

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: Shintoism

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URL: https://www.wizanda.com/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=17

Quote:

Brief history of Shinto:

Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion. Starting about 500 BCE (or earlier), it was an amorphous mix of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques, and shamanism." 4 Its name was derived from the Chinese words "shin tao" ("the Way of the Gods") in the 8th Century CE. At that time:

The Yamato dynasty consolidated its rule over most of Japan.

Divine origins were ascribed to the imperial family.

Shinto established itself as an official religion of Japan, along with Buddhism.

The complete separation of Japanese religion from politics did not occur until 1868.

The Emperor was forced by the American army to renounce his divinity at Meiji Shrine in 1869.

Unlike most other religions, Shinto has no real founder, no written scriptures, no sacred law, and only a very loosely-organized priesthood.

Shinto beliefs:

Shinto creation stories tell of the history and lives of the "Kami" (deities). The first couple, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto, who gave birth to the Japanese islands. Their children became the deities of the various Japanese clans. Amaterasu Omikami is one of their daughters. She is the ancestress of the Imperial Family and the Sun goddess. Her shrine is at Ise. Her descendants unified the country. Her brother, Susano-no-mikoto, descended from heaven and roamed throughout the earth. He is famous for killing a giant serpent.

The Kami are the Shinto deities. The word "Kami" is generally translated as "god" or "goddess". The Kami bear little resemblance to the gods of monotheistic religions. They are not omnipotent and do not compare to the Christian beliefs in the wrath of God, his omnipotence and the separation of God from humanity due to sin. There are numerous other deities conceptualized in many forms: Those related to natural objects and creatures, such as trees, rocks, and water.

Guardian Kami of particular areas and clans

Exceptional people, including all but the last of the emperors.

Abstract creative forces

They are seen as generally benign; they sustain and protect the people.

About 84% of the population of Japan follow two religions: both Shinto and Buddhism. Christianity is quite rarely. Fewer than 1% of adults are Christians.

in Japan from Korea and China during the 6th through 8th centuries CE. basic optimism about human nature, and for the world. Within Shinto, the another "Kami". Meanwhile, Buddhism in Japan regarded the Kami as being various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Most weddings are performed by Shinto performed by Buddhist priests.

Shinto does not have as fully developed a theology as do most other religions own moral code. Shintoists generally follow the code of Confucianism.

Their religious texts discuss the "High Plain of Heaven" and the "Dark Land of the dead, but give few details of the afterlife.

Ancestors are deeply revered and worshipped.

All of humanity is regarded as "Kami's child." Thus all human life and human Believers revere "musuhi", the Kamis' creative and harmonizing powers.

"makoto", sincerity or true heart. This is regarded as the way or will of Kami. Morality is based upon that which is of benefit to the group. "Shinto emphasizes sensibility, and attitude." 2

There are "Four Affirmations" in Shinto:

Tradition and the family: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.

Love of nature: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be cleansed. objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.

Physical cleanliness: Followers of Shinto take baths, wash their hands, and often.

"Matsuri": The worship and honor given to the Kami and ancestral spirits.

The desire for peace, which was suppressed during World War II, has been

Shinto practices:

Shinto recognizes many sacred places: mountains, springs, etc.

Each shrine is dedicated to a specific Kami who has a divine personality and prayers of the faithful. When entering a shrine, one passes through a Torii to the Gods. It marks the demarcation between the finite world and the infinite.

In the past, believers practiced "misogi", the washing of their bodies in water. In recent years they only wash their hands and wash out their mouths in a well within the shrine grounds.

Believers respect animals as messengers of the Gods. A pair of statues of a fox and a turtle face each other within the temple grounds.

Shrine ceremonies, which include cleansing, offerings, prayers, and dancing to the Kami.

Kagura are ritual dances accompanied by ancient musical instruments. They are performed by skilled and trained dancers. They consist of young virgin girls, a group of women.

Mamori are charms worn as an aid in healing and protection. They come in many various purposes.

An altar, the "Kami-dana" (Shelf of Gods), is given a central place in many shrines.

Seasonal celebrations are held at spring planting, fall harvest, and special occasions in the history of a shrine or of a local patron spirit. A secular, country-wide National Holiday on FEB-11 to commemorate the founding of Japan; this is the traditional date when the (mythical) emperor Jinmu ascended the throne in 660 BCE. Some shrines

festivities on that day. Other festivals include: JAN 1-3 Shogatsu (New Year's festival); MAY-5 Tango no Sekku (Boys' festival); JUL-7 Hoshi Matsuri (Girls' festival); Followers are expected to visit Shinto shrines at the times of various life events. Shichigosan Matsuri involves a blessing by the shrine Priest of girls aged five. It is held on NOV-15.

Many followers are involved in the "offer a meal movement," in which each person offers breakfast (or another meal) once per month and donates the money saved to a Shinto organization for international relief and similar activity.

Origami ("Paper of the spirits"): This is a Japanese folk art in which paper is folded into various shapes. They are often seen around Shinto shrines. Out of respect for the kami, to make the paper, origami paper is never cut.

Forms of Shinto:

Shinto exists in four main forms or traditions:

Koshitsu Shinto (The Shinto of the Imperial House): This involves ritual activities performed by those who the Japanese Constitution defines to be the "symbol of the state and the unity of the people." The most important ritual is Niinamesai, which makes an offering to the kami for each year's grain harvest. Male and female clergy (Shoten and Nai-Shoten) perform the performance of these rites.

Jinja (Shrine) Shinto: This is the largest Shinto group. It was the origin of Shinto and date back into pre-history. Until the end of World War II, it was closely associated with the Emperor of Japan who was worshipped as a living God. Almost all shrines in Japan are members of the Honcho, the Association of Shinto Shrines. It currently includes about 80,000 shrines. The association urges followers of Shinto

"To be grateful for the blessings of Kami and the benefits of the ancestors through observance of the Shinto rites, applying oneself to them with sincerity and devotion of heart."

"To be helpful to others and in the world at large through deeds of service and to seek the advancement of the world as one whose life mediates the will of the kami."

"To bind oneself with others in harmonious acknowledgment of the will of the kami so that the country may flourish and that other peoples too may live in peace and harmony."

Kyoha (Sectarian) Shinto (aka Shuha Shinto): This consists of 13 sects founded by individuals since the start of the 19th century. Each sect has its own beliefs and emphasize worship of their own central deity; some follow a near-monothey.

Minzoku (Folk) Shinto This is not a separate Shinto group; it has no formal doctrine or creed. It is seen in local rural practices and rituals, e.g. small images by the roadside, agriculture rituals practiced by individual families, etc. A rural community elects a head annually, who will be responsible for worshipping the local deity.

These three forms are closely linked. An image may be installed by a member of a Sectarian Shinto sects who worships at a particular shrine. Shinto is a tolerant religion and the validity of other religions. It is common for a believer to pay respect to other religions, practices and objects of worship.

Shinto texts:

Many texts are valued in the Shinto religion. Most date from the 8th cent

The Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters)

The Rokkokushi (Six National Histories)

The Shoku Nihongi and its Nihon Shoki (Continuing Chronicles of Japan)

The Jinno Shotoki (a study of Shinto and Japanese politics and history)

Number of adherents:

Estimates of the number of adherents are hopelessly unreliable. Some so
range of 2.8 to 3.2 million. One states that 40% of Japanese adults follo
for about 50 million adherents. Others state that about 86% of Japanese
of Shinto and Buddhism; that would put the number of followers of Shinto

One source estimates 1000 followers of Shinto in North America. The Can
recorded only 445 in Canada.

Essentially all followers of Shinto are Japanese. It is difficult for a forei
Unlike most other religions, there is no book to help a person learn abou
from generation to generation by experiencing the rituals together as a g