

MATSURI AND MATSURI-GOTO Religion and State in Early Japan

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INTRODUCTION

It has often been asserted that throughout history Japan has maintained the principle of *saisei-itchi* (unity of *matsuri* or religious cult and *matsuri-goto* or government administration). According to Professor Ono Sokyō, a leading Shinto theorist today, the term *saisei-itchi* contains three different but related dimensions:

First, there is the recognition of the significance of Shinto rituals being performed by the State . . . It is . . . the act of praying, in the name of the State, for peace and prosperity, which are the common desires of the people; it is the performance, on a larger scale, of what communal Shinto worship does centering around the local *uji-gami*. In State Shinto, the State was in a position of synthesizing the local worship of all smaller social units.

Secondly, by placing ultimate responsibility on its celebrants, State worship, which had the Emperor as its highest celebrant, placed restrictions of the purest kind on the conscience of government leaders and rulers . . .

Thirdly, the concept of *saisei-itchi* has its ultimate basis, not in political considerations, but in the life of each individual. *Matsuri*, or Shinto worship, was not merely religious ritual, but life with the Divine, actively based on the protection and the spirit of the Divine. Government is something derived from it. The word *matsuri-goto*, meaning "government", is derived from the word *matsuri*, which means "worship". In *matsuri-goto* was contained the meaning that each individual should serve the gods [*kami*] and his fellow men through his own individual work in life . . .¹

Thus, in interpreting the term *saisei-itchi*, Professor Ono places the accent on the side of *matsuri* (religious cult), while another Shinto scholar, Professor Mitsuma Shingo, gives more emphasis on the side of *matsuri-goto* (political or governmental administration). Professor Mitsuma, like many contemporary orthodox Shintoists, explicates the meaning of primitive Shinto in terms of *kami-nagara-no-michi* (*kannagara-no-michi*), which literally means "the way that exactly follows *kami* will". His starting point is the mythological distinction of the universe into three realms — (i) the domain of heaven (*Takamagahara*), which he interprets as the "world of seeds"; (ii) the domain of earthly existence, referring to Japan (*Toyoashihara*), which he interprets as the realization of the heavenly domain; and (iii) the domain of roots or materials (*Nenokuni*). According to Mitsuma, all *kami* are personifications of the supreme *kami* (*Ameno-minakanushi*), "who is the great life of heaven and earth and of the whole universe". He goes on to say that the central *kami* in the domain of heaven (*Takamagahara*), however, is the Sun Goddess (*Amaterasu-ōmikami*), who is worshipped by other *kami*. "Among these *kami* there is a situational order which derives from the essence of life", and the order thus established in the domain of heaven has been copied or reflected in the traditional "unwritten constitution" of early Japan. In accordance with the

"unwritten constitution", the emperors have worshipped the Sun-Goddess (Amaterasu-omikami) as the imperial ancestor, forever keeping and exalting her spirit as their imperial spirit. "This is the basis", says Mitsuma, "of the imperial prerogative of Japan and also of [her] national character". In short, the principle of *saisei-itchi* (unity of religion and government), seen from the perspective of Shinto orthodoxy, is inseparable from two other principles, namely, that of "the reign of the emperor of one dynasty" and that of "the oneness of the emperor and his subjects".²

Apparently, Professors Ono, Mitsuma and other Shinto theorists take it for granted that the principle of *saisei-itchi* can be traced back to the pristine religio-political structure of early or pre-historic Japan. Unfortunately, one of the difficulties in dealing with early Japan is the fact that the earliest historical writings, the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan) were not compiled until centuries after Japan came under the influence of Chinese civilization and Buddhism. Elsewhere I have already discussed the knotty hermeneutical problems such as mythologization of history and historicization of myths in dealing with early Japanese historical writings.³ Similar problems confront us in our attempt to delineate the meaning of *saisei-itchi*.

It is important to note that *saisei-itchi* was adopted in 1867 as the pseudo-theological principle to guide modern Japan. Significantly, in the same year restoration of Imperial rule was proclaimed. In the wording of the proclamation issued by the Council of State (Dajō-kan):

Whereas the restoration of Imperial rule is founded upon the achievements initiated by Emperor Jimmu [the legendary first emperor of the ancient Yamato kingdom], and whereas the nation is being restored to a policy of general renewal and *unity of worship and administration*, it is ordered that, first of all, the Department of Shinto Affairs shall be revived, and further that rites and sacrifices shall thereafter be performed.⁴

This proclamation was followed by the government order to separate Shinto from the centuries-old pattern of Shinto-Buddhist amalgamation (*Shin-Butsu Shūgō*). Ironically, while the government was determined to promote Shinto, there were serious disagreements among Shintoists concerning important doctrines and cultic activities of Shinto. Professor Muraoka cites some of the main features of the controversy among Shinto scholars. For example, the opening phrase of the *Kojiki* — "*ametsuchi hajime no toki* (in the beginning of Heaven and earth)" — was debated heatedly by those who accepted the creation theory, on the one hand, and those who did not, on the other. Another controversy centred around the interpretation of the "concealed and mysterious" realm of *yomi*, whether or not it meant the afterworld and whether or not souls after death go to *yomi*. Even the question of the number of *kami* to be worshipped in the shrine of the Office of Shinto Affairs — whether the three Creator *Kami* and the Sun Goddess alone should be venerated or whether another prominent *kami* called Ō-kuni-nushi should also be included — had to be resolved by imperial intercession.⁵ Furthermore, while many took it for granted that the model for the restoration of imperial rule was the reign of the first legendary emperor Jimmu, there were those who were persuaded that the model was to be found in the reign of the 10th legendary emperor, Sujin, who performed the rites of the *Kami* of Heaven and earth and endeavoured to

enlighten his subjects. "In these times, too," stated Kubo Sueshige (1830–1886),

it is the Imperial will to revere the *Kami* of Heaven and earth and to project the radiance of Imperial prestige overseas by adopting the standards of Emperor Sujin's reign. Therefore, as the Emperor establishes relations overseas, foreign people flock to our shores in vast numbers . . . He accepts the learning of all countries and disseminates the world's knowledge . . . All these things are done in accordance with the political structure of Emperor Sujin.⁶

These and other controversies have by no means been resolved even today. Understandably, such a nebulous notion as *saisei-itchi* can be interpreted variously from different perspectives. It is the intention of this paper to delineate different layers of meaning attached to the term *saisei-itchi* with a modest hope of clarifying the nature of the relationship between *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* in early Japan.

ARCHAIC PATTERN

Our attempt to understand the relationship between early Japanese religion and state might profitably dwell on the discussion of two ambiguous and untranslatable terms, namely, *kami* and *matsuri*.

(a) The term *kami* means etymologically "high", "superior", or "sacred". It is usually accepted as an appellation for all beings which possess extraordinary quality, and which are awesome and worthy of reverence, including good as well as evil beings. There is every reason to believe that the early Japanese found *kami* everywhere — in the heavens, in the air, in the forests, in the rocks, in the streams, in animals and in human beings. It would be misleading, however, to consider the religion of the ancient Japanese, which came to be known as Shinto, simply as polytheism or nature worship. While this early religion certainly accepted the plurality of the *kami* as separate beings, its fundamental affirmation tended to stress the sacrality of the total cosmos as such. That is to say, it was taken for granted that within the world of nature all beings, including those which we now call inanimate beings and natural objects, share and participate in the common *kami* (sacred) nature. It is also significant to note that the *kami* in the mythical accounts seem to have human traits, while the princes and heroes (*mikoto*) may be more aptly characterized as *kami* in human form. Moreover, judging from the myths and legends, animals too were regarded as having human-*kami* characteristics. There is no indication, however, that the *kami* were thought to have any supramundane qualities until after the introduction of Chinese civilization and Buddhism.

In the *Kojiki*, *Nihongi* and *Fudoki* (Records of Local Surveys), there are such other terms as *tama* and *mono*, which are frequently used to refer to spirit or soul. For the most part, the term *tama* referred to the spirit of a *kami* or a person, while the term *mono* referred to the spirit of animals.⁷ Furthermore, it was widely held that the spirit or soul could leave the body of a person or an animal on certain occasions, so that a special rite called *chinkon* or *tama-shizume* was performed to prevent the soul from leaving the body. There were also various rites to console the spirits of the dead. It is important to note that the spirits of *kami* and animals were believed to be capable of "possessing" men and women.⁸ In fact, one of the earliest features of Japanese religion was the existence of the shamanic-diviner, known variously as *miko*, *ichiko* or

mono-mochi, who in the state of *kami*-possession performed fortune-telling, transmission of spirit messages and healing.⁹ Another important feature of early Japanese religion was the belief in the "spirits residing in words" (*koto-dama*). According to this belief, beautiful words, correctly pronounced, were held to bring about good, whereas ugly words, or words incorrectly uttered, were believed to cause evil.¹⁰ This was particularly true when one addressed words of speeches to the *kami*.

It is to be noted in this connection that such documents as the *Kojiki*, *Nihongi* and *Fudoki* used these terms, *kami*, *mikoto*, *tama* and *mono* and *chi* (*shi*), almost interchangeably. But, as Professor Anzu points out, some of these terms gradually went out of usage, while the term *kami* began to supersede others as the designation of the divine or sacred beings. In this connection, Anzu cites the edict of the year 647 A.D. — *kamu-nagara-mo waga-ko mishirasamu to koto-yose-saki* — and states:

This sentence is believed to mean that *kami* entrusted the rule of the Empire to the children of *kami*. That *kami* in this case refers to the Sun Goddess Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami can naturally be supposed from the evidence in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. The fact that, in this quotation, the actual name of the Sun Goddess does not appear, but that instead the Sun Goddess is referred simply by the word *kami* — this fact may prove that the word *kami* meant, for certain groups, not an abstract or vague "awesome being" (*kashikoki mono*) but rather an authoritative, sacred being.¹¹

And by the 10th century A.D. the word *kami* became the exclusive Shinto term for the divine being in contradistinction to various Buddhist terms referring to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

(b) The term *matsuri* refers to a wide variety of religious ceremonies as well as festivities connected with religious ceremonies. (With the honorific added, *o-matsuri* means any kind of festive celebrations, religious or otherwise.) Scholars agree that the original meaning of the term *matsuri* is contained in the form *matsurau*, which meant "to be with", "to attend to the needs of", "to entertain", or "to serve", in reference to *kami*, the soul of the deceased, or a person of higher status. It was assumed that the physical act of *matsurau* implied the mental attitude of respect, reverence and the willingness to listen, serve and obey.¹² For example, on the occasion of *tama-matsuri* (*matsuri* of the soul) when the ancestral spirits were believed to visit the homes of their living descendants, the head of each household offered meals and drinks and entertained the visiting spirits as though they were alive. A similar motif of *matsurau* was no doubt evident in the *matsuri* for *kami*.

As far as we can ascertain, archaic Shinto did not have fixed liturgies, ecclesiastical organizations, or elaborate rituals. Most religious functions, except for those in the homes, took place around a *himorogi* (sacred tree), *iwasaka* (sacred rock), or in the paddy field or seashore. Most scholars hold that religious functions were the prerogatives of the head of the family or clan, or the elder of the community, depending on the case, and that in many instances women served as ritual functionaries. With the gradual emergence of professional priests, the role of women was reduced to that of being *miko* or shamanic-diviners. Prior to a festival, the participants were usually expected to purify themselves and to abstain from certain foods and sexual intercourse. In order to invite the *kami*, a particular sacred spot was signified by a sacred rope. Inasmuch as *kami* were believed to descend at night, the *matsuri*

participants observed a vigil (*yo-miya* or *okomori*). When the *kami* descended, offerings, songs and dances were presented for the enjoyment of the *kami*. One of the essential features of the *matsuri* was the feast (*naorai*), which was enjoyed both by the *kami* and the participants.¹³ Another important feature was *norito*, which has long since become stereotyped liturgical prayers, consisting of words of praise, thanksgiving and petition, to be recited by the priest, but which originally referred to the human words addressed to the *kami* as well as the *kami's* words spoken (*noru*) to men.¹⁴

Fortunately or unfortunately, there is no definitive theory as to when the term *matsuri-goto* came to mean political administration. Nevertheless, if the third century Chinese record of the land of Wa (Japan), ruled by the shamanic-diviner Himiko,¹⁵ can throw any light on the state of archaic Japan, we can readily understand that political administration as such must have been a very simple affair. It is safe to conjecture that one of the important functions of the chieftains of early Japan was to maintain close contact with the *kami*, attending to their needs and being guided by their will communicated through oracles, dreams and divinations. It is also safe to assume that the main task of those lieutenants and functionaries who surrounded the chieftains was to attend to (*matsurau*) the needs of their masters. Certainly the records of the legendary monarchs of the Yamato kingdom support the view that the main activities of the imperial court were the *matsuri-goto* or *matsurau* affairs in the double sense of the term.

Such an archaic religio-political structure, based on the unifying principle of *matsurau*, inevitably had to undergo changes because of the increasing stratification of society and diversification of culture. According to the *Nihongi*, it was the 10th legendary emperor, Sujin, who became uneasy with living in the palace, in which religious functions for the Sun Goddess and the *Kami* of the Yamato region (Yamato-no-ō-kuni-tama) were held. Thus, he established shrines for these *kami* away from the imperial palace (*mi-araka*). He also appointed imperial princesses to be in charge of the worship of these *kami*. This turn of event, and there is no reason to question the historicity of this fact except perhaps its exact dating, signified an important transition, as far as the religious dimension of Japanese life is concerned, from the principle of *matsurau* ("attending to" or "being with" the *kami*) to that of *matsuru* ("to enshrine", "to worship", or "to venerate" the *kami*). Politically speaking, this turn of event implied the change of meaning of *matsurau* from that of being with, or attending to the needs of the ruler to that of "faithful obedience" (*kifuku* or *fukujū*) on the part of the subjects, whereas the ruler was expected to reign (*shirasu*, "to listen" or "to govern") over the subordinates.¹⁶

We might mention in passing that it was toward the end of the 4th century A.D. that a powerful clan (*uji*), usually referred to as the imperial clan, which had superior military organization, began to dominate other clans. This was the beginning of the so-called Yamato Kingdom. According to the Chinese sources, the chieftains of the imperial clan were given monarchical status by the Chinese court during the 5th century. By that time the Yamato Kingdom had also established a beachhead in the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. And it was through the commercial, diplomatic and military contacts with China and Korea that Chinese civilization and Buddhism were introduced to Japan.

RE-INTERPRETATION OF *SAISEI-ITCHI*

Early in the 7th century A.D., the Japanese leaders envisaged a multi-value system that attempted to homologize the seemingly irreconcilable features of Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism as the religio-political and cultural foundation of the nation. In this situation, the principle of the unity of *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* took on a new and different meaning. The multi-value system is usually attributed to the innovation of the Prince Regent Shōtoku (573–621).

Although Prince Shōtoku venerated Shinto and promoted Buddhism, he was persuaded that the fundamental principle of the government was "propriety" (*li* in Chinese; pronounced variously as *rei*, *iya* or *iyamai* in Japanese), which he had learned from the Confucian tradition. It should be noted, however, that what Shōtoku adopted was not the classical Confucian notion of propriety, but rather the *li* principle as interpreted by Confucianism of the Han period. As Sansom astutely observes, according to Han Confucianism, "the universe is composed of magic elements, different in their nature and function like stars and stones, trees and insects, but all related and combined".¹⁷ Such an understanding of propriety set in a cosmological context provided the theoretical underpinning for re-interpreting political administration (*matsuri-goto*) and religion (*matsuri*) in terms of a hierarchical principle. Thus, in the third article of Prince Shōtoku's Constitution we find a new rationale for political administration: "You should endeavour to obey the imperial commands, realizing that the lord is Heaven while the subject is Earth . . . [Thus], when the lord speaks, the subject should listen, and when the superior acts, the inferior should obey . . ." ¹⁸ Prince Shōtoku also articulated the new understanding of the principle of *saisei-itchi* as follows:

We are told that our imperial ancestors, in governing the nation, bent humbly under heaven and walked softly on earth. They venerated the *kami* of heaven and earth, and established shrines on the mountains and by the rivers, whereby they were in constant touch with the power of nature . . . May all the ministers from the bottom of their hearts pay homage to the *kami* of heaven and earth.¹⁹

Shortly after Shōtoku's death, the government attempted to institutionalize the relationship between *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* by means of a Sinified legal system. Significantly, those penal codes (*ritsu*; *lü* in Chinese) and the civil statutes (*ryō*; *ling* in Chinese), which were modelled after the Chinese legal systems, were issued in the name of the emperor as the will of the *kami*. The government structure thus developed in the second half of the 7th century is referred to as the "Ritsuryō" (imperial rescript) state.

Early in the 8th century, the government established the Department of *Kami* Affairs (*Jingi-kan*) and placed it side by side with the Great Council of State (*Dajō-kan*). While such a development testified to the great prestige accorded to Shinto, it also implied that Shinto was now under the rigid control of the centralized bureaucracy of the government. Buddhism, too, prospered by the patronage of pious monarchs, especially during the 8th century, known as the Nara period. On the other hand, the activities of Buddhist clerics were strictly controlled by the Law Governing Monks and Nuns (*Sōni-ryō*), which effectively made Buddhism subservient to the authority of the government.²⁰

It was during the 10th century A.D. that the government made the most elaborate attempt to regulate every detail of *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto*. This attempt resulted in the compilation of the so-called *Institutes of the Engi Era*

(*Engi-shiki*), which was a collection of supplementary rules (*kyaku shiki*) to previously promulgated edicts and ceremonial rules. It consists of 50 Books, of which the first 10 are devoted to Shinto matters. Fortunately, we now have a careful two-volume study and translation of the first 10 Books of the *Engi-shiki* by Mrs. Felicia Bock.²¹ The contents of the first 10 Books are as follows:

- I. The Matsuri (festivals) of Four Seasons (i)
- II. The Matsuri of Four Seasons (ii)
- III. The Extraordinary Matsuri
- IV. The Grant Shrine of Ise.
- V. Bureau of the Consecrated Imperial Princess (*Saigu-ryo*).
- VI. The Office of the Princess Consecrated to the Kamo Shrines (*Saiin-ji*)
- VII. Great New Food Festival for the Enthronement (*Senso-Daijō-sai*)
- VIII. Ritual Prayers (*Norito*)
- IX. Register of *Kami* (i)
- X. Register of *Kami* (ii)

The remaining 40 Books provide minute regulations concerning the procedures to be followed by government officials. While the *Tale of Genji* and other literary works of the Heian Period (A.D. 781–1191) give the impression that courtiers spent all their time chasing butterflies and composing poems, the diaries of noble men and court records testify that every aspect of the activities of those courtiers was rigidly regulated by official procedures.²² Clearly, the *Institutes of the Engi Era* (*Engi-shiki*) attempted to carry out to perfection the 7th century Ritsuryō ideal, which portrayed the life of the imperial court as the earthly replica of the court of the Sun Goddess in the Domain of Heaven as told in myths. Moreover, the implicit assumption of the *Institutes of the Engi Era* was that the interpenetration of *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* was *sine qua non* for the kind of "liturgical soteriology" which sanctified the Japanese national community as the holy community.

Historians tell us that shortly after the *Institutes of the Engi Era* was put into effect in the year 967 A.D., its prestige began to erode, due largely to its cumbersomeness, among other defects. Nevertheless, the very fact that such an audacious soteriological model for the whole national community was seriously envisaged between the 7th and the 10th centuries, based on a reinterpretation of the simple, primitive Shinto principle of *saisei-itchi*, is in itself a matter of some significance in our attempt to understand the nature of the relationship between *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* in Japanese history.

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FOOTNOTES:

1. Sokyo Ono, "The Contribution to Japan of Shrine Shinto", *Proceedings of the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960), pp. 390–91.
2. Shingo Mitsuma, "Treatise on National Character and Government in Relation to the Study of the Constitution", *Proceedings: The Second International Conference for Shinto Studies, Continuity and Change* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1968), pp. 66–70.
3. See J. M. Kitagawa, "The Japanese Kokutai (National Community): History and Myth", *History of Religions* (Vol. 13, No. 3, February 1974).

4. Quoted in Tsunetsugu Muraoka, *Studies in Shinto Thought*, Trans. by Delmer M. Brown and James T. Araki (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1964), p. 204. (My italics.)
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-19.
6. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 220.
7. According to *Basic Terms of Shinto*, compiled by the Shinto Committee for the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions (Tokyo, 1958), *Ara-mi-tama* is a spirit endowed to rule with authority; *nigi-mi-tama* is a spirit empowered to lead to union and harmony; *kushi-mi-tama* is a spirit which causes mysterious transformations; and *saki-mi-tama* is a spirit which imparts blessings. These are called together *shikon*, or "four spirits". (p. 68).
8. Kunio Yanagita, (Gen. Ed.), *Minzokugaku Jiten* (A Dictionary of Folklore), (Tokyo: Tokyo-do, 1951), pp. 378-89.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 550-51.
10. *Basic Terms of Shinto*, op. cit., p. 44.
11. Motohiko Anzu, "The Concept of 'Kami'," *Proceedings of the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions*, op. cit., p. 221.
12. Kunio Yanagita, *Nihon no Matsuri* (Japanese Festivals) (Tokyo: Sogen-sha, 1953), p. 42.
13. Kunio Yanagita, *Minzokugaku Jiten*, op. cit., pp. 539-40.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 460.
15. Ryusaku Tsunoda (Tr.), *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, Ed. by L. Carrington Goodrich (South Pasadena, 1951), pp. 8-16.
16. Jiro Kamishima, "Nihon no Seiji Bunka" (The political culture in Japan), *Nihonbunka-Kenkyusho-Kiyo*, No. 32 (September, 1973), 158-59.
17. George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 71
18. J. M. Kitagawa, "Religions of Japan", in Wing-tsit Chan *et al.*, *The Great Asian Religions: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 252-53.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
20. See *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.
21. Felicia Gressitt Bock, (Trans. with Introduction), *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books I-V*, (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970), and *Books VI-X* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972).
22. Naoshige Tsuchida, "Heian-jidai no Seimu to Gishiki", *Nihonbunka-Kenkyusho-kiyo*, No. 33 (March 1974), pp. 206-31.