

Introduction of *The Illusion of Living God "Arahitogami" and "State Shinto": What did invoke Absolute God?*

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“Arahitogami”

“State Shinto”

What kind of image do Japanese people today associate with these words? Perhaps it can be the fanatical "emperor-worshipping ideology" that led modern Japan to war and the "state religion system" that supported it. A person who knows to some extent may say, "The idea that the Emperor should be revered and obeyed as an absolute god had been taught since the Meiji period, and as a result, Japanese leaders had delusions of world domination and the people were driven to war. State Shinto inspired this fanatical emperor-worship ideology, and not only was it treated favorably by the government as a de facto state religion, but the people were forced to visit shrines and worship them, and the religions that opposed it were suppressed, and the people's freedom of religion was trampled down."

This image is not unreasonable because 'Kojien' (commonly used popular dictionary of the Japanese language, Edition 6, 2008) refers to "State Shinto" as "the state religion invented after the Meiji Restoration by reorganizing Shrine Shinto under the Imperial Household Shinto as part of the policy of establishing Shinto as the state religion. It was promoted in connection with militarism and nationalism, and became a pillar of the emperor's rule, with the emperor as the god incarnate (Arahitogami), and dissolved by the Shinto Directive after World War II."

The image appears to be an indisputable truth, and judges' perceptions of the separation of religion and state in Japan are consistent with it:

1. *1977 Supreme Court decision on the Tsu City's religious service to the land by Shinto*

Although the Constitution of the Empire of Japan had a provision guaranteeing freedom of religion (Article 28), the guarantee was not only limited by the article itself, saying “within limits not

prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects” but also because State Shinto was given a de facto state religion, and sometimes faith in State Shinto was required, or severe persecution was inflicted on some religious organizations, the guarantee of freedom of religion under the Constitution could not escape being incomplete.

2. 1992 Judgment of Takamatsu High Court for dedication case of Tamagushi-ryō (votive offering of money) to Yasukuni Shrine by the Governor of Ehime Prefecture

Since the Meiji Constitution defined it as “The Emperor is sacred and inviolable” and the Emperor was regarded as Arahitogami, the State taught the notion of State Shinto to the general public, and it became dominant as the thought to support and govern the State, and at that time, it was really Japanese government that engaged in religious activities.

It is no wonder that the general public does not have any doubts, since this is what the court has said in its ruling. But on second thought, judges are legal experts but not historical experts. Even in cases that occurred yesterday or today, false charges can sometimes be overlooked due to false findings. This is especially true for distant historical events. More conclusively, in a trial, if the defendant (accused side) does not object, the plaintiff (accuser)'s arguments will be accepted by judges. And so far, Japanese government has not raised any objections to the perception of the history.

To be clear, the recognition as described above is nothing more than an "illusion" based on mere assumptions. This is clear from the results of recent empirical historical research, but it is not widely known among the general public. Even though among experts in history, if their fields were a little different from “State Shinto” research, they would not even know the basics of this field. If what is largely unknown did not mean much, it might be left alone, but in reality this "illusion" is influencing many issues: the prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, trials involving the separation of religion and state, controversy over the description of history textbooks and diplomatic relations with neighboring countries.

For example, the families of war dead and religious figures who advocate anti-*Yasukuni* issues sued former Prime Minister Koizumi for visiting to *Yasukuni* Shrine. They claimed that his action is unconstitutional. Their complaint alleges as follows;

Japanese militarism during the prewar period could not be established solely by the tyranny of the military. It was done by the idea of self-righteousness and hegemony represented by “Hakkō ichiu” : the moral and world views of the people at that time, which eliminated modern 'ego' such as loyalty to the emperor, patriotism, and self-annihilation, which were fostered under the “Arahitogami” emperor system and State Shinto. However, such morals and worldviews of the people were never born voluntarily from the people's side. The government enforced them to accept those ideas thorough the *Kōminka* education system or religious education of State Shinto, in which schools were designated as missionaries and 'Imperial Rescript on Education' was regarded as a scripture (The petition for confirmation of unconstitutionality of visiting *Yasukuni* Shrine by Prime Minister, November 1, 2001)

This extreme argument, which completely ignores recent academic achievements, is rampant in court. Many people do not know it, and researchers of the same faith as the plaintiff do not dare to correct the error despite they know it. Apparently, as long as they win the trial, they don't care about their perception of the past. In this situation, it may be very important to clarify that the image surrounding the terms "Arahitogami" and "State Shinto" is nothing more than "illusion" and to explain in an easy-to-understand manner why to say so is possible. This is the primary motivation for writing this book.

When this objective is achieved, the question must come back immediately; Then, what is the real image that replaces the illusion?" However, the level of research in this field has not reached the point where it is possible to provide another answer that is acceptable to everyone. There have been a number of partial and specific denials and revisions, such as "This claim is contrary to the fact." "This perception is misrecognition about it." But no systematic theory has yet emerged that could answer the question that demands a long-term perspective; " Should it be regarded as what kind of religious system that the relationship between politics and religion existed from the Meiji Restoration to the

end of the World War II in Japan?" Nor could answer the question that requires an accurate and detailed comparison with Western countries; "How should be the system positioned in the contemporary countries?"

For that reason, I wish I could say "We can't yet show real images to replace the illusion." but that would be unkind to readers. And it's not that I have no idea. The motivation for writing this book is to, plucking up the courage, introduce the hypothesis that the author have in mind although various objections are expected to be raised.

It should be noted, by the way, that while the whole concept of this book is based on my own ideas, many of the discoveries and interpretations of individual historical facts rely on prior researches. The author intended to introduce them as much as I could, but due to the nature of this book, which is intended for general readers, I had to omit many parts of them. Therefore, for those who want to know the authority in more detail, I listed my articles at the end of this book.