

Freedom of Expression

The Very Modern Practice of Visiting a Shinto Shrine

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Utilizing extended fieldwork, interviews, and cross-cultural reference with other religious sites, the present study examines why the practice of visiting Shinto shrines continues to hold salience for millions of contemporary Japanese. Observations show that a majority of individuals coming to one particular shrine, Kyoto's Kamigamo Jinja, generally comply with the spiritual and visual ideology of the site, yet rarely describe themselves as "worshippers" or even know the name of the principal deity. Shrine visits are neither coerced nor made as a rational means to an end; instead, visitors are generally drawn to the shrine as a repository of cultural heritage within a tranquil "natural" setting. Because contemporary shrines generally do not impose guidelines for a shrine visit, nor do priests attempt to monitor behavior, the paper concludes that the shrine's relevance lies not in its message but in the considerable freedom it provides individuals to use its precincts for spiritual, habitual, and recreational pursuits.

Cultural forms may not say what they know, nor know what they say,
but they mean what they do—at least in the logic of their praxis.

Paul WILLIS (1977, p. 125)

THE LOGIC OF CULTURAL FORMS, to paraphrase Willis, may seem another of those monolithic categories academics are so adept at creating, usually at the price of ignoring how individuals shape and often transform the cultural forms they inherit. But were we to substitute "human beings" for "cultural forms" in the quote above, thereby rendering Willis's concept more suitable as an epigram for a discussion of

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visitations to contemporary Shinto shrines, it would perhaps ring truer. The emphasis in the new epigram, as it will be in this paper, is less on the received norms, beliefs, or values (cultural forms) and more on how men and women render these resources into an experience of the world that, for them and for no one else, makes some kind of consistent, coherent, and predictable sense. That the institution of contemporary Shrine Shinto allows individuals sufficient freedom to make these choices during their infrequent visits is, I believe, absolutely vital to the continued relevance of this ancient and yet somehow very modern tradition within one of the world's leading industrial societies.

While the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* has been at the forefront of important scholarship correcting the West's assumptions about the development of ancient, medieval, and early modern "Shinto," surprisingly little has appeared about the present-day actors, issues, or cultural practices of the Shinto institution and its oftentimes novel uses of inherited or (some might say) invented traditions (see UEDA 1979). I have elsewhere discussed the institutional politics, cultural performances, and active participants within this broad tradition, and so will not replot already worked ground (NELSON 1992, 1993b, 1994, 1996). But, continuing one theme, I hope to show why this allegedly "crystallized" religious tradition demonstrates a vital characteristic of modernity: the assumption that individuals may shape their own futures via subjective rationales and practices in the present. How a seemingly traditional religious institution like Shinto has adapted to this aspect of the contemporary moment is an issue every bit as deserving of study as the structures and practices of the past. The contemporary religious institution, with all its complicated actors and orientations, is neither a departure from nor betrayal of its traditions, though neither does it resort to imposing "the pure gravity of categories" sanctified by their embeddedness in the past. It is, instead, "symmetrical" to its traditions at every point of analysis (see REDFIELD 1995).

It seems necessary to ask just what a Shinto shrine is in this day and age of mass transit and cyberspace. What is the cultural logic behind a shrine's operation, and what motivates its active players? What aesthetic, religious, or emotional salience does a shrine have for modern men and women? An easy first answer to our opening question is provided by the fact that the many shrines in Japan (80,000, according to "official" estimates)¹ are often central to the ways in which neighbor-

¹ This figure is based on registered shrines listed under the Religious Juridical Persons Law (*Shūkyō hōjinhō* 宗教法人法), and does not include the small roadside or unattended shrines one frequently sees in the countryside (see BUNKACHŌ 1988, pp. 58-59.) For the pur-

hoods, urban centers, or rural areas constitute themselves historically, politically, economically, and territorially, their physical presence alone providing a point of reference for a region's populace. Particularly for local residents, a shrine is rarely referred to by its official name; instead the honorific "san" is added after some derivative of the official name, as if one were addressing an individual or personal acquaintance (thus we have "Tenjin-san" for Kitano Tenmangū 北野天満宮, "Suwa-san" for Suwa Taisha 諏訪大社, and "Kamigamo-san" for Kamigamo Jinja 上賀茂神社). Keith BASSO has observed that places and landscapes "can be detached from their fixed spatial moorings and transformed into instruments of thought and vehicles of purposive behavior...eminently portable possessions to which individuals can maintain deep and abiding attachments" (1992, p. 223). These "possessions" may just as often be treated in an offhanded manner, but they nevertheless serve to ground present to past in one's own neighborhood and thereby constitute part of one's immediate social reality in Japan.

This awareness is most dramatically manifested during the shrine's festivals of the yearly ritual cycle (*nenjū gyōji* 年中行事). Originating in the relationships between shrine, parishioner, community, and the natural world, these festivals continue to form an important component of modern-day shrine life. As ASHKENAZI points out, festivals serve to promote community, express a locale's common cultural idioms, display power or wealth, initiate newcomers into a sense of place, and provide recreation and entertainment for locals and outsiders (especially tourists) in the context of an event centering around the veneration of the deities associated with a particular shrine (1993, p. 146). At these times a shrine becomes a cosmos unto itself. There is heightened activity, a variety of management strategies and key players vying for strategic roles, and considerable financial gain to be supervised and redistributed among participants and priests.

But, adding a third possibility that returns us to the place itself, a shrine embodies a set of dynamics and practices that serve to discipline activity and exact a certain kind of social compliance for those entering into its cosmos. One of the key features of a shrine is its capacity to organize its landscape in such a way as to embody and symbolize certain fundamental attitudes about the shrine's deity, and to provide gradations of physical access to this deity (mediated by ritual

poses of this paper, the word "shrine" without qualifying adjectives refers to the much more limited number of institutions that have fully employed priests providing ritual services on a day-to-day basis. I have heard complaints against the semantic slippage of the English word "shrine" by a number of priests, most of whom would prefer the Japanese *jinja* 神社 to be used for a large institution to distinguish it from its Catholic or Islamic counterpart.

the closer one gets). The physical approach to the shrine may be straight, but often, as at Kamigamo Jinja, it meanders so as to deflect malevolent energies from approaching too easily (see TAKAHASHI 1991; NELSON 1993b, p. 90). Erving GOFFMAN sees the “accessibility” and “communicability” of both setting and those who act within it as a kind of dialogue that follows unstated yet predictable rules of engagement, dependent upon but not determined by an individual’s conscious interpretations (1969). The architecture of a shrine’s buildings, the scenic attractions of its grounds (the trees, streams, signs, etc.), even the shadowy regions of the deity’s temporary dwelling place serve—to borrow a term from Denis COSGROVE (1986)—as a kind of “visual ideology.” A shrine’s priests would no doubt support FOUCAULT’s notion that the physical layout of a place serves to discipline not only activity but awareness, often bypassing the individual’s own representations about what she or he thinks the encounter entails (1980, p. 183).

Central to this dynamic of observer and object are the spatiotemporal practices (handwashing, strolling, shaking out fortunes from a container, bowing, throwing coins into a coffer and so on) that provide modes of interaction. I am not suggesting that these practices create an environmental determinism that robs people of their intentionality, but rather that they work to structure what appears to be a natural environment. Like a roadmap, the layout of a shrine is a technology of power leading people into behavioral practices that are often unexpected and unanticipated, but that have the potential to give expression to inner mental or emotional states. In a similar vein, Allan Grapard has recently asserted that sacred geography should be thought of as a kind of political geography. Since specific deities were considered to protect particular geographical areas, the meaning of sacred spaces must be seen as a sociopolitical product, intimately related to power and epistemology (GRAPARD 1994, pp. 372–81). According to this perspective, even the natural environment found at a shrine, one of its prime attractions for visitors (as we shall see later), serves as a legitimation as well as an expression of the institutional power that has preserved it (FRIEDLAND and BODEN 1994, p. 34).

Because a visitor’s interpretations are, like all perceptions, culturally constructed, and because they may not occur at a conscious or verbal level, it is a complex and problematic task to present interpretations regarding the activities of shrine visitors. Like other researchers, I have employed tools like questionnaires, interviews, observations, and histories. Yet because the answers these methods evoke are grounded in the changing dynamic of practice rather than in rigid constructions

of structure, they must be taken as tentative and fragile—"solid objects that dissolve under a steady gaze" (GEERTZ 1988, p. 22). For example, though I use the word "visitor" to refer to the individuals who stroll through the grounds of a shrine, in the eyes of the priests there are no "visitors." Anyone coming to a shrine is a *sanpai-sha* 参拝者, or "worshipper," with their physical presence on sanctified grounds constituting an act of reverence whether they know it or not. From a less emic perspective, a visitor may indeed be a worshipper, but he or she may also be local a resident taking a shortcut home, a casual or highly motivated sightseer, or someone seeking a little peace and quiet. Since the categories themselves usually overlap during the course of a single visit, the use of "visitor" as a descriptive term encompasses these shifting possibilities without restricting them. As I will often mention, it is best to think of shrine visits as "multifunctional," even when "religious" elements appear to dominate (RINSCHDE 1992, p. 53).

While generalizations can be made on the basis of empirical observations that chart the course of individuals, as I have done for 112 visitors to Kamigamo Jinja, two grains of salt are prescribed before the reader attempts to digest the patterns I present. First, there is no empirical way to tell from simply watching people whether a visit is predominantly spiritual, habitual, or recreational. As a number of scholars have remarked (READER 1990 and 1991b; DAVIS 1992; EARHART 1984; GRABURN 1983), much of what we think of as Japanese "religious" behavior is a thoroughly syncretic blend of the above three possibilities.² Also, one cannot overemphasize the importance the Japanese place on action, custom, and etiquette as opposed to belief and structure (see ŌMURA 1988). The outside observer finds that many activities appearing to indicate religious belief—such as bringing the hands together, bowing before an image, making an offering, or purchasing an amulet—have alternate interpretations if the individual performing these actions is queried at length. Even then the interpretations remain problematic. An individual bowing deeply before each small shrine en route to the main sanctuary may indeed be devoted to the deity, but she may also be performing these actions out of habit or propriety, all the while thinking about whether or not she turned off the stove before she left home. I say this not to belittle what may indeed be "genuine" piety, belief, or devotion, but as a cautionary

² Rosalind SHAW (1992) has remarked that the term "syncretism" is in the process of being reclaimed by anthropological discourse, much the same way that "fetishism" was reclaimed by writers on postmodern topics. In its newly revised sense, syncretism refers to the composite, constructed, and contested nature of a religious tradition (and of tradition in general) rather than the oft-cited mechanistic merging of channels or tributaries of cultural influence into one dominant "stream."

brake on those who would have subjective observations serve as a vehicle for generalized theories about the religiousness of the Japanese.³

A second point concerns making definitive statements about the motivations behind an individual's visit even when face-to-face interviews are conducted. Personal narrative is imbued with an importance and immediacy that can be both liberating and constricting, but the conceptual openings provided by and through language must constantly be contextualized, reevaluated according to the social positioning of the individual, and weighed for symbolic or political content mitigating the apparent "factuality" of what is said. Even after one has talked to a visitor it often remains unclear whether the person came because of the beauty and calm of the shrine's environs, because the shrine was en route to another destination, or because of a specific "spiritual" goal.

As Winston DAVIS has pointed out (1992, p. 232), measuring "religious" or "secular" attitudes by "simple sociometric techniques" in Japan is complicated by the Japanese capacity for "self-effacement" and the aversion many have to committing themselves in public to any kind of ideological viewpoint, whether religious, political, or social. Observations and interviews may provide a general idea of why people do what they do, but to elevate the empiricism of method in order to validate a body of data does not further an understanding of the issues at hand. "Facticity is a status, not a state," Graham WATSON reminds us, "...and the distinction between 'facts' and 'interpretations' is social rather than epistemological" (1991, p. 87; see also FARDON 1990). This is (at the risk of sounding like an antirevisionist defender of the Japanese "way") generally true in Japan, where situation and context tend to override the blanket applicability of mores and ethics, and where nuance and understatement are valued in certain situations as a sign of one's status, upbringing, and education. To posit a "reality" based on observation alone risks collapsing two different historical/temporal and spatial processes; that of cognition (a visitor's intention) and that of the social setting in which it is realized (see THORNTON 1992, p. 16). So, while my observations, descriptions,

³ Travel books, articles in newspaper travel-section inserts, and short-term accounts of one's "encounter" with the Japanese are among the sources that promote accounts of the "religiosity of Japanese" based on superficial observations. Academics may howl in protest, but there continues to be a real market for exoticizing Japanese religious and cultural practices (as evidenced by coverage in the *New York Times*). In another cultural context, PFAFFENBERGER (1983) showed how the behavior of youthful, modern-day pilgrims in Sri Lanka, while appearing to be "frivolous" religious tourism from an academic perspective, was instead wholly consistent with culturally-supplied symbols celebrating the relevance of the pilgrimage to modern life.

and interpretations may provide a convenient means to think about the experience of Japanese people at a specific place, they are not intended to provide a kind of closure. Instead, like a mountain meadow that is different yet the same each time one visits, this rendering of cultural practices must point beyond the printed text to ongoing social processes that are given shape and meaning by culture and are constantly in flux.

Shrine Visitor Opinions and Motivations

In a recent discussion of tourism and music, ISHIMORI (1991, pp. 24ff.) asserts that in third- and fourth-world countries blessed with beautiful natural environments the populace willingly commoditizes this resource for economic gain through tourism (*shizen no shōhinka* 自然の商品化). Close on the heels of this practice is the subsequent commoditization of a particular country's cultural expressions—its music, festivals, folk art, etc. (*bunka no shōhinka* 文化の商品化)—again for the express purpose of capitalizing upon a tourist market. Key to Ishimori's observations is the fact that local peoples realize the importance of culture-as-commodity not because of an innate sense of what will or will not “sell,” but because they are educated through outside values to concentrate only on those goods and practices that are exploitable for capital gain. Though Ishimori takes pains to remind the reader that he is not concerned with first-world countries (*senshin koku* 先進国), his description of the commoditization of culture applies quite nicely to the booming industry in cultural heritage taking place in his own backyard, and directly affecting religious sites.

The Japanese domestic tourist industry (described by such writers as GRABURN 1983, 1995; BEER 1995; MOON 1989; and MOERAN 1989) “means what it does” in fostering an awareness and nostalgia of cultural inheritance in cities such as Kyoto, Nagasaki, and (despite the earthquake) Kobe, or in the countryside where a pastoral past that “never existed” is advertised, promoted, and marketed as “home” (see ROBERTSON 1991, pp. 25ff.).⁴ Other things that find ample expression

⁴ According to figures provided in March of 1992 by the Kyoto Tourist Association (Kyōto Kankō Kyōkai), people making visits to the city in 1990 reached 38,620,000. Compare this figure with that for the year 1963, in which about half this number (17,711,000) visited the city, and one can see how large a part the Tourist Association has played in the financial health of both the city and its tourist sites. In the words of an official, the Kankō Kyōkai is an organization subsidized by the city government to “protect and preserve the traditions of the city in a way that allows them to coexist with the economic realities of tourism.” For more on the Tourist Association's involvement with “traditional” events, see my discussion of the Aoi Festival in NELSON 1993b (chapter 6).

through the nexus of a shrine include the commoditization of space, custom, and culture in general; the reenchantment of “tradition”; the performance of acts of resistance, protest, or anamnesis (“performance as social memory”); and of course the production of literature on sacred sites as tourist/pilgrimage destinations (see NELSON 1993b and 1996; SMYERS 1993, pp. 442–47).

Before I present information expressing part of the overall cultural logic of shrine visitations, let me briefly digress and position Kamigamo Jinja (or, more correctly, Kamo Wake Ikazuchi Jinja 賀茂別雷神社) as an institution. The shrine has been ranked second to Ise by the Imperial Household Agency since the Heian period, and it continues to receive imperial messengers (*chokushi* 勅使) at its yearly Aoi Festival in mid-May. Although the shrine’s founding date is disputed (possibly 678 CE), documents from the Nara period acknowledge its already considerable power and influence and the existence of a highly popular festival wherein horses were raced for the entertainment of the Kamo clan’s kami. It later became the tutelary shrine of Kyoto, serving to protect the region from flooding by controlling through ritual and petition its powerful kami of thunder and lightning, Wake Ikazuchi (see INOUE 1985, pp. 73–124; ŌWA 1986). The shrine has also served since the eighth century to block malevolent forces from entering the imperial capital from the inauspicious northeast. In short, Kamigamo’s history and cultural heritage resonates throughout the centuries of Japanese civilization, making it a worthy destination among a city full of notable attractions.

But is the allure of history and the chance to walk and worship where emperors and shōguns have passed a primary reason why people come to Kamigamo? To find out, I used a random sample to elicit general “moods and motivations.” By prior agreement with the priests, I interviewed individuals who had completed their visits and were clearly on their way out of the shrine. After first gaining a visitor’s consent to participate in my survey, I asked 52 males and 60 females questions concerning their place of origin, the intention behind their visits, their general knowledge about the shrine’s principal kami, and their impressions of the shrine.

1. Interview question 1: Could you tell me the main reason for choosing to visit Kamigamo Jinja today? (*Kyo dōshite toku ni Kamigamo jinja o eranda no desu ka?*)
 - a. No special reason 18
 - b. It’s a famous place 12
 - c. It was recommended as a nice place 10
 - d. It has famous festivals 9

Table 1. Respondent's Age and Sex

Age	Male	Female
55+ . . . . .	.10 . . . . .	.9
55-40 . . . . .	.10 . . . . .	.12
40-30 . . . . .	.10 . . . . .	.8
30-20 . . . . .	.12 . . . . .	.19
-20 . . . . .	.10 . . . . .	.12
Totals	52	60

Table 2. Visitor's City or Region of Origin

Kyoto . . . . .	.36	Fukui Region . . . . .	.2
Osaka . . . . .	.14	Okayama Region . . . . .	.2
Nara . . . . .	.3	Shizuoka Region . . . . .	.3
Kobe . . . . .	.7	Matsumoto/Nagano . . . . .	.2
Nagoya . . . . .	.8	Hiroshima . . . . .	.5
Wakasa . . . . .	.4	Tokyo Region . . . . .	.26

- e. We were in the area7
- f. It's traditional7
- g. It's a good place to walk8
- h. It's old6
- i. We live nearby5
- j. I wanted to take pictures5
- k. It was recommended by the guidebook4
- l. We're returning from Kurama4
- m. We're planning a wedding here3
- n. We were having lunch nearby3
- o. It's our graduation trip3
- p. We have a baby dedication next week3
- q. We asked for harmony between us2
- r. I asked blessings for my company, which is poorly located . . .1
- s. It's a good place to meet people1
- t. I saw it on television1

2. Interview question 2: Do you happen to know the name of the shrine's principal kami? (*Kamigamo jinja ni matsurarete iru kamisama no namae o gozonji desu ka?*)

This question, which might seem unreasonably specific, was evoked by the fact that the kami's name was on virtually all the more detailed informational signs. Visitors' answers to this question showed little awareness of the content of these signs, despite having stood and

looked at one for several seconds. Of the 112 respondents, 16 (or 14%) knew the deity's name, while 96 (or 86%) did not. When I mentioned this to the shrine's senior priests, they were not the least bit surprised. "I'm amazed," said one, "that 14% were correct. That's much higher than I thought it would be!"

3. Interview question 3 concerned where visitors had been prior to coming to the shrine and where they intended to go afterwards. For one-third of all respondents, Kamigamo was the first place they had visited that day. For those coming from elsewhere, no real pattern could be discerned concerning a possible visitor's circuit. I had predicted that many of Kamigamo's visitors would be "drop-ins" en route to or from the better-known sites of northern Kyoto such as Daitoku-ji, Kinkaku-ji, Sanzen-in or Kibune/Kurama. When any of these sites was mentioned, however, it was usually to come after the individual or group's Kamigamo visit. Virtually all Kyoto respondents said they were either going home after the visit or were en route to other errands.

4. Interview question 4: "As compared to other shrines you've been to, is there anything special about Kamigamo Jinja that makes an impression on you?" (*Ima made ni irasshatta jinja to kurabete, nani ka toku ni Kamigamo Jinja de insho ni nokotta koto ga arimasu ka?*)

Table 3. Shrine Characteristics Motivating Visit

Natural environment	40
Streams	16
Colors/Color Contrasts	10
Brightness	8
Architectural aesthetics	6
Cultural	16
High Status	6
Heian-style festivals	6
Seen on television	4
Total respondents	112

The information stemming from these interviews points towards two general cultural trends. The first concerns a public awareness that shrines (and other religious sites) are prime repositories of Japanese cultural heritage. Thirty-five percent of respondents mentioned some aspect of the shrine's history, culture, or tradition as that which motivated their visit. The other trend concerns an appreciation for the natural world found at places like shrines. Like many of its counterparts within urban areas, Kamigamo is well-kept, spacious, and quiet; this accentuates the beauty of the streams, buildings, and the sur-



Kamigamo Shrine, outer grounds.

rounding landscape. Thus, it is not surprising that more than half the visitors represented in table 3 mentioned the shrine's natural environment as a particularly striking characteristic.

If the above responses are taken as representative for shrine visitors nationwide, then the main draw of a majority of shrines is not their "religious" services but their complementary ambiance of nature and what I call heritage aesthetics. And yet, as I asserted earlier, this attraction works to the shrine's advantage as a religious site, since most visitors engage in activities that complement rather than detract from the institution's viability. Nostalgia for the past and the reassertion of aristocratic aesthetics are promoted by the shrines themselves, by local and national media, and even by politicians, merchants, and architects. The emotive, nativistic appeal of a shrine's physical features, symbols, and layout to evoke appropriate and complementary behavior is demonstrated in, for example, the work of Jennifer ROBERTSON (1991) on the conscious manipulation of shrine festival dynamics to promote community within urban housing projects, in my own work on the tactics of shrine administrators (NELSON 1996), and even in Isozaki Arata's design using Ise Shrine's stone spaces for the Disney Corporate Headquarters in Orlando, Florida (ISOZAKI 1992, p. 21).

Positionings

Much of the substantial literature on the activities of visitors at religious institutions is of little use since many of the so-called guidelines for differentiating visitors, tourists, and pilgrims are place-specific and frequently overlap (see COHEN n.d., conclusion). Although Kamigamo Jinja has been a pilgrimage site at various periods in the past—in the sixth century, for example, its Kamo Festival drew people from as far away as western Hyōgo Prefecture (ŌWA 1986), and during the war years it attracted crowds because of its status as a “Great Shrine for the National Front” (Kanpei Taisha 官幣大社)—Kamigamo today commands little of the mass appeal of centers like Ise, Meiji, or Izumo, or even the headquarters of New Religions like Tenrikyō, Ōmotokyō, or Gedatsukai (see EARTHART 1989). In fact, many of the major guide books to Kyoto (such as Japan Travel Bureau’s Ace Guide, Pocket Guide, *Tabi-no-nōto* [Travel notes] or the Blue Guide series) mention it as occupying the hidden side, or *ura*, of Kyoto—worth a visit if one has time (or if combined with a local eatery or speciality shop on a gourmet tour), but not really essential when compared to other sites such as Ginkaku-ji or Kiyomizu-dera.

Thus, to talk about Kamigamo Jinja as an “axis mundi” in Eliade’s phrase, as a “center out there” in Turner’s, or as a “formal” or “popular” center of pilgrimage (COHEN 1992, p. 36) is to misrepresent its status in the eyes both of outside visitors (who see it primarily as a religious or political-cultural attraction set within pleasing natural surroundings) and of local residents (who regard it as a defining feature of their neighborhood and, in many cases, of their family and regional identity). Too often the local perspective is overlooked or understudied in research on visitations to religious sites, as if the people who actually live in the area and use the institution are mere bystanders or extras in the spectacle of mass-transit visitations. In the latter part of this discussion I will take a detailed look at activities and practices that, because they center on a shrine as a kind of communal resource, define part of the interplay between institution-as-place and its perception and use in ways not always in line with officially sanctioned norms.

To set the stage for the issues I wish to raise later, let me point out that some of the framing (rather than theoretical) concepts used in studies of religious tourism and pilgrimage can be applied profitably to shrine visitations in general, regardless of the visitor’s motivation. For example, COHEN’s categorizations of motives for pilgrimage to a religious site—acquiring religious merit, making specific requests, seeking specific powers to enhance one’s life situation, etc. (1992, p. 38)—can be extended to include those individuals who may have

come simply to enjoy seasonal scenery, a festive event, or a moment of unhurried privacy. Less helpful are guidelines like those proposed by Valene SMITH (1992, p. 14), who sees belief as the key element identifying the journey of the pilgrim-tourist and who straitjackets the visitor's motives into sacred or secular categories, as if these binary opposites were more than analytical constructs that, when viewed in terms of actual practice, tend to quickly dissolve.

Victor TURNER's notion of a "religious-political center," introduced in one of his earliest works on pilgrimage (1973, p. 229), is helpful in understanding the present-day public status of Kamigamo Jinja. Turner's concept corresponds to the Japanese institution of *saisei-itchi* 祭政一致 (worship administration) that has long been central to the sociopolitical dynamic of government in Japan (see MURAKAMI 1970, p. 32; KITAGAWA 1987, pp. 117ff.). Turner goes on to describe some of the once-powerful centers of this type in Europe (Chartres, Köln, Canterbury) as "ritualized vestiges" of their former grandeur. This applies to Kamigamo as well (along with almost every other major shrine complex). Though Kamigamo Jinja was allied to state interests throughout its long history as a "nation-preserving" shrine, today its administrators carefully downplay and selectively "forget" those controversial periods. While strong nationalistic sentiments are still harbored by a portion of the shrine's clientele, the public expression of these leanings has become a political liability, thus detracting from attempts to capitalize upon a selected set of more generic cultural assets (see NELSON 1993b, 1994).

As a final framing concept, let me introduce what Victor and Edith TURNER (1978, p. 7) have called the "bureaucratic organization" of the pilgrim's experience—the mediation by travel agents, tour operators, and travel itineraries that occurs as visitors move from the "mundane center" of their daily lives to the "sacred periphery" where they can reflect on basic religious and cultural meanings. To the Turners' list should also be added the administrative mediation of those in charge of the site itself. Let us now examine in more detail the subtle strategic and shaping influences of shrine administrators, another key factor in any understanding of contemporary shrines.

Markers and Measurements

Markers, signs, notices, and icons of representation grab the attention of a visitor to a shrine and influence behavior even before he or she enters the actual place. At the outer boundary of a shrine one may find anything from a crudely lettered sign naming the site, to a wooden



Kamigamo Shrine, early Meiji period.

replica of an Edo-period notice board, to an intricately painted map of the entire precinct seen from the height of a passing hawk (as at Shimogamo Jinja, Kumano Hongū, or Meiji Jingū). Public spaces in Japan—such as commuter train coaches, train and bus stations, and pedestrian thoroughfares—are generally awash in messages, announcements, and, of course, advertising of every conceivable product and service. Visitors to religious institutions are often granted a reprieve from these demands on their attention, and yet they would likely think it strange were the places to be totally lacking in markers. After all, as MACCANNELL points out (1990, p. 45), there is a process of “sight sacralization” at work in places open to the public, whereby signs and markers serve not only to identify significance but frame and elevate specific attributes in a way that “enshrines” their importance. In other words, the visitor is rewarded by visual clues indicating not only that he or she has come to the right place, but also that it is a place important and thus worthy of a visitor’s time, attention, and, as we shall see later, money.

Books dealing with the phenomenology of religion frequently point out that religious institutions in Japan are sources of or gateways to power that is channelled through buddhas, kami, or some feature of the site’s natural environment, such as the waters of a spring (see SONODA 1990). This special attribute of a place is often but not always marked by a sign or series of signs that “signify to all who enter that

they are moving from the ordinary world into something special, into the powerful presence of the spiritual realms" (READER 1991b, p. 138). At Kamigamo, however, one notices several exceptions to this general pattern. The signs lack the sequential progression informing visitors they are moving into a special, spiritual realm. In addition, some of the largest and most dominant of the on-site markers perform decidedly nonreligious functions as well.⁵

The permanent markers at Kamigamo Jinja fall into three basic categories. The first announces (and advertises) services performed by the shrine, the second instructs visitors on a variety of subjects ranging from prohibited behavior to the identity of the deities, and the third appeals for contributions. I will turn now to a more detailed analysis of these signs, not so much to analyze their content but rather to explore their messages as announcements that reveal, in a very public way, an emic view of the institution's social and cultural role.

The first indication of the shrine that the visitor to Kamigamo is likely to see is a two-meter-high sign featuring the brightly painted red characters 厄除 (*yaku yoke*, "protection against misfortune"). Standing like a beacon above the turbulence of traffic, pedestrians, and shop signs, this sign is already visible from the Misono Bridge over the Kamo River, one hundred meters away. Shop fronts, tree branches, and a never-ending bottleneck of cars, buses, taxis, and motorcycles do nothing to detract from its announcement of purification for those at ages thought to be inauspicious. At the bottom of the huge *kanji* letters runs the message *Kakushu gokitō—Jichinsai hoka* 各種御祈祷—地鎮祭他 (literally, "All kinds of prayers; land-purification rituals and so forth"). The visitor is informed that she is approaching a place with a ritual repertoire of sufficient versatility and breadth to meet a wide range of needs (not all of which, as the prominence of the *jichinsai* attests, should be assumed to fall under the category of "religious" or "spiritual").

This enormous sign, as big as any highway billboard, constitutes both a notice of services offered and a reminder that certain members of the community are at risk. It can also be seen in an educational or even proselytizing light, informing people of a cosmos that modern-day individuals might no longer believe in but that might just influence their lives nonetheless. Would it hurt, after all, to have a

⁵ Kamigamo's priests were fascinated by my observations of visitor movement and activity. They seemed aware that few visitors read the sign by the first torii, but when presented with percentages based on a year's worth of observations of nearly one hundred twelve visitors (where only three percent actually read the entire sign), they began discussing alternative sites for the sign as well as alternative ways of presenting the same information in a more "digestible" format.

five-minute purification performed at the “inauspicious ages” of nineteen and thirty-three for a woman or twenty-four and forty-two for a man? Interestingly enough, one is given no clues as to the name of the institution offering these services.

As the visitor approaches the shrine, dodging the taxis and buses that use part of Kamigamo’s precincts as an “end-of-the-line” staging point, she sees the first of the shrine’s enormous torii gateways. Here two markers vie for her attention. To the left of the torii is the more striking of the two, a recently constructed notice board built of the finest-quality *hinoki* wood in an Edo-period style, complete with roof and little fence surrounding its waist-high stone pedestal:

Sadame

Hitotsu: Kuruma, uma o nori ireru koto

Hitotsu: Sakana, tori o toru koto

Hitotsu: Chiku, boku o kiru koto

Migi no jōjō keidai ni oite kinshi suru

Notice

Riding vehicles or horses;

Fishing or hunting birds;

Cutting bamboo or trees;

These three things are prohibited
within the shrine grounds.

Even though the sign is new, the somewhat quaint nature of these prohibitions reinforces the notion that the shrine is a kind of open-air historical relic. It also reflects the most fundamental of concerns for the shrine’s administrators (or, for that matter, of any landholder): that the landscape be in no way interfered with.

To the right of the torii, as if to compensate for the naiveté of the first list of prohibitions, is the second sign, which is completely functional both in both its simple design and straightforward message:

Beyond this is shrine property. Do not disturb the beauty of the area or its scenery, or impair the dignity of the place. In addition, the following activities are prohibited:

- Putting up stalls for the purpose of selling
- Handing out flyers, brochures, advertisements, political or religious messages
- Putting up posters or billboards
- Making public speeches
- Disturbing other worshippers

Parishioner’s Council
Kamo Wake Ikazuchi Shrine

With these two lists of injunctions, and before taking a single step inside the shrine grounds, the visitor has been instructed not only in proper behavior but also in the importance of the shrine’s natural surroundings. All the same, one quickly notes that the prohibitions do not include the consumption of alcohol nor other likely candidates

like sports, public assemblies, and sexual activities, all of which, as we will see, occur with regularity.

Once inside the first torii, the visitor is greeted with what is, in modern Japan, an unusual sight: open expanses of well-kept grassy lawns on either side of the long straight worshippers' path (*sandō* 参道). The largest of these is used for the running of horses during the important *kurabe-uma* 競馬 on 5 May, but they also remain accessible to the public for picnics, Frisbee throwing, and lazy Sunday afternoons with a book and a blanket. More than any sign, these fields enjoin visitors to understand the quality of the area (or arena) they are entering. Only a powerful shrine (or a property of the imperial household, like the expansive *Goshō* 御所 palace in Kyoto) could maintain such green spaciousness. The "visual ideology" of the shrine's social power and status is thus conveyed by the physical emptiness of these fields.

Walking about a hundred meters, the visitor reaches the second torii and there encounters another large *yaku yoke* sign, similar to the one by the bridge entrance. On the opposite side, rarely noticed and even more rarely read by visitors, is the first of the purely instructional markers that delve into the mythology, history, and cultural significance of the shrine. Most visitors merely glance at this elegant, densely lettered wooden placard, then succumb to the lure of the middle courtyard's graceful pavilions. The markers in this area are scarcely legible, so thoroughly weathered is their wood. Still, there is a small *tatefuda* 立札 ("standing board") in front of every structure giving its name and noting its status as an "important cultural property" (*jūyō bunkazai* 重要文化財) but offering no additional information. Approaching the inner courtyard, the visitor sees either of two instructional markers that recount myths, important festivals and rituals, and supposed founding dates of the main and subordinate shrines. Again, the visitor that takes the time to read these signs is rare, as most prefer to continue their leisurely strolls. Passing through the main gate (*rōmon* 楼門) leading to the middle sanctuary and courtyard, the visitor suddenly encounters the last of the large signs, a plea for contributions at the approach to the site of worship:

<i>Shaden shūri hi no go-kishin</i>	Please make a contribution
<i>o onegai shimasu</i>	for the repair of the shrine buildings.

Announcements and appeals of this nature come either as directives from the chief priest (*gūji* 宮司) or as suggestions offered by the lay organizations that, through lobbying or influence-peddling, receive the chief priest's sanction. In the words of one senior priest, "Whenever an (instructional) sign gets too old, or someone complains that it

looks shoddy, we solicit donations and put up a new one, usually copying what was already there.” Rather than implementing new knowledge or interpretations, this practice perpetuates the ideas of chief priest Sawada, active just after the war, who was known for erudition but not for scholarly objectivity.

The younger priests are aware of the problem with the instructional signs and indicate concern that few visitors stop to read them. One commented, “In this day and age, we need to have graphics on our signs, or some kind of picture that will catch a worshipper’s eye. As they are now, the information on the signs is too detailed (*komakai* 細かい) and hard to read.” When I asked about specific points on several of the signs, particularly regarding an old practice of burying large jugs of water beside the stream, I could find no one capable of explaining what function this practice might have served. “It’s *that* type of sign,” I was told without apology by one of the priests, “that needs to be made more contemporary. There are problems on almost all the signs, but I don’t know anyone capable of rewriting them in a way that is accurate and interesting.”⁶

Advances

According to the priests, who are schooled in ritual propriety and must demonstrate their expertise before they can be promoted, a “correct” shrine visit involves a certain approach, an act of worship before the kami, and a prescribed departure. Regardless of the size of the shrine or its location in Japan, the first stage of the process begins with an act emblematic of a great number of Shinto’s ritual concerns: a purification at the stone water-basin, the *temizuya* 手水屋. The water is used to cleanse the hands (symbolizing one’s actions) and mouth (words) before one proceeds into the shrine. Next, according to the

⁶ I should perhaps mention something that at first appears obvious—the fact that while the meanings of signs in Japanese are impenetrable to the average foreign tourist, they may nevertheless convey a message. At Kamigamo, as well as at numerous other shrines throughout Japan, the Hitachi Corporation has donated signs signifying important cultural treasures. These markers are uniform in appearance, with neatly printed red-and-white characters against a brown background. At the bottom of the signs, immediately below the company’s logo, Hitachi’s name appears in English in bright red letters. When I once inquired of a foreign visitor leaving the shrine whether she had any questions, she wanted only to know more about the relationship between Kamigamo and Hitachi. When I mentioned that to my knowledge there was none, she replied that since the Hitachi-sponsored signs displayed the only English words in the entire shrine compound she had assumed there was some important relationship. She was nearly as surprised by my answer as I was by her question, although the greatest surprise was, as might be imagined, shown by the priests. No one who reads Japanese would have given the slightest thought to the Hitachi advertisement, so successfully have the conglomerates infiltrated every social and, as in this case, religious setting.

Kamigamo priests, one should cross the Negi Bridge (thus attaining an automatic purification, since traversing flowing water removes impurities) and pay one's respects before the shrine of Tamayorihime 玉依姫, the mythical mother of the principal deity. One then crosses the last bridge (another instant purification), enters the main Tower Gate (the *rōmon*), climbs the stone stairs, and finally arrives at the Middle Gate (the *nakamon*). Here, while looking into the splendidly preserved inner sanctuary (shielded from full view by sedge-grass screens, curtains, and low eaves), one might compose one's prayer or petition. Then one tosses a few coins (ideally, the priests say, ¥100) into the offering box; the coins serve as a donation and as another way to remove impurities. Next one enacts the hand-clapping gesture (*kashiwade* 柏手; two bows, two claps, and a final bow), which supposedly distinguishes the act of Shinto worship from the Buddhist form.⁷ One then takes a single step back, bows ever so slightly to inform the deity that one's business is completed, walks back down the steps, and turns before departing to enact a last bow of farewell and gratitude. The final station on the "correct" course includes a stop at the shrine's information and amulet counter (the *juyosho* 授与所, place of bestowing blessings) to purchase a talisman (¥800), amulet (¥500–¥800), set of postcards (¥600), telephone calling card (¥500–¥1000), or some other item to remind one of the shrine and incur the protection of the deity. Legally speaking, the shrine does not "sell" these objects lest it endanger its tax-exempt status; a visitor makes a "donation" and receives these objects in return.

After all is said and done, however, it is easy to wonder why anyone should follow the priests' course of visitation and worship. At Kamigamo Jinja, like the majority of shrines in Japan, the visitor is on his or her own to "do the right thing," since there are neither visual markers nor written instructions about what constitutes a "correct" course, nor do people have the opportunity (were they so inclined) to find out from the priests.⁸ With the administrative offices located out-

⁷ I have been told that the *kashiwade* (literally *kashiwa* 柏 and *te* 手, or "oak tree hands") signifies the male and female hands "coming together," like two leaves of the bisexual oak tree, in an act of worship. As I have discussed elsewhere (NELSON 1993a), for early social groups the matter of sexual procreation was central to their interaction with the animating life forces of their cosmos.

On the other hand, the *Shintō daijiten* (SHIMONAKA 1969, vol. 1, p. 319; vol. 3, p. 115) points out that use of the kanji 柏 with a "tree" radical is an error for the kanji 拍 with a "hand" radical, so that the compound is read *hakushu* (the same word used for "clapping").

⁸ Since the shrine's priests work away from the areas most frequented by visitors, the only person available for consultation (assuming a visitor was motivated to ask) is the attendant at the amulet counter. At Kamigamo this position is most often staffed by the shrine's female attendants (*miko*), next by the most junior priests, and finally by the gentleman from the upper *juyosho* close to the inner sanctuary.

side the central shrine compound (and for good reason—as one priest put it, “Not all that goes on in an office is something you want the kami to know about”), there is a little chance that a visitor will even see a priest during a visit, let alone have the opportunity to talk to one. Nor can one find anything on the topic of ritual propriety for visitors in the literature available at the amulet counter.

For those preoccupied with orthodoxy or orthopraxis, this laxity of prescribed practices would seem a breeding ground for all sorts of “heretical” or “illicit” religious behavior. Yet I will assert again that contemporary Shinto’s toleration of innovative and highly personal forms of worship, some of which we will explore below, is one of its most important characteristics.

Whose Visit Is It?

Judging from my survey data, most individuals coming to Kamigamo are sightseers first, what we might call “exchange practitioners” second (see BEFU 1980), and frequently but not always “worshippers” last (the reader will recall the opening discussion of this paper, and remember that this word is used to describe outward behavior only).

For the first group, participation entails only a slow amble through the sumptuously cared-for grounds and pauses at the various markers indicating the names of the buildings but rarely lingering to read the entire descriptions.

The second group, although they do not engage in acknowledging the deities, may nonetheless want some pragmatic interaction with the shrine and so purchase a fortune (*omikuji* おみくじ) or amulet (*omamori* お守) as part of their visit (see IKKAI 1988).

The third group, by and large the largest and most complex, combines the activities of all three groups yet more conspicuously exhibits some outward gesture of deference acknowledging that they have come to a place requiring a certain kind of behavior. I am still reluctant to assert that my observations of and conversations with these individuals reveal their “true” religious beliefs, or that social practices are functionally equivalent with inner dispositions, so I am unable to say whether their deference is based on a sense of the presence of the deity, on a belief that ritual propriety requires it, or on a feeling that this is the accepted social form of interaction with the place.

Once inside Kamigamo’s inner courtyard, visitors labor up the rather steep stone steps until they reach the *nakamon* (middle gate) through which only priests, ritual participants, and authorized individ-

uals may pass.⁹ Before this final barrier one can observe a wide variety of actions and styles of what appears to be worshipful behavior, all taking place on a gray limestone platform some three by six meters in size. The principle activity signifying what Catherine BELL calls “interaction (with the deity) from the bottom up” (1992, p. 201)—and which most Westerners would recognize as the only private moment an individual has at a shrine—is the *kashiwade* (or, more formally, *hairei* 拝礼). About half the visitors make a small monetary donation into the large wooden coffer, then, after bowing twice, raise their hands to the level of their chest and clap two times. In standardized practice, such as is taught at the training universities for priests, the performance of *kashiwade* is straightforward and simple, taking no more than fifteen seconds. There are, however, many and varied manifestations and transmutations of this basic gesture, including multiple claps interspersed by moments of prayer, multiple bows of varying angles (deeper bows apparently signalling more intense petitions), prolonged prayer (much as one might do in front of a Buddhist altar), and claps arranged into a rhythmic sequence.

Once again, there is no normative pattern of worship prescribed by the shrine and promoted as such. The priests have been educated to uphold the propriety of certain ritual gestures, but they do not, as specialists, impose these traditions upon the visitors in any way. While the majority of people simply toss a coin, clap their hands a couple times while bowing, then move on to the next site, there are other types of worship performance at the Middle Gate. The three individuals described below, all frequent visitors to the shrine, serve as possibilities rather than aberrations for what constitutes a shrine visit in contemporary Japan. Thus their dramatic and apparently sincere behavior should be located along a continuum of ritual practices that finds common motivation in conveying to spiritual entities a highly personal agenda.

1. Mr. N., from a suburb in southern Kyoto, comes on the morning

⁹ Despite its flat approaches and walkways, Kamigamo Jinja is not accessible to the handicapped. On several occasions I have seen people in wheelchairs maneuver all the way to the Tower Gate’s steps, where, able to go no further, they gaze at the barrier before them much as a hiker might look at a sheer cliff suddenly rising from the middle of a pleasant trail. I have seen shrine priests walk past these same individuals, never once asking whether they would like to be carried into the shrine for a closer look. Because Kamigamo is a private corporation, it is doubtful whether Japan’s few laws addressing inadequate handicap access would apply. It must also be mentioned that the social stigma borne by handicapped individuals has in part been conditioned by “religious” discrimination directed against their infirmities, which can be seen as a form of “impurity.” Similarly, handicaps were thought of, from the perspective of popular Buddhism’s notions of karma, as punishments for misdeeds in a past lifetime.

on the fifteenth of every month to petition the deity. A rather tall man of sturdy proportions, twenty-five to thirty years of age, he is always immaculately dressed in a double-breasted suit, slicked-back hair, and shoes shined to a sparkle. Bypassing the font for cleansing one's hands and mouth, he heads first for the middle of the Tower Gate entrance, where he plants his feet wide apart and enacts the *kashiwade* with sweeping gestures that indicate an affection for sumo wrestling. Then he ascends the stairs, locates two stones in front of the Middle Gate, and positions his feet in a manner not unlike a major league baseball player stepping up to the plate to bat. Legs wide apart, he flexes his knees, rolls his shoulders, and clears his throat before fixing his gaze in the direction of the inner sanctuary. Pulling a folded piece of paper from his suit-jacket pocket, he opens the first of many folds and begins his own invitational prayer, modeled on the *norito* prayer format followed by Shinto chief priests before the altar. At first the words are slow and distinct: "Oh great Kami, hear the petition of N., from X, who addresses you in awe and gratitude...." Soon after the prologue, however, the speed doubles, then triples, until Mr. N. is ripping along like a Buddhist priest trying to chant the *nenbutsu* a million times. Even at this speed his petition usually takes ten minutes to deliver. The attendant of the upper amulet counter adjacent to the Middle Gate says that Mr. N. is always on time, always stands in the same place, and always leaves without acknowledging anyone. His monetary offering to the shrine is discreetly slipped into the wooden coffer at the beginning of his petitioning, and never placed in an envelope that might give away the identity of its donor.

2. Mr. H., a man in his late fifties, makes the trip from Yokohama to Kyoto once a month between the first and the fifth, paying around ¥23,000 (approximately US\$230) roundtrip on the "bullet train" to pay respects to the power of Wake Ikazuchi. Unlike Mr. N., he is quite open about his motives for making this journey:

I believe the deity to be great and fearful, largely because I was granted a vision at Koyama [the shrine's sacred mountain] shortly before the terrible typhoon of 1991. It was a beautiful day in early August, still and hot, but not sticky like it usually is, and I had gone to the mountain as is my custom. Suddenly, even though there was no wind, the thick growth of trees and vegetation on the southern face of the mountain became agitated, as if moved by a great wind. However, there was no wind at that moment—so how did it happen? The very next day, typhoon 19 hit Japan—eventually extending from Kyūshū to northern Honshū—causing damage like we haven't had from

a single typhoon in years. The kami of thunder and lightning gave me a message, and I've been trying to ready myself for the next one ever since. I do *misogi* 禊 [purification by flowing water] daily, and have formed a group of people in Yokohama to talk, study, and experience this austerity so that we might be closer to the spiritual world.

He performs the *kashiwade* not once but three times in succession. Upon the completion of his worship, Mr. H. always makes it a point to visit the priests at the administration building and keep them up-to-date on his group's activities.

3. Mrs. S., aged 70+ from the city of Ōtsu, struggles up the steps to the Middle Gate twice a month and sits on the stone in *seiza* style (legs folded with the feet tucked under the buttocks). There, hands held together in the Buddhist-style *gasshō*, she mutters a prayer of some five minutes' length while gently swaying back and forth. I am told that she is not the only woman to kneel on the stone, though for a man to do so would be "very unusual" (or, in the words of another priest, "out of the question"). Today, on her way back to the bridge over the river, she picks up little red berries on the path beside the Mitarashi stream, bows to the hillside that the berry bush grows upon, then finds a suitable spot to kneel beside the gently flowing water. She cradles the berries in one hand and, beginning what seems to be a prayer, methodically tosses them one-by-one into the stream. Despite the soft morning rain she does not wear a jacket or carry an umbrella. When the berries are all gone, she bows to the stream, walks across the bridge to the second torii, turns and bows once again in the direction of the inner sanctuary, and slowly ambles away.

From the above accounts it is clear that, despite the exalted rank of Kamigamo's principle deity, Wake Ikazuchi, and the fact that there is no physical representation of him available to the public, many people supply their own religious framework and establish what may loosely be termed a patron/client relationship with the deity.¹⁰ Requests to the kami, which cover the entire range of human problems and hopes, are most conspicuously on view at the racks where *ema* 絵馬 (inscribed wooden placards) are hung. READER has called *ema* "letters to the gods" that "offer a channel whereby Japanese people may therapeutically liberate their feelings in an individual way that enables them to transcend the restrictions of their social milieu"

¹⁰ Compare this with pilgrimage in Spain (CHRISTIAN 1988, p. 238), and, I would suggest, with Catholicism in general, where a hierarchical stratification of a saint's rank and importance influences whether an individual will petition that saint for material benefits.



Kamigamo Shrine, main entrance.

(1991a, p. 45). He gives a full analysis of the practice of buying and presenting *ema* plaques, so I need not rephrase his discussion here. Let me add only that if one surveys even a few of the petitionary messages written on the reverse of these colorful placards it becomes clear that the reasons people “turn to the gods in times of trouble” (*kurushii toki no kamidanomi* 苦しい時の神頼み) range from toothaches to uninterested girlfriends to wayward husbands to upcoming entrance examinations. I would also add that the *ema* provide the individual with another means to become part of the place in a physical way. To externalize one’s hopes, desires, troubles, and anxieties upon a piece of wood that is left in the company of hundreds of other such notices is to join a community of petitioners. Individuals often read a number of *ema* before choosing a position for their own, as if looking for a neighborhood where one’s request will best fit in. And while the observer cannot know for certain what degree of belief accompanies such acts, I would agree with Reader that they serve as reminders, commitments, and insurance factors in an uncertain world, given that they occur within a religious context, are often accompanied by bows, and specifically address the kami.

While the above examples comprise public expressions and performances thought appropriate for a shrine and its deity, there are also occurrences of a more private, off-stage nature. To gain a full understanding of shrine visitations in contemporary Japanese society, we must also include those individuals who operate within the shrine’s spatial jurisdiction but outside its social norms.

Off-stage Rites, Curse-casting, and Other Recreations

In describing what happens on the grounds of a shrine at night, it is useful to note SONODA Minoru’s general discussions of the Japanese *matsuri* (1988, 1990). A *matsuri*—a phenomenon usually translated into English as “festival”—is actually a complex event composed of two parts, the first being “ritual” (*saigi* 祭儀) and the second being “festival” (*shukusai* 祝祭). During unspecified “ancient times,” Sonoda writes, the formal and solemn *saigi* was for the daylight hours while the *shukusai*—with its aspects of carnival, bacchanalia, and even protest—was reserved for the cover of darkness. Night was “viewed as a world of visions, a time in which the order of day dissolved into darkness and various ancestral and other spirits freely traveled to and from the land of shade. The very act of humans awakening from that night and becoming active was a kind of offense against order” (SONODA 1988, p. 59; see also IWATA 1975).

Although they concern *matsuri*, Sonoda's words also apply to the situation of the individual in contemporary Japan (or any other highly industrialized society) who seeks release from the solemn roles he or she must play during the daylight hours and the regimented behavior demanded by cultural and social norms. Although shrines and priests are thought of by many Japanese as examples par excellence of rigid and formalized behavior, some local residents nonetheless see the space and otherworldliness of the shrine precincts as liberating and empowering, especially when the priests and "mainstream" visitors are absent. The activities I will describe often have a secretive, even mysterious air to them since they occur outside regular shrine hours (8:30–4:30 in summer, 9:30–4:00 in winter) and away from the shrine's sacred center, and since the actors use the place for their own agendas and prefer to stay out of the notice of the priests. Like detectives constructing a narrative based on circumstantial evidence at the scene of a crime, we piece together bits and pieces of "imponderabilia" to form images of these activities, supplementing the above discussions about shrine visits and the functions of shrines in society.

Anyone familiar with the Japanese landscape knows how common it is to encounter, seemingly at random, little shrines, statues of Buddhist saints, and memorial marker stones. In the more sparsely populated areas some are woefully neglected, but where there are people nearby a thoughtful individual usually cares for the site. At certain times, such as on the first and fifteenth of the month, apples, oranges, bananas, and other fruit are offered in front of smaller shrines (*hokora*, *miya*) and at the base of Buddhist Jizō statues alongside fields and roads. Offerings are made at grave markers at any time of the year but especially during the Buddhist holidays of *higan* and *obon*.

At Kamigamo Jinja offerings appear not only at the subordinate shrines but also alongside the Nara-no-ogawa stream. Atop the many flat rocks flanking the stream one often sees fruit and occasionally dried cuttlefish (*surume*) set upon a white square of lightweight paper, flanked by a little pile of uncooked rice and a pile of salt. These offerings are similar to those presented by Shinto priests during important ceremonies and by ordinary people during rituals at their *kamidana* 神棚 altar at home. Rice, salt, fruit, and water are thought to be the essential "meal" (with only saké rice wine missing) for numinous entities—whether they be Shinto kami, Buddhist departed ancestral spirits (*senzo* 先祖), or perhaps even the wandering malevolent spirit (*onryō* 怨霊). Next to the paper is often a hardened pool of melted wax, the remnant of a spent votive candle that is so much a part of Buddhist ritual and folk practices but that plays little part in those of

organized Shinto.¹¹

Lest one get carried away with romantic notions about devotional practices that may or may not reflect belief in earlier cosmic orderings of the world and society, I should point out that the attitude of Kamigamo Jinja's groundskeeper to such practices is quite pragmatic. The groundskeeper, a retired clerical worker in his mid-sixties, disdains the offerings for two reasons. First and foremost, the candles are fire hazards ("These people think they're doing something religious, but I'd like to see their faces if there was a fire and they were arrested and charged with arson!"). Second, the food offerings attract an even greater number of animals (particularly stray cats) than already frequent the shrine precincts. Rather than respectfully gather up these offerings, the groundskeeper kicks them into the stream below. He obviously feels that they have served their purpose and are no longer worthy of special treatment. And perhaps he is right, for the donors of these impromptu nighttime offerings rely on the shrine's indulgence and hope that someone will clean the spot for future offerings and their accompanying petitions.

This is not to imply that people come to the shrine at night only to leave furtive offerings. Even as late as midnight it is not uncommon to see couples on a stroll or a single individual performing the hand-clapping gesture before the closed gate of the inner courtyard. Yet only a very small portion of the shrine's grounds are illuminated (particularly the areas of the inner courtyard gate and the amulet-counter building in the middle courtyard), leaving the rest of the paths, subordinate shrines, and streamside groves quite dark. In summertime, several of these areas are still prime spots for viewing fireflies.

Here, then, is the appropriate place to find one of the traditional Japanese equivalents of curse-casting, the *ushi-no-toki mairi* 牛の時参り ("shrine visitation at the hour of the cow"). During the Edo period (1603–1868), when Japanese society was highly stratified according to the government's policies for keeping the peace, the practice developed of attacking one's enemies or social superiors by nailing a human form to one of a shrine's sacred trees (*shinboku* 神木). In accordance with the ritual repertoire of the *yamabushi* mountain-ascetics, a woman dressed in white would visit a shrine between the hours of one and three AM, the hour of the "cow" according to the Chinese zodiac.

¹¹ I say this guardedly, since one frequently finds display racks for candles at shrines (particularly Inari shrines) throughout Japan. However, at major sites such as Kamigamo, Meiji, Ise, and Izumo the lighting of candles is not part of a worshipper's activity before the central sanctuary. Most priests are nervous about devotional candles and the fire hazard that they present to buildings often classified as National Treasures.

Wearing around her head an iron “crown” holding burning candles, she would nail a doll-like cutout (*hitogata* 人形) to a tree, all the while petitioning the deities to cause that person harm. On the seventh day after this visit the curse (*noroi*) was supposed to have taken hold and affected the targeted individual (ONO 1974, p. 156).

In the fall of 1991 the TBS television network broadcast a murder mystery set in Kyoto (“Kyoto Satsujin Jiken”). In one scene the handsome detective discovers nails in trees at Kibune Shrine 貴船神社, formerly one of Kamigamo’s subordinate shrines located north of the city. Soon after this broadcast I noticed doll-like shape nailed to two trees in Kamigamo Jinja’s outer grove, although the cutouts of the unlucky individuals were made of leaves and not paper. Could it be that in the future television will be the medium for conveying “traditional” practices to individuals seeking tools of empowerment? Freshly hammered nails in the trees of Kamigamo might indicate that the process is already well along. They also demonstrate, however, the continued inventiveness of men and women in exploring ways to work their will against those impeding their progress in an increasingly complicated world. In this case, the groundskeeper noted the nails with a wary eye and left them exactly as they were.

Island in the Storm

Recalling that Kamigamo Jinja is located in the north of an urban area approaching a population of two million people, it is hardly surprising that, after dark, the shrine becomes a haven for all kinds of activities having nothing to do with what may be termed religious pursuits. And, while these activities are not possible during the light of day, neither are they (according to the wooden notice board near the first torii) expressly prohibited. After one of the two priests on overnight duty makes his final stroll through the grounds between nine and ten PM the shrine returns to the public domain, or is “reappropriated” (to use the current terminology of the literature of popular resistance), under the cover of night and priestly inattention.

Because shrines have large accessible spaces that are unsupervised at night, they have been used throughout Japanese history as clandestine meeting places. For evidence of this cultural predilection one need look no further than Noh dramas like *Ikuta* or *Hatsuyuki*, the Ashikaga clan’s use of shrines like Iwashimizu Hachimangū as staging points for their military exploits, and contemporary television’s treatment of shrines as neutral territory for protagonists to meet in suspense dramas. Kamigamo is used in a similar manner by contemporary men

and women, except that today its nighttime visitors seem more interested in entertainment than intrigue. When contrasted with the surrounding area—the chic new stores along Kitayama-dōri, the heavy traffic on Horikawa and Kitaōji—the shrine at night is for some a dark expanse of freedom into which “city life” does not intrude. For those afraid of spirits and malevolent kami the shrine grounds are best avoided, but for those hoping to escape from the bright lights, cars, and pressures of urban life the shrine is like an island of calm and quiet.

Two factors contribute to the pattern of the shrine’s nighttime users. The first is the large number of residents delivered to the area by the five bus lines that converge at the terminal just outside the grounds proper. In an American or European city of 1.7 million it would be courting disaster to walk home through a wooded, unlit area at night, but in Japan, with one of the world’s lowest crime rates, a shortcut through the shrine remains the quickest way home. The second factor is the many university students in the area, who cross the grounds to and from the outer shrine properties where they park their bicycles and scooters.¹²

With this frequency of human and vehicular traffic, it is perhaps little wonder that people can be found at the shrine at all hours. Although I did not engage in any systematic sampling of nighttime activities, some of my more interesting encounters (during the course of about twenty late evening strolls) were:

- a radio-controlled car club racing their little vehicles at astounding speeds across the large parking lot at 10 PM (November)
- people hoping to see fireflies at 10 PM (July)
- a motorcycle gang (*bōsōzoku*) in the front parking lot at 1 AM taking a beer break from the hard work of disturbing the peace along Shirakawa-dōri (May)
- a bird-watchers group looking for nocturnal species at 11 PM (April)
- a drunk salaryman weeping by the banks of the stream at 11:30 PM because he can’t remember the way to his house, lamenting that it would be better to drown himself here and now since his angry wife will leave him if he doesn’t get home (September)

¹² About two hundred of these vehicles are left at the shrine every day, often resulting in extra work for the shrine’s maintenance personnel, who must clear hastily parked bikes from the main access road leading to the administration building. For students going to Kyoto Sangyō University (whose current president just happens to be an important patron of the shrine) a special service is provided: the school is permitted to run a shuttle bus from the front parking lot.

- three old men in their underwear illegally seining the Nara-no-ogawa stream for the delicacy *ayu* (sweetfish) (August)

By and large, however, the most frequently encountered “group” at the shrine at night was a group of two—a young man and woman. Thirty years ago a pair of this type was called an *abekku*, after the French *avec*, “to be with.” Today it is more casually referred to as a *kappuru*, after the English “couple,” implying a degree of intimacy that may or may not have sexual connotations. The shrine provides aluminum benches at several locations, mostly in the darkest part of the grounds, as if to encourage couples to pause and relax (though most benches are in places heavily infested with mosquitoes during the warmer months). However, the couples I noticed seemed more interested in conversation than in intimacy, and so preferred more open venues like the grassy fields or the steps of the pavilion just inside the second torii. And, while there are those who use the shrine for sexual escapades, the “love hotels” along the banks of the nearby Kamo and Takano rivers commoditize security and privacy in ways the darkness of natural surroundings does not.¹³

Concerning all these coming and goings, over which the shrine has little, if any, control, the groundskeeper has a quite clear opinion:

I don't mind most parts of my job, but picking up after people who do things they shouldn't really makes me mad! I find empty bottles of beer, whisky, saké, and other stuff just tossed here and there on the grass. I find motorcycles, scooters, and bicycles that someone doesn't want anymore and thinks it's all right to dump at the shrine because we have a lot of unused space. Under the drooping cherry tree I've found used condoms. Worst of all, I have to clean up the droppings left behind by people's dogs. I hate it! The new signs prohibiting dog-walking don't seem to make any difference. It really is bad manners to treat the shrine in such a way. I don't know why the priests don't patrol the grounds more frequently at night. They would if they had to clean up what people leave behind!

The only security the shrine musters to defend itself—other than the nightly watch of the two priests—is an antiquated system of electronic

¹³ I believe that many of the motivations that bring people to Kamigamo at night also apply to other large shrines located within urban areas. An anecdote I heard from a senior priest at Nagasaki's Suwa Shrine concerns a groundskeeper who caught a young couple *in flagrante delictu* within the wooded grounds of Tokyo's Meiji Shrine. Escorting them to the exit, he roundly scolded them for engaging in such an act on the grounds of a sacred place, as well as insulting the spirit of Meiji Tennō. To which the young woman replied, “Meiji who?”

eyes that, if crossed, alerts one of the priests on duty in the administration building. These electronic barriers are positioned in the middle and inner courtyards, largely because of an incident a few years ago in which a thief attempted to loot money from the offering boxes inside the main and middle gates. The story goes that he brought his own ladder to scale the walls, but, whether from drunkenness or sheer ineptitude, made so much noise in the inky darkness that he was overheard and apprehended before he could break the rusty locks. So common have thefts of this nature been throughout Japanese history that there is a special name for this kind of thief: a “coffer-box thief,” or *saisen-dorobō* 賽銭泥棒. The priest who recounted this incident added as an afterthought, “When I think of how unprotected the shrine is in general—from terrorists in particular and other really destructive individuals—it makes me shudder. We’ve been lucky so far, but who knows what will happen in the future?”¹⁴

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has traced several patterns in the practices of visitors to Kamigamo Jinja and suggested that a number of these are relevant to shrines nationwide. The first is the “multifunctional” nature of visits, in which visitors, like visitors to religious sites everywhere, may combine sightseeing with some kind of what appears to be “religious” activity. Observations showed that a majority of individuals coming to the shrine do interact in some way with the spiritual and visual ideology of the site, though most would not describe themselves as “worshippers.” The signs and on-site markers, as well as the layout

¹⁴ The vulnerability of shrines to acts of aggression became apparent in 1989, when the nation’s attention was focused on the death of Emperor Hirohito and the reexamination this inspired of the tumultuous Shōwa years. Not surprisingly, given the role Shrine Shinto played in government militarism and the question of the emperor’s complicity in the war, several shrines were burned in nighttime terrorist attacks by the Chūkaku-ha 中核派 (a radical students’ group) and the Kakudō-kyō 革同協 (a radical workers’ group). As shown by the subsequent attacks during the enthronement proceedings of the Heisei emperor, Akihito, the quarrel of these radical groups was with the imperial institution and its continuing links to Shrine Shinto. Eighteen shrines were firebombed nationwide from 1990 to 1992, with one completely burned and five badly damaged. Responsibility for thirteen of the attacks was claimed by the Chūkaku-ha. During the *Daijōsai* ceremonies of 1992, nine attacks were made in and around Tokyo, leaving three shrines badly damaged.

While these attacks formed a dramatic, and extreme, means of protesting the links between Shrine Shinto and the Imperial Household (though most of the affected institutions did not enshrine deities of any special imperial distinction or status), all damage has been subsequently repaired. If anything, the attacks served to solidify community support for their local shrine and its ritual occasions, and thus bolster rather than undermine many of the symbolic associations I have discussed elsewhere (NELSON 1992, 1993a).

of the shrine, serve as subtle rather than controlling influences on a person's visit, especially since few take the time to read the densely worded signs in detail. And yet most people interact with the place in ways congruent with its cultural logic. With a variety of approaches to the innermost sanctuary, and with no guidelines for what constitutes a "correct" course or for the "correct" way to pay one's respects to the deity, visitors have relative freedom of choice in how to structure their visit. Thus a variety of ways of performing the *kashiwade* hand-clapping gesture were observed, some short and simple and others elaborate and dramatic. Daytime visitors were seen to have ample opportunities to interact with the shrine in physical ways—walking through its grounds, cleansing their hands at the *temizuya*, tossing coins into a coffer, or purchasing a fortune, amulet, or *ema* plaque. Some nighttime visitors performed many of the same acts, while others, under the cover of darkness, partook in a different set of practices, some of which contravened behavior officially sanctioned by the shrine administration. It would be a mistake, however, to judge these activities as violating the "sacred" nature of the place, since, as I have mentioned in the opening, "sacred" and "profane" are not seen as categorical opposites in Japanese society (a view supported by DAVIS [1992, p. 246], among others). Making love under a blooming cherry tree on the shrine's outer grounds may not be socially acceptable during the solemn daylight hours, but at night it takes on a dimension of *shukusai*, or "festival," behavior and resonates with the mythic antics of the deities themselves as seen in the *Kojiki*.

I have tried to provide evidence supporting my claim that the creative, flexible, and laissez-faire practices of the shrine's priests are essential to the social position of Kamigamo Jinja in Kyoto. While I hesitate to extend this generalization to shrines throughout Japan, I do hold that this public freedom of expression is inherent to the structural longevity of the institution of Shrine Shinto and to the individual's place in the modern world. Because shrine offices are generally distanced from the ritual center, and because priests are engaged in clerical work for most of the day, they are largely absent from the shrine grounds as authoritative ritual specialists and thus do not interfere with the highly subjective ways in which people choose to interact with the site. In a highly structured and normative society such as Japan this freedom of choice, coupled with a lovely and peaceful setting, provides a breath of fresh air that continues to nurture the urbanized social body.

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