Shinto in Nara Japan, 749-770: Deities, Priests, Offerings, Prayers, and Edicts in *Shoku Nihongi*

Ross Bender

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Shinto has become something of a taboo word, especially in the context of discussions of ancient Japanese thought. Fundamentally of course this tendency began as a reaction to the unsavory imperialist and fascist state Shinto of prewar Japan, and to the notion that Shinto was the timeless, unchanging religion of the Japanese race. But even now, more than a half century after the end of World War II, there is a line of thought that seeks to deny any reality to ancient Japanese religion before the advent of Buddhism and instead characterizes it as Daoism or yin-yang or something else nebulously Chinese. Another tactic of this argumentation is that Shinto was originally a Buddhist term and that Buddhist thought shaped its development until it finally emerged as Shinto in the medieval period. Much of this discourse has consisted of empty argumentation about terminology, in line with the current problematization of even such fundamental and time-honored words as religion itself.

It was the eminent medievalist Kuroda Toshio whose influential 1981 article “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion” first popularized some of these ideas among Western scholars.¹ Kuroda argued that the original meaning of the term “Shinto” was very different from how it is understood today. There was, he said, no “pure Shinto” in ancient Japan; rather it was understood as an element of Buddhism. In fact, said Kuroda, “Shinto” was an invention of 19th century ideologues and in his article tried to trace historical steps in its development. One particularly baneful suggestion of his was that in fact Japanese Shinto was merely Chinese Daoism.²

Kuroda’s immense popularity in the West and in Japan has unfortunately shaped the discourse to such an extent that the term Shinto is now only used with scare quotes – “Shinto” – or termed “so-called Shinto.” This caution has

² This suggestion was developed in particular by Fukunaga Mitsuji, who had a certain vogue in the 1980’s, popularized this notion, and was vigorously debunked by Fukui Fumimasa. (A good overview of this debate in English is in David Bialock’s “Eccentric Spaces” pp 24-31; Tim Barrett’s article on “Shinto and Taoism in Early Japan” in Breen and Teeuwen’s 2000 Shinto in History concluded that “ultimately his [Fukui Fumimasa’s] central contention has to be accepted...p. 27.)
characterized the work of John Breen and Mark Teeuwen who pioneered contemporary Shinto studies with two books which they edited, *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami* (2000) and *A New History of Shinto* (2010), as well as articles Japanese Journal of Religious Studies. Breen is a specialist in early modern and modern Shinto, while Teeuwen is a medievalist. It should be pointed out that they began with a critique of Kuroda, which is worth quoting here in full:

“If we accept Kuroda’s argument in its most extreme form, and adopt his stance that there was no distinct ‘Shinto’ tradition of thought during the premodern period, we render ourselves unable either to explain the process of amalgamation that dominated premodern Japanese religion, or to see the Shinto tradition that rose to prominence in the Edo and modern periods in its proper historical context.”

Despite this cautionary note, Teeuwen in particular adopted Kuroda’s notion that Shinto, or “Jindō”, as he claims it was originally pronounced, was a Buddhist concept. He further argued that the term itself when it occurred in the Nara and Heian court annals did not in fact refer to the native cult and that “Shinto” only emerged in the context of esoteric Buddhist thought in the 14th century. In their second book Breen and Teeuwen seem to have moderated their position against the existence of pre-medieval Shinto by acknowledging that there are “many Shintos” and “many histories.” “The crux of the matter” they point out, “is that kami shrines, myths, and rituals are a great deal older than their conceptualization as components of Shinto.”

The result of this view that the ancient kami myths and rituals cannot be characterized as Shinto is an insistence that the word may only be used in a qualified way as “Shinto,” substituting for the taboo word phrases such as “jingi 神祇 cults,” “kami worship,” and the unwieldy circumlocution “what used to be called Shinto.” It is this superstitious taboo that I wish to break in this article, since it essentially denies that there was anything in ancient Japan that might reasonably be categorized by modern observers as Shinto. While it is true that the word Shinto does not appear in *Shoku Nihongi* during the years 749-770, and only once in the chronicle itself, one could argue by the same token that there was no religion called Buddhism in ancient Japan. Using a faulty logic similar to the denial of Shinto, it could be posited that since the word *bukkyō* appears only once in *Shoku Nihongi*

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3 *Shinto in History*, p. 7. See also *A New History of Shinto*, 19-20.
5 *A New History of Shinto*, 21.
during these years, and only three times in the chronicle as a whole, Buddhism didn’t exist in this era. The vociferous reaction to such a statement would of course be that there is so much evidence of Buddhist sutras, temples, priests and deities in the eighth century that such a contention is on its face ridiculous. But I contend that there is just as much specific evidence of Shinto shrines, priests, prayers and offerings in the official court chronicle of the period. The immense and overpowering hegemonic discourse of Buddhism, a syncretic religion well-known for absorbing the native deities wherever it travels and for a system of thought that contends that every distinct entity in the universe is a component of the body of one or another cosmic Buddha, has simply been such that in the twenty-first century a claim that there was no Buddhism in ancient Japan is viewed as ludicrous, while the same claim against Shinto is treated with respect.

In this paper I will present evidence from Shoku Nihongi, the vastly understudied court chronicle of eighth-century Japan, during the years 749-770, the reign of the Last Empress, Kōken/Shōtoku, for the existence of an institutional structure in the mid-Nara period consisting of shrines, priests, offerings and prayers which can only be termed Shinto. I will also argue that there is very clear evidence of Shinto political theology found in the imperial edicts in Shoku Nihongi for this same period. Examining these references is a first step in the larger project of documenting the existence of Shinto in ancient Japan.

**Kami 神**

Over seventy occurrences of the word appear during this period in the text of Shoku Nihongi. About a quarter of them are references to kami in general, or in the phrase “the kami of heaven and earth.” Once there is the phrase “the hundred kami.” More specific references to the sovereign as a manifest god (akitsumikami 現神/明神) may be found in the senmyō 宣命 and there are also imperial self-designations as kami in the edicts in general. Another level of specificity comes with the reference to the kami of the realm or all the provinces, and particularly to the kami of the five provinces of Kinai. The famous Great Kami of Ise and Usa occur most frequently; they will be treated in the next section, Daijingū. Then there are named kami of particular areas, most of these occurring only once or twice. These are:

- **Takakamokami** 高鴨神, Kazuraki District, Yamato Province
- The famous kami in Ōmi Province
- **Isonokami** 伊曾乃神, Kamuno district, Iyo Province
- **Ōyamatsuminokami** 大山積神, Ochi district, Iyo Province
These kami represent sites of cult. *Shoku Nihongi* does not specify that these are actual shrine buildings, and the term *jinja* 神社 is used only a few times in the text, usually to designate plural sites: “all the shrines in the realm.” A consideration of their function or the reason for offerings will be found in the section “Mitegura” below, but several observations can be made here. In only one case is there a discussion of the identity of the deity; this is the entry on the *Takakamokami*:

There was again to be a festival for *Takakamokami* in Kazuraki District, Yamato Province. The Buddhist priest Enkō of *Takakamokami* and his younger brother Lieutenant of Middle Imperial Guards Jr 5 Lower Kamo Asomi Tamori said:

“In ancient times Emperor Yūryaku 雄略 hunted on Kazuraki Mountain. At that time there was an old man who always competed with the Emperor for the game. Yūryaku was enraged and exiled the old man to Tosa. The deity that our distant ancestor served changed form and became the old man -- he was the one whom the Emperor banished.”

(Note: Officials investigated this story in the records but no evidence was found. Thus the Retired Empress sent Tamori to perform the festival at the original site in Tosa.)

One would wish for more specificity of this type, but the other kami listed here do not have such anecdotes personifying the deity attached to them. The kami of Ōsumi Province is not identified, although it is credited for volcanic eruptions in

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6 SNIV p 54 n 9 – See supplemental note 25.113. Perhaps Takakamo Ajisuki Takuhikone no Mikoto.
7 TPHJ 8.11.7
the sea near Kagoshima, producing three new islands. Similarly the famous kami of Ōmi Province are not identified, and the phrase denotes a plurality of kami. An oracular dimension is hinted at for the Suminoenkami, as the chronicle records that a messenger was sent to receive “divine instruction” 神教 from the god. As to geographical distribution, four of the list are in the Kinai (Yamato and Settsu). The furthest from the capital are those in Ōsumi in southern Kyushu and those in Iyo Province on the western end of Awaji Island. The latter are notable since four shrines in different districts of the province are listed in one entry, and all were awarded high court rank. Finally, there is a cluster of kami in three provinces to the north of Nara, namely Wakasa, Echizen, and Noto.

Ise and Usa: The Daijingū 大神宮

Ise, to the east of Nara, and Usa, to the southwest, were the two major sites of Shinto cult in this period. Both deities were designated Great Kami (大神 Ōkami) and their shrines identified as Daijingū. Ise is mentioned eighteen times in the chronicle for this period and Yahata 八幡 seventeen times. The primacy of Ise is evident in commands in the imperial edicts that “all the kami beginning with Ise Daijingū ” should be granted various honors. Usa’s peculiarity was that the shrine, unlike Ise, produced oracles. Despite the obvious importance of the two great shrines, neither kami is identified or personified in any way. Historically of course Ise was known as the shrine to the sun goddess Amaterasu, and Hachiman was later personified as Emperor Ōjin and Empress Jingū, and as a bodhisattva, but in the mid-Nara period these identifications were yet to be overtly ascribed to the deities.

One point of ambiguity seems to be the location of the Yahata shrine. The first reference, in Emperor Shōmu’s famous edict, identifies the god as “the Yahata Great Kami of the Broad Banners who dwells in Usa District of Buzen Province.” The progress of the deity from Usa to Nara is related in some detail in Shoku Nihongi, which records that the kami was housed in a new shrine building called Nashihara no Miya south of the Heijō palace. This is the last mention of this shrine, which is considered the forerunner to the present-day Tamukeyama 手向山

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8 TPHJ 8.12 (no day indicated)
9 TPHJ 8.11.20
10 HK 1.8.2.
11 TPJG 2.4.19.
12 SNKBT consistently gives the reading Yahata; Hachiman is the more common modern pronunciation.
13 豊前国宇佐郡〈爾〉坐広幡〈乃〉八幡大神. TPSH 1.12.27, Senmyō 15.
14 即於宮南梨原宮。造新殿、以為神宮。TPSH 1.12.18.
Hachiman on the grounds of Tōdaiji, although it was never given that name in the chronicle. Although none of the entries that follow concerning Yahata specify the Usa shrine, the narrative following Senmyō 44, Empress Shōtoku’s famous edict concerning the Hachiman oracle, relates that the head priest at Dazaifu, Suge no Asomaro, invented a pronouncement of the Great Kami, and Kiyomaro’s mission to attain the truth of the revelation is understood to have taken him to Kyushu. This association with the Kyushu Headquarters is strengthened by an oracle produced by the shrine naming Fujiwara no Asomi Otomaro the Governor-General of Dazaifu.

Ise Daijingū was located in Ise Province as was the associated Toyouke Shrine in Watarai District, named only once in the chronicle. Also related to the Daijingū was the Isse Itsuki no Ōkimi (伊勢斎王, Saiō), the abstinence princess, and the Itsuki no Miya (斎宮, Saigū). The latter was headed by an administrative Shinto priest, the Itsuki no Miya Kanzukasa, sometimes referred to simply as the head of the institution. Shoku Nihongi does not record the precise location of this shrine nor the function of the princess.

The chronicle notes that Buddhist temples were built at both great shrines in this era. In 767 construction began on a shrine temple, a gūjī at the Yahata Himegami. This is the only notice of a Hachiman shrine temple during this period, although when the priestess Ōmiwa no Morime visited the capital in 749 she was identified as both a negi and a Buddhist nun. Shoku Nihongi does relate that earlier, in 741, gifts of Buddhist sutras were made to the shrine and a pagoda was constructed, and when the deity arrived in Nara Buddhist priests performed a rite of repentance before the god. In 766 orders were given to construct a sixteen-shaku Buddha image at the Ise Daijingūji, although the type of Buddha was not specified. The only other record in Shoku Nihongi of a shrine temple at Ise occurs later, in 780.

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15 太宰主神習宜阿曽麻呂. JGKU 3.9.25.
16 JGKU 1.9.18.
17 TPSH 1.12.27.
19 TPSH 1.12.18.
20 TPJG 2.7.23.
21 HK 11.2.1.
Priests: Kannushi 神主, Negi 陰宜, Hafuri 請, et al.

The three main types of shrine priests – Kannushi, Negi, and Hafuri – each appear about a dozen times in the chronicle for this period, but whether there was a strict hierarchy at that time is unclear.\(^{22}\) Another point of ambiguity is that “Kannushi”, which term denotes a head of a shrine, occurs a number of times as a kabane, as for example in the name Onchi no Kannushi Hirohito 恩智神主広人.\(^{23}\) The most frequently named Kannushi, Obitona of Ise Shrine, is first noted as Ise Daijingū Negi Jr 7 Lower Kannushi no Obitona 伊勢大神宮陰宜從七位下神主首名.\(^{24}\) In this formulation it designates the man as a Negi priest of Ise Shrine, with Kannushi apparently functioning as a kabane. In this entry he was promoted from Junior Seventh Rank to Outer Junior Fifth Lower. Subsequently he, as Kannushi, was promoted to Outer Junior Fifth Upper and finally to Outer Senior Fifth Lower, making him the highest ranking shrine priest of the era.\(^{25}\) In the latter entry the Ise Kannushi Hira Hito 神主枚人 was promoted to Outer Junior Fifth Lower Rank. Another related term is Kanzukasa 主神, as in the Itsuki no Miya Kanzukasa 請宮の天神 who held Senior Seventh Rank Lower, and the Usa Hachiman Kanzukasa Ōmiwa no Tamamaru 主神司從八位下大神宮麻呂 who held Junior Eighth Rank Lower when he and the shrine Negi Outer Jr 5 Lower Ōmiwa no Morime 八幡大神陰宜外從五位下大神麻呂 were awarded the kabane of Ōmiwa no Asomi.\(^{26}\) Both were promoted, Morime to Junior Fourth Lower Rank and Tamamaru to Outer Junior Fifth Lower Rank, although both were stripped of court rank and priestly titles several years later.\(^{27}\)

Negi are twice listed in the formulation “the priests of all the shrines beginning with Ise Daijingū Negi,”\(^{28}\) seemingly implying the primacy of the Negi over other priests, yet the Negi of Ise Shrine held only the rank of Junior Seventh.\(^{29}\) The term “negi” literally denotes one who petitions a deity, but this general function is the only one that can be understood from the chronicle. Hafuri, a title whose etymology is unclear, frequently occurs in the formulation “the Negi and Hafuri” of shrines. Roy Miller and Nelly Naumann devoted an entire, if brief,

\(^{22}\) The Encyclopedia of Shinto: Institutions and Administrative Practices: Officiants presents this hierarchy.
\(^{23}\) JGKU 2.11.2.
\(^{24}\) TPSH 1.4.5.
\(^{25}\) TPSH 5.1.5; TPHJ 4.3.13.
\(^{26}\) TPSH 1.11.1. SNKBT consistently reads the surname as Ōmiwa, although at some future time it became Ōga.
\(^{27}\) TPSH 1.12.27; TPSH 6.11.27.
\(^{28}\) TPHJ 4.3.13; HK 1.10.1.
\(^{29}\) JGKU 2.4.28.
monograph to examining the term in the context of Altaic languages. They raised the question of whether it might denote a type of shaman, although they concluded that it was a type of “possession priest” and general cult functionary.\textsuperscript{30} Several times in \textit{Shoku Nihongi} the reading \textit{Hafuribe} 祝部 is given, and once the reading \textit{Kamuhaful} 祝祝.\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Hafuri} were part of the entourage each time the Izumo \textit{Kuninomiyatsuko} 出雲国造 came to court and offered the liturgy of \textit{Kamuyogoto} 神賀事,\textsuperscript{32} and they were awarded promotion in court rank on each occasion.\textsuperscript{33}

Then there were the \textit{Uchihito} 内人 and \textit{Monoimi} 物忌 at the Ise \textit{Daijingū} who were shrine functionaries both male and female listed after the \textit{Negi}.\textsuperscript{34} Again their specific function is unknown, although from their name the \textit{Monoimi} may have functioned as purification ritualists. A \textit{Mikanagi} 御巫 appears once in a list of Ise ritualists; the duties are not specified although the name suggests a spirit medium.\textsuperscript{35} Such mediums, both male and female, appear in the chronicle, but only once in connection with an official shrine.\textsuperscript{36} After the eye-opening ceremony at the \textit{Daibutsu} in 752 seventeen of these people were detained and sent into exile. The character often translated “medium” 巫 is otherwise noted only in instances of sorcery.\textsuperscript{37} Finally, a priest called \textit{Kaminomiyatsuko} 神奴 appears once, together with a \textit{hafuri}. No shrine affiliation is specified in the entry, although the place is the Suminoe District in Settsu, the home of the \textit{Suminoekami}.\textsuperscript{38}

The \textit{Jingikan} 神祇官 or Department of Deity Affairs and its officials appear frequently in the chronicle. The Head of the Department, or \textit{Jingihaku} 神祇伯 is mentioned eleven times, while the \textit{Jingi Daifuku} 神祇大副 or Senior Assistant occurs seven times and the \textit{Jingi Shōfuku} 神祇少副 (Junior Assistant) once. Four \textit{Jingihaku} are named in the chronicle and they were all of high court rank: Junior Second Kose no Asomi Nademaro; Senior Third Ishikawa no Asomi Toshitari; Senior Third Fumuya no Mahito Jōsamu; and Junior Third Nakatomi no Asomi Kiyomaro. All of

\textsuperscript{30} The \textit{Encyclopedia of Shinto} presents several possible etymologies, including “shaking” a garment or object, and notes that in \textit{Nihon Shoki} the annals of Emperor Yōmei describe a \textit{hafuri} delivering an oracle. Also \textit{神斎賀事}. See Piggott 1989 for a description of this ceremony. Miller and Naumann 1991:64-76, 98.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Kamuhaful} TPJG 1.1.7.

\textsuperscript{32} Also \textit{神斎賀事}. See Piggott 1989 for a description of this ceremony.

\textsuperscript{33} TPJG 2.2.4; JGKU 1.12.14; JGKU 2.2.25.

\textsuperscript{34} TPJG 5.1.5; TPHJ 4.3.13; JGKU 1.8.16.

\textsuperscript{35} JGKU 1.8.16.

\textsuperscript{36} TPJG 4.8.17; HK 1.2.23.

\textsuperscript{37} TPJG 1.8.1; JGKU 3.5.29.

\textsuperscript{38} TPJG 2.8.16.
them held other concurrent offices, with Ishikawa no Toshitari serving at times as Middle Counsellor (Chūnagon 中納言) and Head of the Ministry of War (Hyōbu Kyō 兵部卿). In 769 Nakatomi no Kiyomaro was granted the kabane of Ōnakatomi in recognition of his special service as Head of Deity Affairs.

**Offerings and Prayers**

*Mitegura*幣 or *heihaku*幣帛 were the offerings most commonly dispatched by the imperial court exclusively to Shinto shrines. A generic term for shrine offerings, the types are not described in *Shoku Nihongi*, although in later times the words came to denote offerings of cloth, paper, or bark. Possible etymologies for *mitegura* are “to fill (mite) a high place (kura),” or “honorific hand” (mite) plus “seat or throne (kura).” Frequent occurrences of the term are found in *Shoku Nihongi* for this period and many times the purpose of the offering is indicated in the entry.

*Mitegura* were most often dispatched to Ise *Daijingū* and in the majority of cases the reason for the offerings was described in the annals. The messengers, usually of the fifth court rank or above, reported to the shrine matters pertaining to the sovereign. Prayers were made for Shōmu’s healing in his final illness and his death was announced to the shrine, as was the accession of Junnin. Three days before Empress Shōtoku’s death the court sent *mitegura* and two horses to Ise. The court dispatched offerings to report the discovery of gold in Michinooku, to pray for the safety of the embassy to Tang, in preparation for Fujiwara no Nakamaro’s intended invasion of Silla, and to report Nakamaro’s rebellion. *Mitegura* were also sent out in connection with shrine matters: once to report the promotion of the *Negi* from Junior Seventh to Outer Fifth Rank, and once upon occasion of a settlement of a boundary dispute. In 757 the court announced that only members of the Nakatomi family were to be named messengers to Ise *Daijingū* in the future, but this decree was apparently honored only in the breach, since members of other families, including imperial princes, appeared as emissaries thereafter. Although Nakatomi were always members of the delegation, these also included those of the Inbe, Fujiwara, and Kose kabane. However, Nakatomi no Kiyomaro, the most frequent envoy, was granted the new kabane of Ōnakatomi in 769 in recognition of his service:

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39 JGKU 3.6.19.
40 Alexander Vovin and John Bentley, personal communications.
41 TPHJ 1.6.19.
42 TPHJ 8.9.13; TPHJ 1.6.19; TPHJ 2.8.19; TPHJ 6.11.3; TPHJ 8.9.13.
The Empress gave an edict: “In the Kamugoto 神語 there is mention of the Ōnakatomi. However, Nakatomi no Asomi Kiyomaro has twice been appointed to the Department of Deity Affairs and he has never failed to fulfill his duties. Therefore he is granted the kabane of Ōnakatomi.”

Details of this liturgy, the Kamugoto, are not cited here, but the Shoku Nihongi editors provide an alternate spelling, 祝詞, and point to usages in the Nihon Shoki, and also to the Kamuyogoto presented by the Izumo Kuninomiyatsuko.43

By contrast to Ise, the court sent offerings to the Yahata (Hachiman) Daijingū only twice. The first was during Emperor Shōmu’s final illness, when physicians and meditation monks were sent into the Left and Right Capital and the four Kinai provinces to aid those suffering from disease. The second was three days before the death of Empress Shōtoku; in this case one horse “with a coat like deer’s hair” was given to the shrine.44 A similar horse was offered to the Wakasahikonokami the same day, and the following day the court dispatched mitegura to Kehinokami in Echizen, and the Ketanokami in Noto. In addition, the Head of the Bureau of Music Prince Ito was sent as a messenger to receive the “divine instruction” from Suminoenokami in Settsu. This kami no oshie 神教 was an oracle of some sort and is notable for being the only time an oracle was sought from a shrine other than Hachiman. In 755, during Shōmu’s illness, the court sent messengers to seven imperial misasagi 陵, and to the tomb of Fujiwara no Fuhito to present mitegura and pray for the recovery of health for Shōmu. The imperial tombs were those of recent sovereigns, and included that of Prince Kusakabe who was only posthumously named Emperor: Yamashina (Tenji); Ōuchi East and West (Tenmu and Jitō); Ako (Monmu); Mayumi (Prince Kusakabe); Nahoyama East and West (Genmei and Genshō).45 Obviously the misasagi served as sites of cult where the deceased emperors and empresses were worshipped. In 762 the Sangi Jr 3 Head of Ministry of Military Affairs Fujiwara no Asomi Kosemaro and Scattered Rank Outer Jr 5 Lower Haji no Sukune Inukai were sent to present mitegura to Kashii Byō 香椎廟 near

43 JGKU 3.6.19. SNIV p 244 n 6 - 祝詞. Also Supp 29:85 (p 533) for reference to this Shinto liturgy in Nihon Shoki. See JGKU 1.2.14 for 神賀事 or 神事 as the liturgy performed by the Izumo Kuninomiyatsuko.
44 TPSH 8.4.29; HK 1.8.1.
45 TPSH 7.10.21
Dazaifu on the occasion of military drills in preparation for Nakamaro’s planned attack on Silla.\textsuperscript{46} Kashii Shrine was dedicated to the legendary sovereigns Chūai Tennō and Jingū Kōgō, who had used the area in northern Kyushu as a staging site for the epic invasion of the peninsula. Days later the court dispatched mitegura as well as bows and arrows to all the kami of the realm for the same purpose.\textsuperscript{47}

On miscellaneous occasions the court sent offerings to all the shrines of the Kinai to pray for rain in periods of drought and accompanying famine. Prayers were made twice to Nifunokawakami and in addition to mitegura, a black horse was presented to this shrine.\textsuperscript{48} The “wind kami” of the five provinces of Kinai were specified in one entry.\textsuperscript{49}

A special occasion for offerings and prayers was the Ōname 大嘗, literally “Great Tasting,” festival, celebrated four times in the period 749-770.\textsuperscript{50} This might also be translated as “Great Thanksgiving” or “Harvest Festival,” since it was the tasting of the harvest grain, usually celebrated in the eleventh month; this is reflected in the term Niiname 新嘗 used for the ritual in 769. On two occasions it also served as the accession ceremony, once for Empress Kōken and once for Emperor Junnin. This “feast of kingship” later became known as the Daijōsai 大嘗祭 and the ritual codified in the tenth-century Engi Shiki. Robert Ellwood has translated the text in a book-length study of the ritual.\textsuperscript{51} Breen and Teeuwen provide a detailed treatment of the modern ceremony from Meiji onwards, and briefly discuss enthronement ritual in Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, but not in Shoku Nihongi. They term it “A ‘Shinto’ Rite of Accession,” using quotation marks to emphasize their extreme caution in the use of the term Shinto.\textsuperscript{52}

Shoku Nihongi describes the circumstances of the ceremony and that the Empress bestowed “red and black wines,” but the other specific ritual details such as are known to us from later texts are not included here. In the eleventh month of Tenpyō Shōhō 1, that is, during the year in which Kōken ascended the throne, the rite was celebrated on the Heijō Palace grounds, in the Yakuen New Palace in the

\textsuperscript{46} TPHJ 6.11.16.
\textsuperscript{47} TPHJ 6.11.26; 6.11.28.
\textsuperscript{48} TPHJ 7.5.28; TPHJ 8.4.16; TPJG 2.5.17; JGKU 3.7.15.
\textsuperscript{49} JGKU 3.7.15. kazenokami 風伯. SNIV p 247, n 4 -- the Jingiryō 4.6 specified this as the Tatsuta Shrine 竜田社, although this is not recorded in Shoku Nihongi.
\textsuperscript{50} An alternate reading is Ōnie.
\textsuperscript{51} TPSH 1.11.25; TPHJ 2.8.16; TPJG 1.11.23; JGKU 3.11.28.
\textsuperscript{52} Ellwood 1973.
\textsuperscript{53} Breen and Teeuwen 2010, 168-198.
South Garden. Inaba was designated the Yuki Province and Mino the Suki Province. In Tenpyō Jingo 1 Mino was named the Yuki Province and Echizen the Suki, and it is specified that they were chosen by divination. Junnin’s accession to the throne was celebrated in 758, and here Shoku Nihongi records that “messengers were sent to the various provinces of the realm to carry out the Great Purification, to prepare for the enthronement ceremony. The purification rite, or Ōhare is noted on two other occasions in Shoku Nihongi for our period, once when the Saigū was dispatched to Ise.

Senmyō 38, delivered on the occasion of the Ōname in Tenpyō Jingo 1, provides Empress Shōtoku’s justification for admitting Buddhist priests to this Shinto ritual:

“We now decree: Now is the day when We partake of the Copious Brightness of the Grand Banquet of the Great Thanksgiving Festival. However this time it is extremely unusual in that We participate as a disciple of the Buddha who has received the Bodhisattva precepts. Thus serving first the Three Treasures, next revering the various kami of the heavenly kami shrines and the earthly kami shrines, and finally cherishing with mercy and compassion the imperial princes, the ministers, the Hundred Officials, and the people under Heaven who serve Us, We thus return again to the Imperial Rank to administer the Realm. Hence do you, peacefully and steadfastly attending at the banquet, consume the black wine and white wine presented by the Yuki and Suki Provinces until your faces redden. We, being granted these customary banquet gifts, We also grant them to you.

54 TPSH 1.11.25. South Garden. Later 薬園新宮 See SNIII, p. 93, n. 25 – precise location uncertain.
55 The Yuki and Suki Provinces were designated by divination to provide supplies for the Ōname. Yuki refers to the fields of the east, Suki to fields of the west. John Bentley suggests a possible etymology of “sacred bastion” for “yuki” and “the next one” for “suki.” (Personal communication.)
56 TPJG 1.1.23. sadaka ni貞〈仁〉.
57 TPHJ 2.8.16.遣使大糴天下諸国。欲行大嘗故也。
58 TPHJ 5.8.29; HK 1.9.22.
60 Naorai猶良比. A special banquet following the Ōname. SNIV p 102 n 7 gives details on the performance of this ceremony.
61 kuroki shiroki no miki 黒紀・白紀〈乃〉御酒. SNIV p 103 n 17 gives a description of these “wines” (sake – “rice wine”). Yunoki 2005 pp. 17-18 discusses a recipe for sake brewing in the Engi Shiki and says “the ash of kusagi臭木 is mixed with vinegar to make “black sake.”
“We further decree: The people believe that the kami should be separate from the Buddhas and should not have contact with them. However when We examine the Buddhist scriptures\(^{62}\), we see that the gods are to protect the Buddhist law and respect it. Thus how can there be a restriction on those who have left the world and the white-robed people\(^{63}\) mingling together? What has formerly been a taboo on Buddhist priests participating in the ceremony is no longer forbidden, and thus shall the Great Thanksgiving Festival be performed – let all hearken to this pronouncement which is the command of the Empress.”

Upon the last occasion when Shōtoku presided over this ritual, late in 769, she delivered Senmyō 46, linking auspicious omens to the performance of the festival:\(^{64}\)

“At the present time the Empress decrees: Today is the day when We partake of the Copious Brightness of the Grand Banquet of the Great Thanksgiving Festival. Now yesterday being the winter solstice,\(^{65}\) rain fell, the earth was moist and the ten thousand things began to sprout and flourish – thus we already considered it auspicious. Then the auspicious sign of a white deer was presented by the Iyo Province, and We viewed it with joy and gladness. Further, We consider it as extraordinarily marvelous and wonderful that these three good things\(^{66}\) have come together at the same time. Together with all the ministers We looked and rejoiced at the awe-inspiring beautiful white form of the deer. Consequently as you consume and enjoy the wines of black and white, We grant you the usual banquet gifts\(^{67}\) – so We the Empress decree.”

**Shinto and Imperial Legitimacy in the Imperial Edicts**

Such was the Shinto infrastructure – shrines, priests, offerings, ceremonies – during the period 749-770. It is in the imperial edicts that we find statements of

\(^{62}\) SNIV p 103 n 21 Presumably a reference to the Konkōmyō Saishōōkyōō, which features the Four Heavenly Kings, Indra and Brahma as protectors of the Buddhist law.

\(^{63}\) SNIV p 104 n 22 shirokinu 白衣. Buddhist priests wore black robes, as opposed to the lay people, including Shinto priests.

\(^{64}\) JGKU 3.11.28.

\(^{65}\) Fuyunokiwami. SNIV p 271 n 27 冬至 に賀 – very approximately the winter solstice.

\(^{66}\) The rain, the white deer and the Niiname.

\(^{67}\) Sakamai 酒幣.
Shinto doctrines of imperial political legitimacy. This is not a completely systematic theology, but the material provides clear evidence that the Empress and her intellectuals were attempting to clarify the role of the native faith during an age of the predominance of Buddhist thought. Of course the edicts were composed in a thoroughly syncretistic age, when not only Shinto deities but a variety of buddhas and bodhisattvas as explained in the sutras were understood to be actors in a theology of divine protection of the sovereign and state. In addition, toward the end of the period novel Hindu deities assimilated to Buddhism appeared: Bishamonten (Vaiśravaṇa) and his consort Kichijōten (Lakṣmi) became foci of cult and seemed to herald a new esotericism. The common formulation was that the sovereign was first to serve the Three Treasures (Buddha, Law, Priesthood), second to revere the kami, and third to nurture the people. While this articulation has traditionally been characterized as Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian respectively, the situation was of course more nuanced. The political theology of the time also included other aspects of Chinese thought, including particularly a systematic omen theology which functioned in tandem with other theological expressions. Moreover “Buddhism” in Asia and Japan was not a single faith or construct; rather specific Buddhist deities and specific doctrines from particular sutras were highlighted at different times. A primary conundrum the Empress sought to untangle was the meaning of the native faith in combination with these other foreign elements. Nevertheless in examining this very rich body of thought it is possible to identify aspects which can only be designated as Shintoist.

The primary doctrine of the sovereign’s legitimacy rested on the fact that he or she was a manifest god (akitsumikami) and that the sovereign held the throne by virtue of the Heavenly Sun Succession (amatsuhitsugi 天日嗣) stretching back to the time of the primal deities on the High Plain of Heaven (takamanohara 高天原). This mandate depended also on the descent of the heavenly grandchild from the High Plain, an event described in the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki and denoted by the current formulation of Tenson Kōrin 天孫降臨. Of course these are elements deriving from the mythology of the Kiki but it should be pointed out that these

68 See Bender 2013 for a discussion of auspicious omens in this era.
works are never explicitly cited in the edicts, and the deity Amaterasu is never alluded to by name. Sovereigns are protected by an infinite number of kami in addition to the various Buddhist deities named, and specific oracles and omens are acknowledged to be signs from the kami. A more specifically historical mandate is presented as the unalterable eternal law (aratamu mashijiki tsune no nori 不改常典) handed down by Emperor Tenji.

Sovereigns termed themselves “manifest gods” in nine of the senmyō, inscribed in Old Japanese in Shoku Nihongi. Every edict of accession — for Kōken, Junnin, and Könin -- used this terminology.70 Senmyō 14, in which Emperor Shōmu announced his abdication and the accession of Empress Kōken, employed a lengthy and typical formula explicating the sovereign’s legitimacy:

“Let all hear the words which are the command proclaimed by the Emperor, Beloved Child of Yamato, who rules all under heaven as a manifest god. Let all hear the command of the Emperor, which he decrees and pronounces as a god carrying out the duties of the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession, ruling the country in the divine lineage, age after age of Emperors, beginning with the reign of the distant divine ancestor, according to the decree that “Our Grandchildren shall have the rule of all under heaven,” given by the Divine Male Ancestor and the Divine Female Ancestor, seated as gods in the High Plain of Heaven.71

Here the mandate to rule on the High Throne of Heavenly Sun Succession is traced back not to Amaterasu, but to the Divine Male and Female Ancestors on the High Plain of Heaven. Norinaga commented that these divine ancestors, kamurogi kamuromi no mikoto 神魯棄・神魯美命, may refer explicitly to Izanagi and Izanami or perhaps to all the male and female imperial ancestral deities down to Amaterasu Ōmikami.72 The phrase Yamato Neko 倭根子 occurs nine times in the senmyō. I have translated it as “Beloved Child of Yamato,” following Herbert Zachert’s “Das Liebe Kind von Yamato,” although the term is not transparent. Hermann Ooms has speculated that it should be translated literally as “Root Child of Yamato,” whereas

70 Senmyō 14, 24, 49.
71 現神（止）御宇倭根子天皇可御命〈良麻止〉宣御命〈乎〉、衆聞食宣。高天原神積坐皇親神魯棄・神魯美命以、吾孫〈乃〉命〈乃〉将知食国天下〈止〉言依奉〈乃〉随、遠皇祖御世始而天皇御世御世聞看来食国天〈ツ〉日嗣高御座〈乃〉業〈止奈母〉随神所念行〈佐久止〉勅天皇〈我〉御命〈乎〉、衆聞食勅。
72 Norinaga 1971 MNZ7 p. 100.
the historical linguist John R. Bentley surmises that it derives from a term “Yamato no ye”, meaning “Elder brother of Yamato.”

“Amatsuhitsugi” is found six times in the senmyō, and “Takamanohara” four times.

Empress Kōken/Shōtoku in particular often appealed to the decrees of previous divine sovereigns to bolster her claims of legitimacy. In particular, in Senmyō 45, the Empress quoted decrees by Genshō and Shōmu, and also the Dowager Empress Kōmyō to justify her appointing and then dethroning Junnin as Mikado. In the edict the Empress declared:

“Further Shōmu commanded Us: ‘As for the imperial throne, if it is conferred on someone whom Heaven has not ordained, that person will not be able to keep it. Rather it will cause that person to perish. Even though you may say ‘This is the person whom We have established’, yet if you come to know in your heart and see with your eye that that person is not competent, then follow your heart and replace that person. Thus he decreed.’”

It is significant that both Shōmu and Kōken/Shōtoku reached back to Emperor Tenji, “the Emperor who ruled from the capital of Ōtsu in Ōmi”, as a guarantor of legitimacy (Senmyō 13, 14, 40). In Senmyō 14 there appears the supposed decree of Emperor Tenji that the imperial line should not be broken. In Senmyō 27 Kōken quoted her mother Kōmyō: “The line of imperial descendants of the Emperor who ruled the Realm at Oka no Miya should remain unbroken. To

73 倭根子天皇 Yamato neko sumera ga mikoto. “Yamato neko” is commonly identified in modern commentaries as a bishō or honorific poetic name for male or female sovereign of Yamato. Norinaga had no comment and George Sansom also does not translate the phrase. See Zachert 50, 95; Ooms 2009, 45-48; Bentley comments “My personal theory about the etymology is that this comes from “Yamato no ye” – “elder brother in Yamato,” which collapsed into Yamato Ne. Ko (‘son’) was added later, creating “Neko.” (personal communication). Donald Philippi 1968, 639, gives the literal translation ‘root child’ in his glossary, but notes that it is “understood as a title in the names of hereditary rulers of places”, and gives the tentative translation of “Yamato-Ruler Lord” for Yamatō-Nekō-no-Mikōtō” in Kojiki.

74 近江大津宮 or 近淡海〈乃〉大津宮

75 不改常典, or more specifically 不改〈自伎〉常典 (aratamu mashijiki tsune no nori). This phrase is frequently discussed in the secondary literature. See e.g. Takinami 1998, 14-16, on Shōmu’s enthronement edict and Katsuura 2014 on Kōken’s enthronement edict, 112-113. Nakanishi 2002 devotes a major section to this trope, 265-291.
avoid breaking this line you, even though a young woman, should succeed to Shōmu Tennō.” This Oka no Miya Sovereign however is actually the husband of the later Empress Genmei, the Crown Prince Kusakabe, who died before taking the throne and was posthumously awarded the title of Tennō. Thus doctrines of imperial legitimacy of this period refer to an “unbroken line.” Another method of strengthening claims of legitimacy was to retroactively deify imperial ancestors. This was an approach employed by both Junnin and Könin, who upon accession to the throne named parents, both living and deceased, as Tennō.76

Divine protection by the kami was another element in the political theology of legitimacy. State protection by various Buddhist deities was obviously an important element of political theology in the mid-Nara period, but the tendency has been to overemphasize the Buddhist contribution to this ideology at the expense of the nativist strand. Thus Shoku Nihongi frequently quotes the sovereign as emphasizing that the duty of subjects and ministers is to “serve and protect.” In Senmyō 13 Emperor Shōmu specified the role of the ancient military families: “Now the Ōtomo no Sukune and Saeki no Sukune have always said that they will protect and serve the Emperor’s court, with no regard for their own lives, just as their ancestors said... Thus we employ you as Our bodyguard, serving Our court just as you have served from the beginning down through the reigns of the distant ancestral Emperors. So may you serve as children of your ancestors, having the same hearts.”77 Empress Shōtoku in Senmyō 45 noted that Shōmu had commanded her to employ armed servitors from the East as close guards and attendants: “These Easterners are those who have always said: ‘Though arrows come upon our foreheads, arrows will not come upon our backs.’ They protect their lord single-heartedly. Since you know their hearts, you may employ them.”78 In Senmyō 37 she decreed to the governors of the two lands Yuki and Suki: ‘It is precisely because you serve at the barrier passes with straightforward and clear hearts, protecting the court, that though there are many provinces, Mino and Echizen have been found worthy through divination.”79

Specific protection by the kami from Tachibana no Naramaro and his co-conspirators and from the rebellion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro was cited on the occasions of both disturbances. Senmyō 19, after the suppression of Naramaro, phrased it thus: “That the filthy and detestable wretches have been swept away is

76 Senmyō 25; Senmyō 49.
77 TPSH 1.4.1.
78 JGKU 3.10.1.
79 TPJG 1.11.23.
indeed due to the compassion and protection of the kami of Heaven and Earth and the awesome and fearsome divine spirits of the Imperial Sovereigns who have ruled from the Creation.” The Empress went on to cite secondarily divine protection from Buddhist deities including several Hindu gods. ⁸⁰ After the suppression of Nakamaro’s revolt she declared “We relied on the divine spirits to protect our country, and fortunately the wind and rain aided our army. Within ten days Nakamaro and his allies were completely suppressed and executed. Now the evil ringleader has been swept away and virtue been completely restored.” She went on to change the era name to Tenpyō Jingo 天平神護, Heavenly Peace and Divine Protection.⁸¹ The edict has no reference to Buddhist protectors of the state.

That the Last Empress and her court intellectuals were well-aware of competing divine claims by Buddhist and assimilated Hindu deities and the native kami is clear from the edicts. Senmyō 38, delivered on the occasion of the Ōname, and quoted above is the most famous of imperial edicts weighing the relative claims of kami and Buddhas. She noted that it was “extremely unusual in that We participate as a disciple of the Buddha who has received the Bodhisattva precepts,” but cited the traditional formula that it was the imperial duty to first serve the Three Treasures, next to revere the heavenly and earthly kami, and finally to cherish and nurture the people. Then, although people believe that the “kami should be separate from the Buddhas and should not have contact with them,” she cited Buddhist scripture that the gods are to protect the Buddhist law and serve it. Hence she relaxed the taboo on Shinto and Buddhist clergy mingling at the quintessential Shinto rite. In the Shoku Nihongi edicts, both the senmyō and those inscribed in classical Chinese, the shō 詔 and choku 勅, divine protection by kami as well as Buddhist deities is often cited. In addition there is a large body of omenology in which auspicious signs from a variety of deities is cited as proof of divine legitimacy.⁸² These omens, as well as numerous oracles from the Hachiman shrine, constitute a supplemental body of political theology.

Conclusion

The taboo against using the word Shinto to describe aspects of religion in ancient Japan is highly irrational; it should be broken, and the usage of scare-quotes around the term suspended. This prohibition against the term derives from a modern reaction to the history of Shinto in the twentieth century. It has been

⁸⁰ TPHJ 1.7.12.
⁸¹ TJPJG 1.1.7. 幸頼神霊護国、風雨助軍。
⁸² Bender 2013.
reinforced by influential speculation by the late medievalist Kuroda Toshio about the history of Shinto and more or less codified by the work of John Breen and Mark Teeuwen. As this study has clearly demonstrated, there existed in mid-eighth century Japan an institutional Shinto infrastructure comprising shrines, priests, offerings, and prayers, and an intellectual superstructure comprising theological argumentation by the Empress and her court. Quite obviously the Shinto aspects of Nara religion were complemented by and interwoven with aspects of Buddhist thought from Indian and Chinese sutras, Hindu/Buddhist deities, omenology, and classical Chinese thought from various traditions.

The evidence presented here is the result of an unprecedented translation into English by this author of the complete text of the official court history *Shoku Nihongi* for the years 749-770. Neglect of the evidence of this chronicle is largely to blame for the great lacuna in our knowledge of Shinto in ancient Japan. Roughly sixty percent of *Shoku Nihongi* remains to be translated, and when that work is complete, the remaining four volumes of the Six National Histories (*Rikkokushi* 六国史) which take the official record to the year 887 must be tackled. When that work is completed we will finally be able to speak more intelligently about the history of Shinto during the eighth and ninth centuries.

In 1983 Alexander Meshcheryakov, then of the Academy of Sciences, Moscow, sent a five-page communique to *Monumenta Nipponica* in response to this author’s 1979 article “The Hachiman Cult and the Dōkyō Incident.” He had performed a count of Shinto and Buddhist entries in *Nihon Shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi* from 672 to 792, and summarized his findings thus:

From Temmu to Kammu, I found 698 Shinto and 709 Buddhist entries in *Nihon Shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi*. In spite of the fact that these two figures differ only slightly, their distribution in time varies greatly. The distribution of Buddhist entries has many ups and downs, while the number of Shinto entries grows continuously from the Gemmei reign; this last fact may be explained by the adjustment of the 'Shinto party' (including the emperor) to new political, economic, and religious demands. My arguments show, I hope, that on the whole there was no crisis in the emperors’ relations with the gods; rather, one should say that from time to time there was a crisis in the emperors’ relations with the Buddha.\(^\text{83}\)

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\(^\text{83}\) Meshcheryakov 1983, 88.
Meshcheryakov, who has also translated some of the early volumes of *Shoku Nihongi* into Russian, in a 2008 study of religious themes in Emperor Shōmu’s reign, suggested that “the influence of Buddhism on Shōmu’s politics toward religion has been overestimated and Shinto elements in the structure of state ideology discourse need more consideration.”[^84]

In closing, I would endorse Meshcheryakov’s recommendations for further study. Recently a Japanese medievalist, Inoue Hiroshi, has proposed that Shinto shrines arose in Japan as a result of the establishment of the *ritsuryō* system and in particular of the *Jingikan*, which is translated by Paul Watt as “Office of Shinto Affairs.”[^85] Although Inoue does not examine in detail the *Jingiryō* 神祇令 section of the *Ritsuryō*, it would perhaps be useful to examine the legal provisions for Shinto rituals in that document. Despite the fact that *Ritsuryō* as we know it today was cobbled together from material in ninth century commentaries, there is much detailed and useful information in the codes about the annual program of *matsuri* 祭. Notably, only one of these state ceremonies and shrines, that of the wind kami, appear in the *Shoku Nihongi* record for 749-770. This is presumably due to the stated intent of the editors of *Shoku Nihongi* not to record all events that occurred on a regular basis. Still, another way forward might be to conduct a detailed study of the *Jingiryō* festival calendar and compare it with material from the chronicles as well as *engi* 縁起 traditions of various shrines. There is an enormous amount of work yet to be done on ancient Shinto and many collections of data yet to be mined.

[^84]: Meshcheryakov 2008, 40.
**Bibliography and Abbreviations**

- **HK**: Hōki 宝亀
- **JGKU**: Jingo Keiun 神護景雲
- **MNZ**: Motoori Norinaga Zenshū
- **SN**: Shoku Nihongi [SNKBT edition]
- **TP**: Tenpyō 天平
- **TPJG**: Tenpyō Jingo 天平神護
- **TPSH**: Tenpyō Shōhō 天平勝法

**Primary Sources**


**Translations into Modern Japanese**


**Secondary Sources**


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