Michizane (845-903) is deified as *kami* of studies in Kitano Tenmangu. On the other hand, in the case of the Seven *Kami* of Good Fortune, although *Ebisu*, *Daikoku*, and *Benzaiten* were originally violent *kami*, Japanese people came to see them as guardian deities (e.g., Miyata, 1996). Furthermore, *kami* is born from the feeling of appreciation that people have in their daily life. For example, Japanese people see *kami* of the kitchen, *kami* of fire, and *kami* of water in their house to guard them from dangers (e.g. Uryu & Shibuya, 1996).

In conclusion, in the sense of Shinto *kami*, *kami* is close to human beings.

Kami is not an object to strictly believe in and follow, but is based on something supernatural and superhuman that human beings perceive to be around them. While Japanese people have a proverb, “Humans turn to *kami* in times of distress,” they also have a proverb, “The *kami* left alone do not curse” (Let sleeping dogs lie). Based on their intuitive awareness, Japanese people feel that *kami* is everywhere, and traditionally, the Japanese assume the presence of *kami* as naturally as they see beauty and fertility in nature; no conscious act of faith is needed. They have, however, expressed their appreciation by prayer and *matsuri* offered to *kami*. Furthermore, ancestors are worshipped as *kami* from folklore viewpoints. This will be argued in a later section.

Shinto's The-Other-Worldviews after Death

Shinto's time worldview is based on one's previous life, this world, and the afterlife. These worlds are not seen as being strictly separated. It is thought that people in this world can communicate with their ancestors' souls (spirits) via a shaman. However, Shinto's space worldview has two types. The first is the folklore view that the ancestors' souls are in the mountain. The second was developed in ancient times and its cosmology is divided into this world and the other worlds. Seeing the worldview of ancient Shinto (Shinto in the period before it came to be influenced by Buddhism), two types of cosmological worldviews existed in regard to life and death. The first type was based on a vertical and three-dimensional idea consisting of *Takama-ga (no)-hara* (the plain of high heaven), *Nakatsu-kuni* (middle land, the world of human kind), and *Yomi* (under-world of pollution, the land of the dead). The second type saw the universe as horizontal and two-tiered with *Tokoyo* (the world where the purified spirits of the dead reside) and the world of human kind. *Tokoyo* was believed to be far beyond the sea. However, in common views of Shinto by modern people, it is thought that we could always face the soul of an ancestor at one's family Buddhist altar. In such a sense, the position between a human and the soul of an ancestor is by land. Additionally, some people even think the ancestors are watching us somewhere in this world (Anzu, 1986). The third is the view that the world of *Tokoyo* is far away beyond the sea. This view is especially believed in Okinawa, and is called *niraikanai*.

Reverence of Nature

In an island country and also a mountainous country like Japan, ancient people lived in agricultural life in a village community staying in one place. Natural phenomena were crucial for harvest, and people felt a supernatural power in changeable weather. When they had a rich harvest, they felt that it was *kami*'s blessing. However, when they were faced with the supernatural power of nature such as a heavy rain, an earthquake, a flood, a heavy snowfall,

or a landslide, they felt *kami* was angry. In such a sense, *kami* did not necessarily have to be invisible. Sometimes, they felt the supernatural power stayed even in trees or stones. For example, such as in *Nihonshoki* ("Historical Record of Japan" written in 720 A.D.), there was a statement that the trees and weeds uttered, and in *Hitachi-no-kuni-fudoki* ("A record of Everyday Life in the Hitachi District" written in 713 A.D.), grasses, stones, and trees talked (Mitsuhashi, 1995). As people defied nature and felt the existence of *kami* with them, the concept of *musubi* (the spirit of birth and becoming) came to be realized (Minamoto, 1985). In regard to whether nature itself is *kami* or not, it is commonly thought that in ancient times, nature itself was seen as *kami*, but gradually, it came to be seen that *kami* is in nature and later, that *kami* has the power to control nature (Ueda, 1991).

From the viewpoint of Shinto, nature itself is seen to have a spirit and life. For example, Japanese people have looked upon even a tree, a rock, or a river in nature as a figure of life. Kamata (2000) argues that the Japanese word *inochi* connotes the dynamic motion, flow, and circulation of all the universe. Likewise, people also felt respect toward the mountains and worshipped the mountains as a sacred place where *kami* stays. The consistent underlying assumption to such a view of nature among Japanese people is that Japanese people feel that they do not live in nature, but live under nature and its divine protection.

Worship of Ancestors

Ancient Japanese people believed that the soul of the deceased would not go far away from their world. They believed that the soul of ancestors stayed in the mountain, watching over the lives of its descendants, and would come back to his or her house during the New Year's Festival (*Shogatsu*). With such a view, they were conscious of interaction with ancestors' feeling as if the soul of ancestors had been close to them (e.g., *Jinja Honcho*, 2000). In this way, they worshiped their ancestors as *kami*. When the souls of ancestors came back, they made a fire or had the Festivals for the Souls (*Mitama-Matsuri*) to treat the ancestors' souls. Especially, such a feeling of worshipping their ancestors as *kami* stemmed from the appreciation for the ancestors who left rice fields as an invaluable gift for ancestors to take care of their rice harvest (Honda, 1985). This is the origin of the worship of ancestors.

Folklore studies such as those done by Yanagita (1975) argue that the substance of the soul of ancestors will be the *kami* of the mountain (*yama-no-kami*). Some ancient people believed that the soul of the deceased would go into the mountain, and would be the *kami* of the mountain. In an agricultural community, the souls of ancestors were believed to come to Earth as the *kami* of the rice field (*ta-no-kami*) in order to watch the growth of the rice plants,

and then go back to the mountain as the *kami* of the mountain. As the community became like a country, they began to offer prayers for *ujigami* (a tutelary guardian), *kami* of the clan of the families. *Uji* refers to a group consisting of blood-related families, and *ujigami* was originally believed to be their ancestors (Iwai, 2002).

There are two types of ancestors in their worshipping style. One is the souls of ancestors (*sorei*), which refers to the souls of departed ancestors that were purified after a fixed period years. It is generally believed that it takes 33 years after a person's death, but some prefectures or areas believe it takes 17, 49, or even 55 years (Sonoda, 1995). Such a soul of ancestors will lose the person's own characteristics and will be absorbed in the body of souls of ancestors called *mitamasama* (Honda, 1985). They are prayed to at a household Shinto altar (Uryu & Shibuya, 1996). The souls of ancestors who passed away less than 33 years ago are also often called *hotoke* in Buddhist terms, and are prayed to at a Buddhist altar.² Family members talk and pray to ancestors in front of a Buddhist altar, imagining the ancestor's figures of his or her lifetime. On the days of *Bon* festival (in many areas, from August 13 to 15) and *Higan* (a seven-day period with the spring or autumn equinox falling on the middle day) as well as New Year's Festival, all of the souls of ancestors are believed to come back to this world. On such days, there are ceremonies and events to communicate with ancestors, and ancestors' descendants will receive providence.

Although there is no common view in regard to where the souls of ancestors are, according to Anzu (1986), Japanese people have a sense that the souls of ancestors stay with them, and are always accessible to them, and it such a sense is an emotional support. The Shinto or Buddhist altar is not only the place to pray but also the place where Japanese can share the sense of staying together with the souls of ancestors. They are engaged in intrapersonal communication with the souls of ancestors in front of the Buddhist altar. There, people are conscious of the existence and blessing of ancestors and talk to them, praying for their desires or reporting what they experienced. In daily communication, ancestor worship in such a sense also plays an important role in regulating morals. This is represented in expressions such as "gosenzosama ni moushiwake nai" (I am sorry for my faults, my ancestors) as well as in expressions appreciating ancestors such as "gosenzosama no okagede" (thanks to the ancestor's providence). Additionally, by praying and offering foods to the altar, people not only show their feeling of appreciation but also support the ancestor so that the soul's power and rank will be higher in the other world. Therefore, Japanese people have both ancestor memorialism and ancestor worship (Smith, 1996). It is concluded that communicative consciousness of the providence of ancestors not only let us feel the relationship by blood by ancestors but also gave us relief from providence in our daily life.

Admired Concepts in Shinto

Musubi. Shinto originated from an agricultural society that had attached great importance on producing life, and felt an enormous power and energy to produce life in nature. This concept is called *musubi*. According to Yamakage (2000), *musubi* means the birth and growth of life and spirituality. *Musubi* comprehensively covers concepts such as creation of energy, reproductive power, unity with people, fertility, and prosperity (Honda, 1985). There are Japanese words whose origin is from *musubi*. For example, we call a son and daughter *musuko* and *musume*, who are born as a result of *musubi* between male and female. Another example is a triangular rice ball, which is called *omusubi*. The reason why Japanese people make triangular rice balls stems from the shape of the mountain. Ancient people tried to put the power of *musubi* in the mountain into their bodies by eating mountain-like *omusubi* (Yamagishi, 1995). Yamakage (2000) states that, in order to intensify the power of *musubi*, a person should be engaged in health management, growth of mind, and purification of spirituality.

Misogi and Harai for Purity. In Shinto, purity is given great emphasis, and impurity is seen as taboo. The purity in Shinto refers to the purity of mind rather than cleanliness of the body. Behind such faith, there is a view that any life in this universe is born from water, and the view of purification that water washes away any evil and sin and purifies us (Honda, 1985). An activity with a prayer to purify oneself is called *harai* (its verb form is *harau*). Also, to purify with water is called *misogi*. The undesirable state of not being purified is called *kegare* (impurity). *Harai* is also performed with *norito* (a Shinto prayer), the words of which are seen to have a power called *kotodama* (the soul of a word which has supernatural power). A unique point in Shinto's purification is that impurity or sin of a person is seen like a material which could be removed by *misogi* or *harai* (Yamakage, 2000).

As we have seen, the essential characteristic of Shinto is to produce life energy based on the concept of *musubi*, under the divine providence deities such as *kami*, nature, and the souls of ancestors. The following sections will argue the implications of Shinto's worldview for Japanese communication practices, taking into consideration the aspects of worldview that have been argued by Shinto.

Kan'no (Responding to Nature as a Deity) as Intrapersonal Communication Views of Nature by Japanese People

The sense of Shinto arises from responding to nature. This kind of response, which is called *kan'no* in Japanese, means responding to nature feeling in awe of it in one's mind. In his book *Fudo* (Climate and Culture), Watsuji (1979) argued that Japanese people who have been confronted with severe monsoon climates that have both torrid and frigid zones have cultivated a passive and patient personality. Such a personality has been created through *kan'no* to nature.

When Japanese people feel the blessing of nature, they feel they are at one with *kami*. One of the places where the sense of deities of nature is strongly sensed is in the forest of the Shinto shrine, which is called *chinju no mori* (village shrine). In the forest, the existence of *kami* is felt, although there is no idolized figure or shape of *kami* there. Kubota (1997) views such a sense as follows:

Nature in the woods or forest produces life energy, and if there is a tall and large tree of a deity, we feel that *kami* comes down to earth, and we feel the existence of *kami* as a sense. This sense makes Japanese people's view of nature equal to their religious views (pp. 27-28; Translated by Hara).

How this sense is blessed is seen in the Buddhist priest Saigyo's (1118-90) famous *waka* poem read in Ise Shrine: "I don't know what resides here, but tears fall in appreciation for it." Another example is that when Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975), a historian, went and worshiped at the Ise Shrine, he wrote, "Here in this holy place I feel the underlying unity of all religions."

Constructing *Kan'no* (Response to Deities) Communication Model

In order to visually consolidate the image of *kan'no*, the author attempts to conceptualize the process of *kan'no*, which leads to the creation of the sense of the worship of nature as dignity. This model is based on message processing at the intrapersonal communication level. The dotted line in the center stands for a human being who is in the process of *kan'no* communication. The dotted line used to represent a person means that a person is originally a part of nature. In contrast to a monotheistic religious worldview, Shinto's polytheistic worldview does not have a boundary between ecological communication and spiritual communication.

First, curved arrows around Person A stand for the process of sensing the existence of supernatural powers by deities. After feeling the blessings of supernatural deities, Person A will be engaged in message processing by feeling

the pleasure of living in nature, and will think of some issues in his or her daily life and have some ideas of soul-searching. Sometimes, internal self-feedback is repeated to make his or her mind clear. After being refreshed and recomposed, Person A feels and recognizes himself or herself as being a part of nature, and feeling at one with nature. Then Person A realizes a sense of relief feeling at one with nature. Such a sense of appreciation for nature will make Person A realize the weight of life, and produces modest moral sense to consider other people, animals, plants and so on, all of which have life. This will lead to Person A's ethical behavior with reverence of nature, sympathy to all creatures, strong work ethics, etc. Although the author describes the process of *kan'no* with each component such as nature or Person A to clarify it from the viewpoint of intrapersonal communication, the ultimate state of *kan'no* is that each component will turn into "oneness," which is beyond description with words.

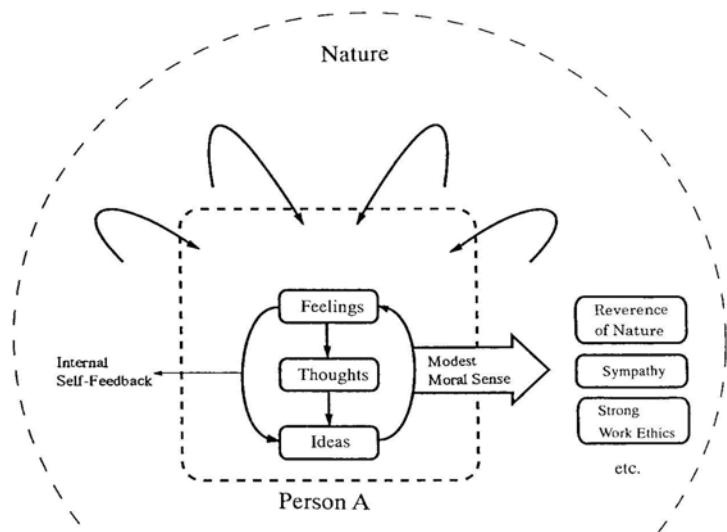


Figure 1. “Kan’no” (Responding to Nature as a Deity) Communication Model

Matsuri (Festival) as a Communication Event: To Have a Sense of Oneness with Kami

Japanese life is enriched with a variety of *matsuri* every year. *Matsuri* can be classified into three types. One is related to a traditional Japanese life cycle, which has been viewed based on the changes of seasons related to rice cultivation. The origin of this type of *matsuri* was to humbly serve and entertain *kami*, praying for enriched harvest. Even today, Japanese people celebrate *Kinensai* (a festival praying for the year's harvest) in spring, and *Niinamesai* (a festival to appreciate *kami* for good harvest in fall). Another type of *matsuri* is seen as a community event. For example, *matsuri* to pray to *ubusuna kami* (a *kami* in the local community where a person is born) is included this type. The last type of *matsuri* is related to a person's life ceremony in phases of life. A child is born protected by *ubugami* (*kami* to protect a newborn baby) until seven days pass, and after that, the baby will be named. Thirty-one days after a boy's birth and 33 days after a girl's, the baby is brought to a Shinto shrine to be admitted as a son or daughter of the local shrine. After that, the child celebrates *hinamatsuri* (for girls) or *tango no sekku* (for boys) every year, *shichigosan* (taking a child of seven, five, and three years of age to the Shinto shrine to thank *kami* for their health and pray for their happiness), and *seijinshiki* (Coming-of-Age Day) when they are 20 years old. Furthermore, they celebrate a person's long life (for example, 60 years old is called *kanreki*), and receive *harai* (purification) at the ages of 25, 42, and 60 years old for men, and 19, 33, and 49 years old for women. In such ways, a personal level of events is seen as an individual *matsuri* (see Jinjahoncho, 1997, for details).

Kami Matsuri

Kami Matsuri is in a sense, the most sacred communication with *kami*. Customarily, *matsuri* begins with the Shinto priest's *imigomori* (to live in sacred Seclusion for several days) when he will serve the *kami*. After that, he is most purified, and he calls *kami* with the sacred vocalization "oh" and opens the doors of the shrine. Then, he offers food such as rice, sake, fish, vegetables, and fruit, along with symbolic offerings of pine branches with white paper strips attached. He also shows his gratitude to the *kami* by dedicating *norito* prayer. Then the priest who has received the highest spiritual power from *kami* prays for *kami* by offering *tamagushi* (a branch of sacred tree with zigzag strips of paper called shide). After festival events finish, with the sacred vocalization again, he closes the doors of the shrine and has a ceremony so that *kami* will go back to heaven (see Honda, 1985, for details).

The Meaning and Function of *Matsuri* in a Community

The word origin of *matsuru* (verb form of *matsuri*) includes two meanings: *matsu*, to wait for the coming of *kami*, and *matsurau*, to serve the *kami*. Originally, it meant to wait for *kami*'s coming, wait on *kami*, and welcome *kami* (Sonoda, 1988). For modern Japanese, however, Sonoda (1988) states that *matsuri* does not require to strictly believe in *kami*; its sense is “*matsuri* comes before its belief.” Rather, through jubilant *matsuri* in a community, people come to be awakened to the world of *kami*.

For those who share the atmosphere of *matsuri*, *matsuri* is not simply a religious event. Rather, as Oguchi and Hori's (1973) definition illustrates, Japanese people's sense of *matsuri* is:

We call events *matsuri* of something, in which people flock together expecting some kind of non-daily refreshment. Everyone participates in it in some way, enjoying the sense of excitement and freedom from daily life and one another. (p. 684; Translated by Hara)

Through *matsuri*, the daily communication style of the participants is dissolved and forgotten, and daily social relationships will be set free, mingled, and purified, to feel the sense of unity among them (Sugiyama, 1988). It is thought that the more exciting, the better it is.

Matsuri also has spiritual meaning. Through *matsuri* festival, people activate their life energy which has been decreased in their daily life. In daily life, the state when people's energy is used up is called *kegare*. The word *kegare* has two meaning; impurity and the drying up of *ke* (life energy). In Shinto, the state of *kegare* is disliked the most because it could be associated with the troubles of evils, or even death. In *matsuri* festival, people hold a ceremony and eat a meal with *kami* (called *shinjin kyoushoku*). As a result, they restore, replenish, and refresh the energy in their soul; this is *matsuri*. Such a state of context is called *hare* (grand occasion) in contrast with *ke* (the state of daily life of the individual or community, or the energy which supports this daily life).

A Sense of Oneness with *Kami* Achieved By Carrying *Mikoshi* in *Matsuri*

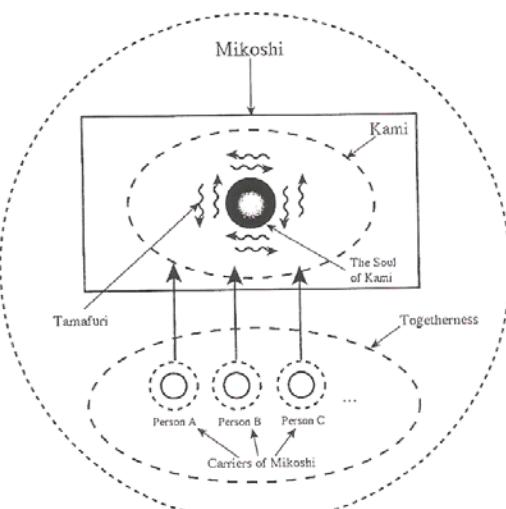
In Shinto, maintenance of the soul is essential. Behind such a belief, there is an ancient people's view that life was maintained when *tama* (soul) was inside a body; death meant that the soul had left from the body. The soul of *kami* is also seen to divide into pieces and increase (called *tamafiyu*), attaching the soul of a person to be unified into one (called *tamafure*), and to come down to us to possess us (Honda, 1985).

One of the events to increase the power of the soul is carrying *mikoshi* (a

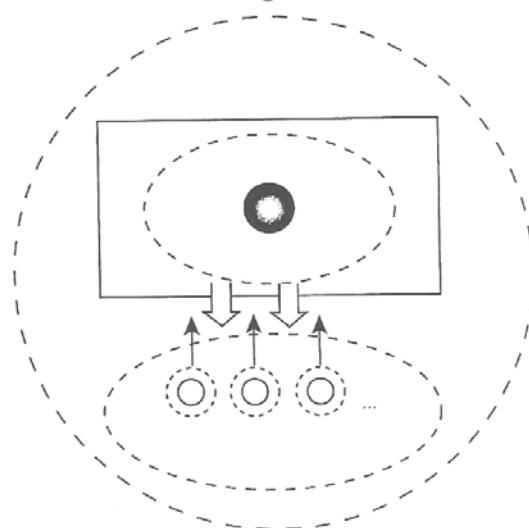
port able Shinto shrine) in a *matsuri* in local Shrine community. For the members in a community, the parade of carrying *mikoshi* is, in one sense, a most exciting event, whether each member actually carries it or not. Carrying *mikoshi* is for *tamafuri*, which means to wave up and down, right and left the soul of *kami* so as to enhance its dignified power. By carrying *mikoshi* aggressively, it is thought that the power of *kami* is increased, and as a result, the power of life of any creature is strengthened and we can expect good health and a rich harvest. Shinto respects and puts high value on the intense energy of life with the thought of *musubi* (the mystical power of becoming or creation of life energy).

The spiritual meaning of carrying *mikoshi* as *tamafuri* means to eventually feel a sense of oneness with *kami*. This is the process of “re-recognizing” the sense of oneness with *kami* and receiving life energy from *kami*. As was mentioned in the section on *kan’no*, the sense of oneness with a deity is an ideal state. The whole process of communication between people and *kami* through carrying *mikoshi* could be described with the following model constructed by the author. In the terms of *matsuri*, participants of a community purify themselves and share the same meal with *kami*. Under such prepared conditions, they began to carry *mikoshi*.

Stage I in Figure 2 explains the activity of carrying *mikoshi* for the purpose of *tamafuri* by those who carry it. The darkest circle in the square represents the soul of *kami*, and each pair of wavy arrows represents *tamafuri* stimulating the soul of *kami*. The square enclosing the soul of *kami* is the *mikoshi*. The carriers of *mikoshi* are expressed with dotted circles to indicate that they are children of *kami*. The number of carriers of *mikoshi* depends on the size of *mikoshi*. The soul of each person is represented with white, which stands for the energy of the soul that is drying in a state of *kegare*. The activity of carrying *mikoshi* as *tamafuri* with respect to *kami* is described with arrows up to *mikoshi*. The large dotted line encircling the whole figure shows that the sense of oneness with *kami* is being weakened because of *kegare* by human beings in daily life. In Stage II, the process that *kami* will come down to the carriers of *mikoshi* is illustrated with outlined arrows pointing down to the carriers. At this stage, the relationship of oneness between *kami* and people is becoming strengthened. Finally, in Stage III, when people participating in *matsuri* feel the peak of excitement, they are unified with *kami*, sharing the power of *kami*’s soul. The state of Stage III stands for people’s sense of oneness with *kami*, which is described with a solid line encircling *kami* and human beings. Each person’s soul has recovered the energy of life with the providence of *kami*, in contrast with the state of Stage I. After the festival, *kami* will go back to the *kam*’s world. People might still enjoy the afterglow of *matsuri*, human relationships in a community are strengthened, and energetic daily life begins again.



Stage I



Stage II

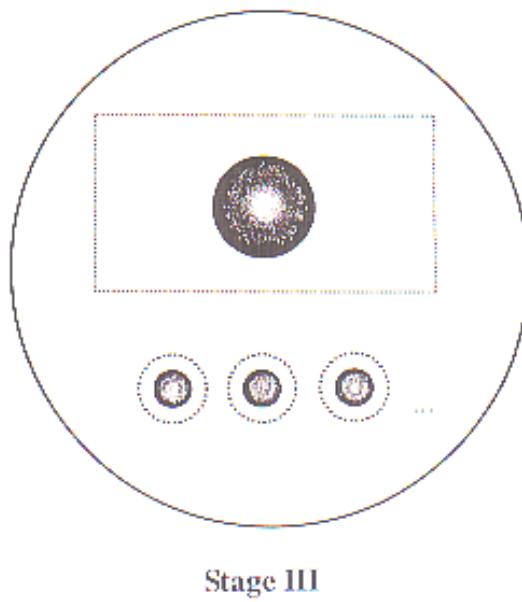


Figure 2. A Model of A Sense of Oneness with *Kami* Achieved by Carrying *Mikoshi*

Conclusion

This essay has outlined the essence of Shinto, and argued both the reverence of nature as *kan’no* (responding to nature as a deity) and sense of oneness with *kami* achieved by carrying *mikoshi* in *matsuri* with the author’s own conceptualized models. As seen in this essay, Shinto’s hope is as Miyazaki (1999) states:

In Shinto, which has been passed from our ancestors as a faith of the Japanese people, it is hoped that we live with nature, treasure ancestors’ spirits, and live in harmony with others. There is a peace of mind in harmony with nature, and a spiritual support in respecting the traditions from our ancestors. Additionally, we have believed that we can have a better life by developing a relationship with others. (p. 64; Translated by Hara)

Before concluding this essay, the author would like to present three points that Shinto's perspectives could contribute to the quality of our daily communication.

First, we should always appreciate the blessing of nature in our daily life, and should suppress desires which could result in environmental disruption. Our sound communication environment is not ensured without the natural resources, and once nature is disrupted, it is difficult to regain what has been lost. If we, however, try to keep nature enriched, we can have opportunities of refreshing communication everywhere, not to mention in Shinto shrines. In modern society with lots of stress, to feel the sense of oneness with nature deities will help us set our stress free and heal ourselves.

Secondly, we should rethink the function of a community for our human relationships. To share oneness with others in a community will be essential in a sound human relationship. For example, in *matsuri* festivals, every member has to cooperate and work with one another in some way to succeed, even with those whom they do not like. In *matsuri*, however, people cannot perform and enjoy *matsuri* without frank communication with others. By carrying *mikoshi*, people could reduce uncertainty with those whom they are not familiar with or who they disliked. Through events, people recognize we live by supporting each other and one another, and in such a sense *matsuri* helps contribute to the harmony in a community (Jinja Honcho, 1998).

Thirdly, we should always have a sense of transmitting communication from our ancestors to our descendants. In Shinto, ancestors' souls are looking after us, and their precepts inherited from them will be at work in our future descendants for generations. Especially in a relationship with close ancestors whom we always keep in mind, Heise (1997) points out the importance that children learn to be modest so as not make the souls of their parents feel sad. In Shinto, there is a *kamidana* (a household Shinto altar) or *butsudan* (a family Buddhist altar) where we can declare to live seriously so that we would not be ashamed to communicate with the souls of ancestors. Such a sense of oneness with ancestors has an educational meaning, making us realize that we have to live an honest life thinking of the succeeding generations.

In conclusion, the essence of Shinto is to feel appreciation for the fact that we are protected by deities such as *kami*, nature, and ancestors, and as a result, we can enhance our life energy. With a sense of gratitude, we should have this feeling of oneness with them in our daily life. For that, we must live honestly and modestly with purity and appreciate the blessings of deities. As Yamakage (2000) states, Shinto is a very simple faith that everyone can accept and practice. The author sincerely hopes that this essay has contributed to clarify aspects of Shinto in spiritual, mental and behavioral culture influencing Japanese communication.

* The author wishes to thank Professor Kunihiko Tasaki, a lecturer of intercultural communication at Meikai University, for his inestimable advice on this essay, and Professor Yoshitaka Miike at Denison University for his constructive comments as a respondent at the IAICS Conference 2003.

Notes

1. Since Shinto implies spontaneous following of the “way of *kami*” and does not have any particular political belief or preaching, the author does not use the term Shintonism in this essay. As we know, -ism is the suffix to refer to “a political belief or religion based on a particular principle or the teachings of a particular person” (Summers, 1978, p. 984).
2. *Hotoke* originally referred to a Buddha who had become enlightened. Japanese people however call the deceased hotoke (with-sama)

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