

Magical Power of “Real Articles”: Issues in the Historical Discourse about Old Temples and Shrines Tourism in Japan

Nakanishi Yuji

Japanese claim that Buddhism, which was transmitted from the Korean Peninsula in the sixth century, and Shinto (神道), a Japanese ethnic folk religion, have historically coexisted. A Buddhist temple is called *tera* (寺), and Shinto shrine is *jinja* (神社). These religious facilities are a valuable part of Japan’s cultural heritages and have therefore become important destinations for foreign and domestic tourists in Japan. For example, the cities of Kyoto and Nara are popular destinations for international tourists in Japan because of their attractive tourism resources including the old, beautiful, traditional temples and shrines in the area. A particular characteristic of the modern period is that those who do not hold religious beliefs also visit these religious facilities.

Some claim that tourists experience a part of Japan’s real history in Japan’s cultural tourism. This statement is correct in the sense that these religious facilities have existed for 300 to more than 1,000 years. However, are real cultural heritages the evidence of real history? This paper takes a new look at this ongoing discourse.

In this paper, I will focus on two locations; Kamakura, a famous tourist spot for both foreign and Japanese tourists located approximately 40 km from Tokyo and the famous Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine (鶴岡八幡宮), located centrally in Kamakura. Kamakura was founded in the medieval period (12th century) by Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199), a leader of *samurai* (soldiers) as a new city for *samurai*. The Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine was at the center of *samurai* belief, so it became a symbol of the old Kamakura town and was central to current Kamakura tourism.

The Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine was first established in 1063; the current shrine was built in 1191. Kamakura can be reached during a one-day trip or excursion from Tokyo, so it is often suggested as a good tourist spot for foreign tourists who visit Tokyo. It is estimated that 500,000 to 600,000 foreign tourists visit Kamakura each year; however, no public institution gathers accurate statistics for such measures. An English newspaper published at the beginning of the Meiji era (just after the end of the Edo era, a period of *samurai* government by the House of Tokugawa) was the first to introduce Kamakura as a good excursion from Tokyo and Yokohama.¹

The current main building of the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine, which was rebuilt in 1828, is certified as an important cultural asset for Japan. Though the building's current appearance and the building-construction techniques used in the shrine are different from those of its foundation, it is indisputable that this is the same building in which people worshipped gods for about 800 years. While standing in the shrine, a person may recall the remote medieval period in which it was first built. While this is certainly the case, one must also admit that the scenery within the shrine has changed. An old illustrated map of the shrine (dated 1732) shows five facilities within the area of the shrine that are no longer in existence. These were Buddhist facilities that included a warehouse of Buddhist scriptures, a Buddhist tower, and a building that housed Buddhist images. Felix Beato, an Italian journalist and photographer who visited Japan around 1870, took photographs of the changes in scenery at the shrine.²

These changes in scenery did not happen only at the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine. In Japan, just after the Meiji Revolution (1867), most Shinto shrines faced the same circumstances as the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine did. In Japanese history, this event is called *Shinbutsu Bunri* (the separation of Buddhism and Shinto). From the 18th to the 19th centuries, Japan pursued a purely Japanese cultural tradition in the idea of *Kokugaku* (Japanese national learning), on which Japanese modern nationalism was based after the Meiji Revolution. Scholars of *Kokugaku* in the 18th century thought the mythical world that was based on *Kojiki* (a collection of Japanese myths edited in the eighth century) was the essential characteristic of Japanese culture and that it had been altered for the worst by the strong influence of Buddhism, which was imported from China and Korea. These scholars regarded the religious system and idea of *Shinbutsu Shugo* (a mixture of Buddhism and Shinto created in the ninth and the tenth centuries) as the start of this change.

Shinbutsu Shugo is usually described as a mixture or hybrid of foreign Buddhism and native *Shinto*, but this is a misunderstanding. *Shinbutsu Shugo* was really a Japanese Buddhist idea, in which it was thought that the Indian Buddha changed Japanese gods in appearance and manifested in Japan in order to help the Japanese. This religious system and idea was created by Japanese Buddhist monks so that Buddha is ranked higher rank as compared to Japanese gods. Thus, Buddhist monks occupied a higher position than that of *Shinto* priests because their position corresponded to that of the religious system. Until the Meiji Revolution in 1867, Buddhist monks carried out the management and ritual practices in shrines based on *Shinbutsu Shugo*. Japanese historian Kuroda Toshio's³ latest studies have led to the now-mainstream belief that the system and ideas of Shinto were arranged and developed under Buddhism. In other words, Japanese shrines, especially huge and traditional ones, can be viewed as Buddhist temples used to worship centrally Japanese gods (the only exception to this pattern among the large Japanese shrines is the Ise Jingu shrine). The Tsurugaoka

Hachimangu shrine is a typical example of this occurrence in the religious system.

Some may be skeptical of how Shinto, long considered traditional ethnic religion or belief in Japan, could have held religious subjectivity until the Meiji Revolution. Japanese historical studies have developed drastically over the last 30 years, and two important points have emerged on this subject. First, Shinto was not established as a belief system in the ancient period before the transmission of Buddhism to Japan. That age was characterized by the simple worship of deities. Second, in the medieval period (after the tenth century), Japanese gods were positioned in a marginal role in the Buddhist religious system of *Shinbutsu Shugo*. After that time, Shinto gradually gained independence from this system, especially after the 16th century. Some Japanese historians assert that Shinto should be historically regarded as a sect of Buddhism.⁴ Regardless, it is clear that the establishment of *Shinbutsu Shugo* changed the world of deities in ancient times in Japan.

At the end of Edo era, Japanese nationalists denied the traditional formation of religious systems in Japan and aimed at creating new figures of religion and nation based on imaginary "ancient times" in which Buddhism did not exist. The conclusion of this political movement was a law separating Buddhism and Shinto (神仏分離令) in 1868, just after the Meiji Revolution (1867). To make clear the distinction between Buddhism and Shinto, the law ordered that Buddhist facilities in shrines be destroyed and removed. The law may have been applied to tens of thousands of facilities all over Japan. People worshipped Buddhist statues as symbols of Japanese gods in most Shinto shrines, but these were also destroyed and sold in numbers exceeding 100,000.⁵ Buddhist monks who managed and operated Shinto shrines returned to the secular world or were converted into Shinto priests.

Many claim that the separation of Buddhism and *Shinto* and the damage to Buddhism in Japan was the largest event in the history of Japanese religion. Religious and folk culture in Japan was forced to change fundamentally.⁶

The national policy to abolish *Shinbutsu Shugo* and separate Buddhism and Shinto also prompted the change in scenery at Kamakura's Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine. By removing Buddhist facilities and statutes from Shinto shrines, the world of Shinto that Japanese nationalists (and essentialists at the same time) had imagined appeared as a concrete figure in front of the Japanese; however, this world had never existed in the history of Japan. Thus, the scenery of the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine that tourists now see had never existed historically before this period of change. From its establishment, this shrine was a complex religious facility based on the ideas of *Shinbutsu Shugo*, and its formation continued until the end of the Edo era. Similar events also happened in other shrines all over Japan. The scenery of "pure" and "essential" shrine was "modern" one that Japanese could meet at that time.

Many Japanese know the historical facts like the separation of Buddhism and *Shinto*

and the anti-Buddhism movement just after the Meiji Revolution, and Japanese high-school textbooks relay these events. However, most Japanese do not think these events brought about a large change in the religious worldview of Japan. I hope to point out the relationship between this tendency and tourism.

The Shinto world established by the separation of Buddhism and Shinto after the Meiji Revolution was the typical “invention of tradition”⁷ in modern times in Japan. However, the world of Japanese gods and religious facilities in which to worship was left almost untouched, executing only a small change. It is helpful to think of the situation using a simple formula “(Shinto + Buddhism) – Buddhism = Shinto.” I must emphasize again that *Shinbutsu Shugo* was a Japanese religious idea created in the framework of Buddhism that included Japanese gods in the system of Japanese Buddhism.

Historical heritages become objects of tourism because they inspire and activate our imaginations about history. Tourists visit tourist spots in order to experience real articles and be charmed by them. In the context of Japanese religious history, the current Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine after the removal of Buddhist facilities is not real, but it can be considered a real historical heritage in referring to the historical fact that people have continued to worship Japanese gods there for over 800 years. This consideration characterizes modern Japanese thought, in which the authenticity of historical heritages is prescribed by articles being in existence now and over the historical ages. Anything in existence can be evaluated in currency and, therefore, naturally be appointed as a cultural heritage. According to this standard, Japan enacted the Cultural Properties Protection Act. If the historical heritage is “real” according to the meaning of modernity above, people give authenticity to the history of the historical heritages, even if it is only metaphorically. “Real” articles strongly prescribe our imagination in this manner.

One could say that traditional cultural tourism in Japan’s Shinto shrines is an activity in consuming the modern Japanese ideology in the area of tourism. Tourists visit famous Shinto shrines, watch real articles, and acquire an image of real history or tradition. Though the image is misunderstood, a historical discourse created by the image based on a concrete tourism experience eventually functions to reinforce the existing modern ideology. In modern-day Japan, most Japanese believe that Shinto has existed since ancient times and that *Shinbutsu Shugo* only caused a partial change in the Japanese gods because Shinto shrines, which were reconstructed based on modern ideology, exist as independent religious facilities around Japanese people. This understanding makes it clear that the formation of modern mass tourism about Japanese culture played an important role in the diffusion and popularization of Japanese modern ideology.

Notes

1. *The Far East: An illustrated fortnightly newspaper*, 2(7): 77–82. (1871). Yokohama: Printed and published

- for the proprietors by Wm. A. Miller at the Japan Gazette printing office.
2. The Yokohama Archives of History (Ed.). (1987). *A collection of photographs in Japan in the end of Edo era by F. Beato* (pp. 46–51). Yokohama: The Yokohama Archives of History (in Japanese); *The Far East: An illustrated fortnightly newspaper*, 1(2):4, 1(6):4 (1870), 2(7):81 (1871). The captions of later photographs were not signed, but a comparison between earlier and later photographs suggests the photographer throughout *The Far East* was Felix Beato.
 3. Kuroda Toshio (1926–1993) was a famous historian who gave this viewpoint to Japanese academia. Kuroda, T. (2001[1983]). *The law of king and the law of Buddhism: A scheme of the medieval history in Japan*. Kyoto: Hozokan (in Japanese).
 4. "Buddhism" as used in this paper includes some Buddhist sects in the Nara area and Tantric Buddhism, which was established before the tenth century. This Buddhism is called old or *Kenmitsu* Buddhism (顯密仏教) in Japan and is distinguished from new or *Kamakura* Buddhism (鎌倉仏教), like each branch of a *jodo* (浄土宗) or *zen* sect (禅宗). Most shrines related to *Shinbutsu Shugo* were organized in a religious system of old Buddhism, partly *jodo* and partly *zen*.
 5. Accurate statistics were not available about the disposal of facilities and statues. In some feudal clans (*han*) in the Edo era that were strongly influenced by the idea of Japanese national learning (国学), the separation of Buddhism and Shinto was executed before the Meiji Revolution. According to statistics on these feudal clans, in the modern Ibaragi prefecture, 1,098 temples were abolished in 1666 and 190 temples in 1845–1846. In a part of the modern Yamaguchi prefecture, 9,666 temples and shrines and 12,510 stone and metal statues of Buddha were destroyed in 1833. Yasumaru, Y. (1979). *The Meiji Revolution of gods: The separation of Buddhism and Shinto, and the anti-Buddhism movement*. (pp. 38–40). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (in Japanese).
 6. The separation of Buddhism and Shinto obviously forced Japanese folk religion and culture to change after the Meiji era. However, in Japanese folklore, this point is mostly ignored. Nakanishi Y. (2006). Another possibility for "native anthropology": The anthropological understanding of Kuroda Toshio and Shinbutsu Shugo. *BUNKAJINRUIGAKU (Japanese Journal of Cultural Anthropology)*, 71(2): 221–242 (in Japanese). The English translation of this article by Jolyon Baraka Thomas can be found at the website of the COE (Center of Excellence) program "Establishment of a National Learning Institute for the Dissemination of Research on Shinto and Japanese Culture" of Kokugakuin University, Tokyo: <http://21coe.kokugakuin.ac.jp/articlesintranslation/pdf/nakanishi.pdf>. COE is funded by a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (an Independent Administrative Institutions in Japan).
 7. Hobsbawm, E. & Range T. (ed.) (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,.

Nakanishi Yuji teaches tourism anthropology and folklore in the Department of Tourism and Cultural Studies, Rikkyo University, Japan. He studies the historical formation process of folk religion from the perspective of historical and native anthropology. Professor Nakanishi is the author of *Hyoj to noroi no Ethnography (Ethnography of Possession and Curse, 2001)* and "Witchcraft in Japan: An introduction and case study" in *Le Japon et L'Europe*. Tissage International. (Eds. J. R. Klein & F. Thyron, 2004). ynakanishi@rikkyo.ac.jp