Translated by Rebekah Clements

神国の行方 – Where to next for *Shinkoku* thought?*

Translator's introduction: The following is an English translation of "Shinkoku no yukue" (神国の行方 'Where to next for *Shinkoku* thought?'), the final chapter of *Shinkoku Nihon* (神国日本 'Japan, Land of the Gods') by Satō Hirō.¹ In this chapter, Satō covers the broad history of the controversial notion of Japan as "*shinkoku*" – a divine 'land of the gods' – that is often associated with ultranationalism in Japan. Taking issue with what he sees as the common misunderstanding of *shinkoku* thought in contemporary Japan, Satō argues for the way it ought to be conceptualized and studied in future.

A professor of Japanese philosophy and literature at Tōhoku University, Satō is the author of numerous scholarly monographs and articles on the history of Japanese religious thought. He is also a writer of *shinsho* ('new books') – a type of paperback found in the Japanese publishing industry in which specialists write for a general audience and elaborate their intellectual position in more direct terms than they would in traditional scholarship. *Shinkoku Nihon*, the source of the following translated extract, is one such work.

It should be noted that there are a variety of ways to translate the word shinkoku into English. It is comprised of the logographic Chinese characters 神 meaning 'god(s)' or 'divine' and 国 meaning 'land', 'country', or 'nation'. Shinkoku (神国) is thus usually translated as 'the land of the gods', or as 'the divine land' depending on context, though other translations are possible. For present purposes, it is also worth noting that although the character 神 is read as shin, using Sino-Japanese on'yomi pronunciation in the compound shinkoku, when 神 appears on its own it is usually read with Japanese kun'yomi pronunciation as kami, a word for 'god' that has long associations with native gods in Japan. Thus, shinkoku could also be translated as 'the land of the kami or Japanese gods'. The significance of this multivalency becomes clear as Satō covers the various meanings shinkoku has had throughout Japanese history.

^{*} The initial draft of this translation was the result of a SOAS translation studies workshop conducted in July of 2010, sponsored by the Nippon Foundation. I am grateful to Angus Lockyer, Mick Deneckere, and Park Kyoung-Hee for their insightful suggestions.

¹ Satō Hirō 佐藤 弘夫, "Shinkoku no yukue," in Shinkoku Nihon (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2006), pp. 193-219.

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Keywords: Shinkoku, religion, history, Buddhism, Shinto

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神国の行方

佐藤弘夫

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以下で取り扱うのは佐藤弘夫『神国日本』(2006年)の終章「神国の行方」の 英語翻訳である。この章において佐藤は日本のウルトラ・ナショナリズムに関連した論争多き概念である「神国」の広範な歴史について概観する。現代日本 における「神国」思想の一般的な一般的な理解に異議を唱え、この概念のある べき解釈、今後の研究のあるべき姿について議論する。

東北大学の哲学、文学教授である佐藤は日本の宗教史に関する多数の歴史学術書、論文を出版している。また新書も出版しており、以下の抄訳の元である 『神国日本』はその一つである。

Shinkoku thought – the idea of Japan as a divine 'land of the gods' – is by no means a fixed concept. Where necessary, it has changed in response to historical circumstances. Time and again it has functioned as a logic for subsuming various non-"Japanese" elements and awakening people to the idea of universality. Therefore, if we are to revive the idea of *shinkoku* today, we should not simply rely on mistaken understandings of "tradition." Instead, we must be prepared to broaden our horizons, to take the future and the rest of the world into consideration, and in doing so create the contents of *shinkoku* thought anew.

Between nationalism and internationalism

1.1 Current discourse on shinkoku

Until recently, the most common understanding of shinkoku thought held that our sacred land, centered on the emperor, was protected by various gods native to Japan. People believe shinkoku to be a strong, chosen-race mentality that sanctifies the Japanese archipelago and its inhabitants, and attempts to set them apart from other people groups. It is seen as an ethnocentric way of thinking.

Such a view of shinkoku thought holds that it was the Mongol invasions during the Kamakura period that first gave rise to the idea that Japan was the "land of the gods." Supposedly, from ancient times until the first half of the Kamakura period, our land was under the overwhelming influence of a foreign culture. The main representative of this foreign influence is considered to be Buddhism. In this scenario, according to the Buddhist world view, Japan was a tiny island nation in a large sea far removed from the center of the world [hendo zokusan 辺土粟散],² home to a millennial society in the midst of the dark ages, where sinful men congregated en masse.

Supposedly, that negative view of the country was overturned in a single stroke in the latter half of the Kamakura period when shinkoku thought came to the fore in response to the external threat of the Mongol invasions and unequivocally revealed Japan to be a sacred land ruled by a divine descendant and protected by the gods. Eventually, this grew to become the strong insistence that Japan was greater than other countries.

This common understanding of the history of *shinkoku* thought holds that, considered from a cultural perspective, the spread of ideas of shinkoku was closely connected with a growing awareness of "Japaneseness." Supposedly, the era in which Japan had been smothered by foreign, mainland culture came to an end, the "uniquely Japanese" culture created by "Japanese people" began and continued through to the Muromachi and Edo periods.

1.2 The ephemerality of existing theories of shinkoku

The thread running throughout my discussion in this book thus far has been the misleading nature of this common interpretation of *shinkoku* thought.

² Insertions in square brackets are by the translator.

First, we must note that the idea of Japan as the land of the gods did not first appear as a result of the Mongol invasions. The claim that Japan and the land of the gods were synonymous is to be found in every era, from the time of the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 ['The Chronicles of Japan', 720] right up to the modern period. There are, however, considerable differences between the various theories according to time period and proponent when one considers the reasons upon which each based their view that Japan was the land of the gods. Behind these differences were large-scale changes in cosmology and views of the divine, which formed the basis for these various concepts of *shinkoku*.

Second, I want to emphasize that even *shinkoku* thought following the Mongol invasions, which is considered to be the standard version, was not a theory based on unreserved praise for Japan. The outlines of medieval Japanese *shinkoku* thought lay in the idea that buddhas from the other world [*takai* 他界 'the world beyond ours'] took upon themselves the form of Japanese gods [*kami* 神, also read *shin*] when they appeared in this country. In this way of thinking, Japan was called "the land of the gods" because it was here that the universal buddhas manifested themselves in the form of Japanese *kami* gods. The reason that China and India were not called lands of the gods was simply that the buddhas had happened to take on a different form when they appeared there.

This theory, which argues that a higher universal truth exists behind the various phenomena of reality, is of course incompatible with belief in the sanctification and special selection of a single land or people. At its heart the medieval version of *shinkoku* thought was not a claim that Japan was superior to other countries, but instead it emphasized Japanese uniqueness.

Third, I would like to point out how completely unfounded the view is that shinkoku operated basically in opposition to mainstream world views up to that time and that it was propounded as a way of overcoming a Buddhist sense of inferiority – that is to say, $mapp\bar{o}\ hendo\ \bar{\star}$ [the idea that Japan was far removed from India and was experiencing the deterioration of Buddhist teaching and practice]. Far from being incompatible with a Buddhist world view, the development of medieval shinkoku thought was first made possible on the premise of Buddhist ideas of $mapp\bar{o}\ hendo$. To put it simply, shinkoku thought was born of the process of indigenizing Buddhism in Japan.

Lastly, it is important to touch upon the question of the emperor. The existence of the emperor has been considered the most important element in making Japan the divine "land of the gods." However, in medieval *shinkoku* thought, the emperor was no longer the central element. *Shinkoku* thought was not about perpetuating the existence of the emperor, but rather the emperor became a means to ensure the survival of the divine land of the gods itself. It was com-

monly understood among people at the time as only natural that an evil emperor would be punished by the *kami* and the buddhas, and that an emperor unfit to rule the land of the gods would be forced into retirement.

1.3 Shinkoku thought as a form of internationalism

When we hear the expression "shinkoku thought" it conjures up images of nationalism and fierce ethnocentrism. Shinkoku thought since the Mongol invasions is generally believed to contain the strongest overtones of this kind. Yet, as I have mentioned, even this version is founded on a consciousness of universal truth existing behind our present world, which transcends time periods and national borders.

This version of *shinkoku* thought holds that there are many countries in this world [Skt. $sah\bar{a}$] in which we live, and people's appearance, the language they speak, and their cultures differ by country and region; however, despite such superficial differences, a single truth pervades the universe. Shakyamuni, Confucius, Mencius, and their like, are believed to have been messengers – that is to say, manifestations [suijaku 垂迹] – used by buddhas in this world to open people's eyes to that truth. In Japan, too, both Prince Shōtoku and Kūkai were believed to have played the same role. The theory goes that among these manifestations, there were some which were unique to Japan – namely, the kami gods. And, thus, Japan came to be known as the land of the gods, or the divine land.

Along with an interest in the uniqueness of their land, one characteristic common to currents of thought during the Japanese medieval period was a strong yearning for a world that was universal [fuhenteki sekai 普遍的世界]. This view holds that through faith in *kami*, buddhas, and sages who were manifest in the present world, any of us can eventually pass to other, ideal worlds. We must not overlook that shinkoku thought was also fostered in this kind of philosophical and cultural breeding ground.

I would like to look more closely at this multivalency of shinkoku thought through an examination of Nichiren, Nichiren, an eminent philosopher of the Kamakura period, repeatedly discussed the exemplary features of Japan. Moreover, in Shinkokuō-gosho 新国王御書 ['Rulers of the Land of the Gods'] he wrote that "The Great Goddess Amaterasu, The Hachiman Bodhisattva and The Mountain King [sannō 山王], plus the kami of three thousand other shrines protect the country day and night. Morning and evening, they watch over the nation," clearly stating that Japan was a sacred land protected by The Great Goddess

Amaterasu and the gods ranking below her.³ On the other hand, however, he also asserted that the Japanese *kami* were "minor gods" when compared to Brahman and Indra, the guardian gods of Buddhism, as well as, of course, to the Buddha himself, and stated that Japan was an "evil land" [akkoku 悪国] at "the ends of the earth" [hendo zokusan].

Of course, I am not attempting to say that *shinkoku* thought did not contain *any* tendency toward asserting Japanese superiority. What I want to emphasize is that we must not overlook the fact that, in addition to this tendency, *shinkoku* thought also contained elements that pointed toward the universal and the international.

2 The historical development of *shinkoku* thought

2.1 The lessening importance of the afterlife

What changes occurred in medieval *shinkoku* thought, which developed during the Kamakura period, as it made its way down to us in the present era? Following the late medieval period (that is, the Muromachi period), the intellectual world of this archipelago was struck by two major cultural earthquakes: the lessening importance of the early medieval idea of a real and actual "other world" [*takai* 他界] or afterlife existing somewhere beyond ours; and the diminution of the binary opposition between that world (also known as the "other shore" [*higan* 彼岸]) and ours (known as "this shore" [*shigan* 此岸]).

The most important thing to people until the early Middle Ages was not this present world in which we live, but rather the distant, other-worldly Pure Land $[j\bar{o}do$ 净土] which they believed to be waiting for them in the afterlife. When all was said and done, the present world amounted to nothing more than a temporary lodging. People's interest was focused solely on the question of how they could achieve rebirth in this ideal Pure Land after they died. This world view became established in the transition from the ancient to the medieval period. However, by the Muromachi period, the idea of the distant Pure Land as the place in which people desired to be reborn was gradually fading, and the view that the present world was the only reality was becoming wide-

³ Source text is: Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo (ed.), *Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun* [Showa standard edition of Nichiren's writings] (Minobu: Kuonji, 1952), p. 188. English translation is of the Satō's modern Japanese rendering.

spread. Everyday life was relieved of its religious significance, and the secularization of society increased. It was during the Edo period that this process eventually achieved a kind of completeness.

People began to believe that the buddhas were not in some faraway world beyond the realm of human comprehension, but rather that they existed within our present reality [gense 現世]. The world to which a deceased person went came to be contained within this world. Peaceful rest for the dead no longer meant journeying to the distant Pure Land, but rather resting in a graveyard and listening to the voices of their descendants as they came to read the sutras at certain set times. The *kami* were disengaged from their role of spiritual guides drawing people toward the other shore, and their main duty became to listen to the prayers of the people of this world, the land of the living.

This change in cosmology, which happened in the latter part of the medieval period, inevitably brought about definitive changes to the various philosophies that were based upon it. The effects spread also to the idea of honji suijaku 本地垂迹. In the early-modern period, this theoretical framework, in which Japanese kami were considered to be manifestations [suijaku 垂迹, lit. 'traces'] of the universal buddhas [honji 本地, lit. 'original ground'], continued to be accepted by people as it always had been. However, the decline of the notion of an "other world" beyond this one lessened the importance of the original buddhas who had previously occupied a privileged position with respect to their Japanese kami manifestations. As a result, early-modern honji suijaku thought was not a theory that linked the other-worldly buddhas with the kami of the present or real world, but instead became a theory joining, in this world, the buddhas and the *kami* together as the same type of entity.

This meant the disappearance of the old idea of an absolute greater than anything on earth, and the disappearance of the universal authority of its earthly embodiment. The idea of the other-worldly buddhas and the Confucian concept of Heaven [Ch. tian 天] had formed the basis for contrasting and critiquing the rulers and values of the present world. During the early-modern period these other-worldly buddhas and the Confucian concept of Heaven were absorbed into the present world and came to support the workings of its power structures from within rather than from without.

2.2 The religious policies of consolidated political power

The lessening importance of the other world or afterlife, and the value placed on this world were the result of changes in the cosmology of our archipelago over a long period of time. These changes were not simply the inevitable culmination of an organic process, but rather came about as a direct result of certain man-made historical realities.

In Japan, the lessening importance of the afterlife began around the four-teenth century. The sense of a real, other-worldly Pure Land gradually grew weaker even within the Nembutsu sects which had held sway during the Kamakura period, and the aspects of their teaching which had to do with gaining benefits in the here and now became more important. Rather than salvation on the other side after death, people came to desire a fulfilled life in this world.

On the other hand, however, there were thinkers during the medieval period who strongly asserted the truth of the other-worldly afterlife as objectively real and claimed that the buddhas therein constituted the ultimate reality. These ideas were received mainly at a popular level, and were used as a kind of spiritual justification when confronting secular authority. People often relied on the belief that they had close ties to this ultimate reality of the other world, when they were refusing to obey the powers of this one. This kind of idea can be glimpsed in the philosophies of the Hokke uprising, Ikkō uprising, and Kirishitan groups that were active from the Sengoku period through to the Momoyama period.

Following fierce battles against the authorities, the Lotus Uprising was put down and the Kirishitan were killed and their sect exterminated. As for the Hokke and True Pureland sects, only those who taught a watered-down version of the significance of the world beyond this one had official permission to continue. Large temple complexes like Mt. Hiei and Kōfukuji had their lands confiscated and were stripped of their special right to extraterritoriality. Thus, during the first half of the Edo period, all religious authority was forced to bow to the centralized political power. Religions whose teachings justified putting oneself at odds with secular authority died out on both a philosophical level and as a social force.

The centralized government was not content with merely bringing religious power to its knees. What the rulers wanted was to connect religious authority with their regime and so use religion to cement their own authority. They wanted to do this in order to prevent their enemies and the common people from again lighting the flames of rebellion in the name of faith. To this end, they set out to become *kami* themselves.

Nobunaga had an official notice erected at Sōkenji Temple stating that worshipping him would bring long life and prosperity. After death, Hideyoshi and Ieyasu were given divine names — Toyokuni Daimyōjin 豊国大明神 ['Great Bright God of the Bountiful Nation'] and Tōshō Daigongen 東照大権現 ['Great Manifestation of the Eastern Brightness'], respectively — and were worshipped as *kami*. Their likenesses were painted in the form of divine images.

However, in the early-modern period when the importance of the world of the other side had diminished and belief that it genuinely existed had died out, it was impossible for a single *kami* or buddha to rule over the religious world. Ieyasu as Tōshō Daigongen could not claim ultimate authority over the existing religious arena by taking the place previously occupied by the manifestations of the otherworldly buddhas. In the end, he was no more than one of the numerous *kami* and buddhas of the present world.

2.3 Hideyoshi and leyasu's theories of shinkoku

Shinkoku thought could not remain untouched by the change in cosmology that occurred in the latter half of the Middle Ages. Both Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, who subdued the unrest of the Sengoku period and became rulers of Japan, based their proscription of Christianity on the claim that Japan was the land of the gods. Let us now consider one source for each in connection with their idea of shinkoku.

- (1) Tenshō 19 (1591). Letter from Hideyoshi to the Portuguese Viceroy of India Our realm is the land of the gods [shinkoku]. Our heart [kokoro \(\in\)] is the kami. There is nothing in all the universe that can escape its heart ... Thus we consider the *kami* to be the origin of all things. In India [*Jikudo* 竺土] these kami are known as Buddhism, in China [Shintan 震旦] as Confucianism, and in the Realm of the Sun they are called The Way of the Gods [shintō 神道]. By knowing The Way of the Gods, one thereby knows Buddhism and also Confucianism. One deals with the world of men on the basis of benevolence [jin 仁, Ch. ren]. Without benevolence and righteousness, a ruler is not a ruler, nor a minister a minister.⁴
- (2) Keichō 17 (1612). Letter from Tokugawa Ieyasu to the Viceroy of Mexico Our country has always been the land of the gods. Since the beginning of the world, we have revered the kami and esteemed the buddhas. The buddhas and the kami are one and the same manifestation and there is no difference between them. The reason we do not break our covenant with other nations, and strictly maintain fealty between ruler and ruled, is that all swear by the *kami* as proof of their faithfulness.⁵

⁴ Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai (ed.), Nihonshi shiryō [Materials for the study of Japanese history], vol. 3: Kinsei [Early-modern period] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), p. 49.

⁵ Source text in literary Chinese (kanbun): Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo (ed.), Dai-Nihon shiryō [Japanese historical materials], vol. 12, part 9 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1971), pp. 960-961. English translation is of Sato's kakikudashi transcription.

Due to space constraints, I cannot bring in all the surrounding documents and make a detailed interpretation of this idea of *shinkoku* here, so for the time being I would like to highlight a few important characteristics.

2.4 The emergence of Confucian ethics

The brand of *shinkoku* thought we see in both these examples claims an extremely close affinity with Buddhism and there is no attempt to eliminate the Buddhist elements from within it. Furthermore, a logic reminiscent of *honji suijaku* can be seen in Hideyoshi's assertion that the Buddhist dharma, Confucianism, and Shintō are all manifestations of the "*kami*" (which are seen as ultimate truth), and in Ieyasu's explanation that the *kami* and the buddhas are one and the same. Thus, at first glance, it is difficult to distinguish these two examples from medieval *shinkoku* thought which was premised on the blending of *kami* and the buddhas. However, if one looks closely at their lines of argument there are aspects that are obviously different to mainstream *shinkoku* discourse of the medieval period.

In medieval thought, *honji suijaku* meant buddhas from the other world beyond ours manifesting in this world in various different forms. The logic of the first extract certainly calls this to mind. The Pure Land, where the buddhas existed in their fundamental and original state [*honji*], was considered to be extremely "otherworldly." It was a far-off world, separated from ours; a place which people could not easily perceive and one from which they could not easily come and go.

However, in the first extract, the "kami" are the true form and substance [honji] and are defined as being in the human "heart" or mind. The gods of Japan, the origin of all things, are thus not seen as inhabitants of a different dimension, but rather as existing within human beings. At the same time, these kami are described as supporting interpersonal relations and harmony between ruler and ruled in the form of an underlying morality of benevolence and right-eousness.

The second extract explains that the kami and the buddhas have the same essence $[d\bar{o}tai\ \Box f]$, but Ieyasu does not think that the idea of manifestation, which is fundamental to such a theory, connects the other world of the Pure Land with this world. Rather, kami are given the role of fostering the Confucian virtue of loyalty between ruler and ruled.

The idea of a distant other world, which was usually behind theories of *honji suijaku* and *shinkoku* during the medieval period, does not come up at all in either of these extracts. Nor is there any sign of the idea that *kami* draw

people to the other-worldly Pure Land. Instead, the present world where humans carry out their daily lives, and the Confucian ethics that operate within it, are pre-eminent. Honji suijaku is not described as a relationship existing between the other world and ours, but rather is morphing into a relationship between the *kami* and the buddhas in our world alone.

It has been noted by scholarship that these two examples of *shinkoku* were influenced by Yoshida Shintō beliefs that came to be systematized during the Muromachi period. Hideyoshi and Ieyasu's ideas about shinkoku, which at first glance appear to have inherited the traditions of the medieval period, in fact represent this new type of *shinkoku* thought, premised on the changed cosmology and developments in Shintō teaching which occurred during the latter part of the medieval period.

The turn toward national particularism 3

3.1 Shinkoku thought as national particularism

In one sense, the changes to medieval honji suijaku thought meant that certain ideological restraints on the content of *shinkoku* theories were lost.

At the core of medieval shinkoku thought was the idea that buddhas from the other world were manifest as kami in our archipelago. People firmly believed in the concept of a single, universal truth that overcame any differences existing in our present reality. I have already mentioned how this acted as a brake to prevent shinkoku thought from speeding toward ethnocentrism.

However, together with the waning significance of the idea of another world beyond this one, which came to pass in the late medieval period, the point of view in which the various nations and people groups in our world were at the very least seen as relative to one another was lost. Shinkoku thought had been deprived of the theoretical grounds for a universal viewpoint, and no longer contained anything that could act as some sort of restraint on claims of Japanese superiority.

Masuho Zankō, a Shintō philosopher from the mid-Edo period, strongly criticized the Buddhist idea of salvation after death, and argued that the affectionate ties of this present world [ren'ai bojō 恋愛慕情] - mainly the relationship between man and wife - were what counted. In Uzōmuzō hokora sagashi 有像無像小社探 ['In Search of Small Shrines with and without Images', 1716] he also stated that "in all the world, there is no country so precious as Japan; of all the peoples there is none so beautiful as the Japanese," wholeheartedly

approving of the idea of Japan as the divine land.⁶ Furthermore, in the appendix to *Dōji mondō* 童子問答 ['Dialogues with Children'], the late-Edo period Nativist scholar Nakajima Hirotari stated that, unlike Japan which was fortunate to be the land of the gods, foreign nations were "races no better than beasts, and their ancestors immoral," strongly emphasizing Japan's absolute supremacy.⁷

The above is merely a small sample, but from the mid-Edo period onward, we begin to see frequent references to *shinkoku*, mainly among Shintō and Nativist scholars. In many cases, the difference between Japan and other nations was taken to be an inherent and unchanging fact, and the greatness of Japan the divine land was propounded in the strongest of terms. Thus, there was a change from medieval *shinkoku* thought, which claimed that Japan was unique, to early-modern *shinkoku* thought, the essential feature of which was a claim to absolute Japanese supremacy.

3.2 The secularization and diversification of *shinkoku* thought

The disappearance of the restraints on medieval *shinkoku* thought had the effect of allowing *shinkoku* thought to come into its own as a theory. If we look back into history, we can see that the idea that Japan was a divine land of the gods was premised on a state-endorsed, orderly hierarchy of deities with Amaterasu Ōkami at the summit. *Shinkoku* thought was put forward in connection with this idea of stability and order. Since this connection with the state was a barrier to the free development of *shinkoku* thought, *shinkoku* philosophies from the ancient period and the medieval period share a common character.

However, in the early-modern period there was no such philosophical constraint on the contents of *shinkoku* discourse. So long as the claim that Japan was a divine land was not equated with criticism of those in power, anyone was free to expound their theories. Philosophy and scholarship became divorced from religion and ideology, and it was in the early-modern period that they were able to develop independently. The early-modern period was when the time and objective conditions were first ripe for *shinkoku* to join with many different currents of thought and begin to develop on its own.

⁶ Shintō Taikei Hensankai (ed.), *Shintō taikei: Ronsetsuhen* [Shintō compendium: Analysis and discussion volume], vol. 22 (Tokyo: Shintō Taikei Hensankai, 1980), p. 187.

⁷ Yatomi Hamao and Yokoyama Shigeru (eds.), *Nakajima Hirotari zenshū* [Complete works of Nakajima Hirotari], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Ōokayama Shoten, 1933), p. 364.

In contrast to the situation in previous centuries, our first impression of early-modern shinkoku thought is the startling diversity of its content and its proponents. Early-modern discourse on shinkoku first took off among Buddhists close to the rulers Hideyoshi and then Ieyasu. From there, claims about shinkoku appeared among Confucians such as Hayashi Razan and Kumazawa Banzan. Beginning with Shintōists and Nativist scholars, from the mid-Edo period onward, it can be widely found in popular morality texts, the writings of popular religion, and the followers of Shingaku 心学.

These shinkoku theories, although they are all based upon the idea that Japan is the divine land of the gods, in fact are extremely varied. It is not productive to engage in debate as to which of these is the typical version of "early-modern" shinkoku thought. Rather, I want to highlight that a situation had emerged in which it was possible for anyone to freely discuss "shinkoku" in connection with various philosophies like Buddhism, Confucianism, and Nativism, and that this is a characteristic peculiar to the intellectual environment of the Edo period. I have already argued that what they all have in common is a strong sense of national self-importance and a secular standpoint that believes the present world to be the only world that truly exists.

3.3 The divine land as the emperor's country

Another characteristic of early-modern shinkoku thought which must not be overlooked is the important position occupied by the emperor. In the Middle Ages, the emperor was excluded from the center of the discourse equating Japan with the land of the gods. In contrast, early-modern shinkoku thought revived the strong connection between the emperor and shinkoku, and the emperor was again given a central role.

Previously, ultimate authority had rested with the buddhas in their transcendental original forms in the world beyond ours, and so the central role in medieval shinkoku thought was played by these original buddhas and the kami who were their manifestations in our world. While, as a descendant of the gods, the emperor was given the role of monarch, if an emperor were judged unfit to rule the divine land then they had to be replaced immediately. Moreover, during the Middle Ages, the emperor was not the only person considered to be a descendant of the gods. It was strongly asserted that the entire populace were jin'in 神胤 – people descended from the kami.

However, from the late medieval period onward, belief waned in the distant Pure Land where one could be reborn and in the ultimate reality of buddhas in their original state. The importance of the present world grew. This meant that the previous religious grounds for relativizing everything on earth, including the emperor, retreated into the background.

At this point, theories of *honji suijaku* could no longer serve as the foundation for *shinkoku*. At that time, when transcendent authority had lost its influence, the only higher authority that could be used to support the claim that Japan was the divine land of the gods and to legitimize those who held the actual reigns of political power was the emperor, who belonged to an ancient tradition and was a descendant of the *kami*. People could no longer find a basis for *shinkoku* in the hierarchical relationship between the far-off other world and ours, and so sought the proof that Japan was a divine land in the historical stream that ran through this world and connected past with present through the office of the emperor.

At the end of the Edo period, the sense of crisis that resulted from the growing instability within in the domain system and the incursions from foreign countries intensified people's desire for a new national system. The emperor was the only option by which to overcome the predicament they were facing and unify "Japan" as a single nation, rather than conceiving of the various domains as individual "countries." By necessity, references to the history of the emperor system inevitably awoke memories of *shinkoku* that had widely permeated society in the early-modern period.

3.4 Separation of Buddhism and Shintō after the Meiji Restoration

The enthusiasm for the idea of Japan as a divine land of the gods ruled directly by an emperor, an idea that came to the fore during the late Edo period (when it was known also as $shinsh\bar{u}$ 神州 in addition to shinkoku) was eventually passed down via the Meiji Restoration to the modern period. However, while the Meiji government's version of shinkoku stuck to the line that the land of the emperor was the land of the gods, at the same time they were attempting to replace the contents of shinkoku thought with something different.

In the third month of Keihō 4 (1868), the newly established Meiji government promulgated a series of laws known as the *Shinbutsu bunri-rei* 神仏分離令 ['Law for the separation of Shintōism and Buddhism'], ordering the removal of Buddhist influences from shrines and from the Shintō faith itself. In the process of creating a new Japan with the emperor at the center, it was necessary to reconstruct the world of the *kami* that supported the authority of the emperor, who was known as *akitsumi kami* 現御神 ['*kami* manifest in our world'], and to create new myths suitable to a modern imperial system of government. How-

ever, the Japanese kami, beginning with Amaterasu Ōkami, had since the late Heian period been woven into a Buddhist world view and placed in a subordinate position to the Buddhist deities by means of the *honii suijaku* theory.

Even within the shrine system, in many shrines the Shintō officials were tamely submitting to a subordinate position below Buddhist monks, and it was not in the least bit unusual for a Buddhist statue to be enshrined as the object of worship in a shrine. From the Edo period onward, although the medieval form of honji suijaku had changed, the actual social reality was that Buddhist and Shintō deities continued in their long-held, inseparable relationship.

That the Japanese kami, who were supposed to legitimize the system of imperial rule, were under the thumb of foreign buddhas was a great inconvenience to the political elite of the Meiji state. In order to adapt them to the image of religion that the rulers had drawn up, the relationship between the *kami* and the buddhas, which had gone through a long honeymoon period of one millennia and several centuries, was rent asunder. By means of the Meiji government's policy of shinbutsu bunri, a "pure" world of the kami, untainted by the influence of foreign religions, came into being on this archipelago for the first time.

3.5 Inventing shinkoku in modern Japan

The modern idea of shinkoku, which developed in the wake of this major upheaval in the religious world, had no tolerance for any elements apart from the Shintō deities, though these had been but a small part of *shinkoku* thought. The varied shinkoku thought seen in the early-modern period, which had blended with philosophies native and foreign, did not come to fruition. This was even more so the case for medieval shinkoku thought which was grounded in Buddhist ideas. If that kind of shinkoku had been put forward, it would have been viewed as a flagrant act of treason against the sacred national myths. The popular religion that emerged in the transition from the late Edo period to the modern period took many elements from the ancient mythologies when forming its world views and creation story. However, even these elements were subject to merciless suppression when their cosmologies conflicted with the new national mythology.

The idea of *shinkoku* with which we are thoroughly familiar today, with the emperor at the center of a nation-state protected by "traditional" kami, was formed via this process together with the beginnings of the modern nationstate. It differed from previous, medieval versions, and did not contain the potential to relativize Japan with respect to other nations. Soon would come a variety of shinkoku thought that was self-righteous, self-important, and which would legitimize the invasion of neighboring countries.

4 Shinkoku thought and the present

4.1 The need to confront shinkoku thought

Today, when it could be said that we have entered the postmodern age with the end of the Cold War, nationalism is bursting into flame everywhere across the world. Moreover, religious nationalism has demonstrated its power in the political arena. In Japan, too, there have recently been calls to reconsider the study of postwar history, and the Yasukuni question has caused debate. From the actual processes of government such as constitutional revision, to diplomatic issues with various Asian nations, it seems likely that the question of nationalism will increasingly attract attention in the years to come. Thus, when reconsidering the past and thinking about the future, we cannot afford to ignore *shinkoku* thought, which could be described as the origin of Japanese nationalism.

However, debate rages as to the rights and wrongs of *shinkoku*. Such debate takes place between those who detest *shinkoku* thought with every fiber of their being and are afraid to refer to it at all, and those who believe that it should be a source of psychological support for the "Japanese people," such that it is not possible to have a calm and objective discussion. This to me seems a very unfortunate state of affairs.

Unlike those who completely reject *shinkoku* thought, I do not think that we should deplore the idea that Japan is a divine land or the land of the gods. Nor should we silence debate on the subject. The idea of belonging to a chosen people can be found across the world in many different times and places, and *shinkoku* thought is simply one such idea. It is something that has been proclaimed among the people of this archipelago for many long years, not merely as a form of xenophobia, but also as the opposite – as a theory which opens people's eyes to the universal. And, moreover, there were times that it operated as a way of subsuming foreign elements. This philosophy is unmistakably one of the cultural traditions of the Japanese archipelago, and we have a duty to appreciate its importance as part of our cultural heritage, even if that means nothing more than properly understanding the role it has played in history.

On the other hand, I want to stress to whole-hearted proponents of *shinkoku* thought that it should not be made into a simplistic political slogan, especially one directed at other people groups and countries. To do so, I feel, would be to trample upon the rich philosophical and cultural traditions of *shinkoku* and the efforts of our predecessors who bequeathed various ideas to "*shinkoku*" thought.

Before we give way to emotion and proclaim *shinkoku* at the top of our lungs, we have a duty to excavate from history the faiths and voices of people

who gave their all in the advocacy of *shinkoku*. They felt that they had no choice but to entrust their ideas to "shinkoku," so we must not forget our responsibility in light of this fact.

4.2 Shinkoku as scholarly method

Likewise, scholars also must acknowledge the questions posed by shinkoku. For scholars, especially historians, shinkoku is one of those subjects that they want to avoid as much as possible in the course of their work. Rather than an object of study, shinkoku has been viewed as a target to be criticized and overcome. One might say this is the habitual attitude of certain "progressive" scholars who call it freakish and wrong that a chosen-people philosophy, which views one's own country as a "divine land," has been handed down over more than a millennia together with the emperor system, and still influences the thinking of people in the present era. However, we must not forget the significance of the fact that as shinkoku has been passed down to us the contents of the idea have changed over the years such that it is difficult to view it as a single philosophy.

It is probably fair to say that in scholarly endeavors it is unacceptable, when talking about the traditions of one's own culture, to take only a single, isolated people group as an object of study. References to a scholar's own culture that make no contribution to the world of academia beyond national borders are completely pointless. Nor is shinkoku thought any different in this respect.

Shinkoku thought, although a kind of chosen-people philosophy, is also an extremely important example of one which includes tendencies toward a completely opposite kind of universalism, and has survived in various forms from ancient times up to the present. Furthermore, the contents of shinkoku thought were intrinsically related to the cosmology and view of the gods upon which the theory was philosophically based in each era. As a result, since studies of shinkoku attempt to come to terms with the philosophy and culture of this archipelago as a whole, shinkoku is a source of important material for historians.

4.3 Shinkoku thought in the world today

In addition, it is necessary for us to broaden our horizons and investigate *shink*oku thought together with other types of racial supremacism and nationalism elsewhere in the world. In regions where the "world religions" Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are widespread, there was a stage during the pre-modern period in which a universalist world view occupied the mainstream. Then, in the modern period, regions and peoples who had been liberated from the restraints of universalism commenced a kind of violent self-assertion in their striving toward some kind of self-image. Belief in the idea of a single religious truth permeating the entire universe was lost.

One can see how the results of research into *shinkoku* thought, incorporating as it does both a sense of national self-importance and universalism, might make a contribution to scholarship by illuminating the interaction and interconnectedness of universalism and ethnocentrism in various regions, both methodologically and evidentially. In doing so, this worldwide perspective will surely help us to consider the uniqueness and philosophical significance of *shinkoku* thought. Merely by treating *shinkoku* as something more than a shallow discourse of self-importance, and by acknowledging the whole intellectual world behind it, such research would contain the potential to become a profound theory of comparative culture.

Shinkoku thought, together with the question of the "kami" which are foundational to it, continues to pose difficult questions for the "Japanese people" today. We must not shrink from these questions nor ignore them. I am convinced that it will only be by squarely facing up to these issues and making clear the historical realities surrounding them that *shinkoku* thought will be completely freed from the spell which currently binds it, and the way will be open to make the most of the traditions of *shinkoku* for future generations.