

The illusion of Living God “Arahitogami” and “State Shinto”: What invoke Absolute God?

Part 2 The Illusion of “State Shinto”

Chapter6 What happens after the illusion disappears?

Don't be fooled by 'witchcraft' again: Resist the temptation to 'deductive thinking'

In the time when the oldest historical books of Japan, *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, were compiled, there was a theory called *Shini-Setsu* [識緯説]. According to the combination of calendar numbers, i.e. 10 Stems [Kan 干] and 12 Branches [Shi 支] of the Chinese zodiac, in the year of *Kinoe-Ne* [甲子], there would be a great political change (*Kasshi-Kakurei* 甲子革命), and in the year of *Kanoto-Tori* [辛酉], there would be a change of emperor (*Shinyū-Kakumai* 辛酉革命). In accordance with the theory, the history of Japan was compiled by extending and falsifying the actual dates far into the past. Today's scholars mock the compilation method as unscientific, but at that time the theory was the latest theory brought from civilized country. No one is more vulnerable to "civilization", "science" and "latest" than scholars, and more easily to fall for the "witchcraft" which bears such names.

Even in our time, until recently, historians believed in *Shini-Setsu* [識緯説] called "the theory of stages of development" derived from Marxism. It is a kind of prophecy that the history of the world moves by confrontation and revolution between rulers and ruled, and develops regularly in the order of primitive communism, slavery, feudalism (the end of which is absolute monarchy), capitalism (the end of which is imperialist stage), communism. Many scholars who called themselves "scientific" argued in earnest to fit Japanese history into the scheme. However, the rational suggestion that the developmental stage theory itself is dubious had been ignored as nothing more than a conservative delusion that failed to understand science, and it did not change until the Soviet Union collapsed before our eyes.

There is a theory called the theory of “Japanese Fascism”. It also relies on “the

theory of stages of development”, and its variants are the theory of the "Arahitogami" and the theory of the "State Shinto". I have pointed out in this book that they are nothing but "common illusions". But as long as the desire for 'magic' did not disappear from the people, especially from the intellectuals, even if one 'illusion' disappeared, another one would continue to be created.

I assume that the psychological need for the witchcraft comes from the desire for “convenience”, “ease” and “quick results”. This psychology is satisfied by a methodology called 'deduction from above'. It is a method of research in which a certain basic premise is formulated and from there the investigation of specific phenomena begin. The researcher decides on the basic structure in advance, and collects only the materials that are convenient for the purpose, while ignoring those that are not. There is no need to be troubled by the contradictions between one's assumptions and the facts, and we can shorten the time it takes to reach our conclusions. But in this way, we cannot escape the "magic trap" forever.

No matter how long it takes to get the result and how much pain we suffer from not being able to see the answer, I think that we should not give in to the temptation of simplification, but continue to seek a way to understand the complex as it is. To this end, I believe that we have no choice but to continue practicing what Takeyama Michio called "induction from below" in his critique of Japanese fascism theory: "In order to elucidate history, one must first focus on individual concrete facts and examine their various aspects, rather than following a predetermined position and drawing up a picture conceived from that point of view. Instead of descending from the expected cause to facts, we must, on the contrary, go back from individual facts to the cause. Rather than explaining phenomena by fixed axioms, the validity of the axioms must be verified by the phenomena. We should not impose forms from the outside, but we should find out the forms of the facts themselves from the inside. The starting point of our research must be to decipher the direct meaning of phenomena that cannot be unquestionable" (*Syōwa no Seishinshi*, p.38).

Following Takeyama's lead, my academic life has been one of questioning the "axioms" of academia and journalism, and "testing" them against the facts. It has freed me from the "common illusion" and allowed me to have a "perspective" on the history of the creation of the "common illusion", i.e. my own "hypothesis". So

what do I see now, after the mirage has disappeared? I have some of the hypotheses and issues for modern Japanese thoughts and religious institutions. Next I will talk about them.

The Meiji Restoration was the 'Ikki' [一揆] '!

What perspective we have on the thoughts and religious institutions of modern Japan is closely related to the question of what we understand the issues and visions which modern Japan had at the start. Rather, we need the answer to the question as a foundation to have the perspective. But it is difficult for me to answer this question for myself. So I can only rely on the theories of other scholars which are most consistent with what I have examined in my own field. At the moment, the theory that fits me best is the one developed by Sakamoto Takao in his book *Maiji Kokka no Kensetsu* [The Construction of the Meiji State] (Tokyo: Cyūōkōron-sya, 1999).

Based on the philosophy of history that history "should take on our aspirations for the narratives to solve problems and achieve tasks of our society and nation and presents them in a 'plot' of consistent series"(p.9), Sakamoto argues for the necessity of eliminating conventional subjective historical narrative (such as the materialist view of history), which is "largely defined by the historian's own desire to solve a particular problem or achieve a particular task" (p. 15), and "developing an attempt to present an overall picture of modern Japanese history from a variety of perspectives without being bound to a particular vision of the future based on absolutizing of a particular story." (p.15).

As a "hypothetical presentation" of how to achieve the attempt, he advocates a method that will not fit the real facts of modern Japan into a prearranged scheme of historical development, nor project the researcher's own concerns and issues onto the research subjects, but rather will start from the actual narratives by which they in modern Japanese history understood their own circumstances and actions and draw a unified historical picture. In other words, "let us look for clues to the 'plot' of modern Japanese history in the stories that the people concerned had themselves in mind" (p.16).

With the purpose, Sakamoto examines the discourses of Iwakura Tomomi,

Fukuzawa Yukichi, and the peoples advancing *Jiyū Minken Undō* [the Free Civil Rights Movement] , and extracts key words such as ‘Yūshi no Hito(Sisi) [有志の人(志士) Volunteers] ’, ‘Kōgi Yoron [公議輿論 Public Debates and Opinions] ’, and ‘Kuntoku Baiyō [君徳培養 The moral education for the monarch] ’, and summarizes the issues and visions at the starting point of modern Japan as follows: “In the thought situation at the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the ‘Yūshi no Hito’, so called by Iwakura Tomomi, entered the real political arena on the background of the concepts of ‘Jinzai Tōyō [人材登用 The Use of Qualified Personnel]’ and ‘Genro Dōkai [言路洞開 The Freedom of Speech]’. Furthermore, they were aware that they were ‘Kōkoku no Tami [皇国の民 Vassals of the Emperor]’, that is, the Nation People, based on the idea of the ‘Kokutai [National Polity]’, and that they were the ones who would inspire ‘Genki [元気 The Energy]’ or ‘Seiki [正気 The Right Energy]’ in the country. They wanted to achieve the diplomatic tasks demanded by the public consciousness and to establish a new political system for the tasks, by demanding respect for ‘Kōgi Yoron’” (p. 42).

It can be said that Sakamoto's interpretation of the Meiji Restoration is a more precise version of the interpretation of the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate given by Ashizu Uzuhiko in his *Dainipon Teikoku Konpō Seiteishi* [The History of the Enactment of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan" (ed. Meiji Jingū, 1980, Tokyo: Sankei-shimbun-sya) as follows: "The traditional system of warrior government [Bumon Seiji 武門政治], which had been in place for seven hundred years since the Kamakura Shogunate, had underwent radical transformations. A striking feature of the political climate during the period was that the political principle that 'in times of international emergency, Japan must manifest its true nature as a unified nation under the Emperor, decide its national affairs through ‘Kōgi Yoron’, and protect its glorious national independence' had become established as a political principle that could not be denied by anyone, regardless of political factions or conflicts” (p.37). In short, Ashizu says, they tried to overcome the national crisis by appointing human resources, abolishing Status [Mibun 身分] , creating Citizens [Kokunin 国民] " and establishing a system in which all the citizens supported the state under a parliamentary system [Kūgi Seitai 公議政体] centered on the Emperor. Incidentally, the skeletal parts of Sakamoto's theory is very similar to the description in *Meiji Ishin to Tōyō no Kaihō* [The Meiji Restoration and the Liberation of the Orient] (Kogakkan University Press) by Ashizu Uzuhiko.

By the way, Sakamoto says that the adoption of parliamentary systems [Kūgi Seitai 公議政体] is also an inheritance of Japanese traditions, and refers "the tradition of the medieval 'Ikki [一揆]' which was councils of equal bonding in front of Kami" (p.30), as well as the council system of the court nobles in the Heian period, the council of the ministers [Rōjū 老中] in the Tokugawa Shogunate, and village councils [Yoriai 寄合]. The idea of locating the parliamentary systems as an extension of the Japanese tradition of council systems seems to have been proposed by Mitani Hiroshi (*Maijiishin to Nationalism* [The Meiji Restoration and Nationalism], pp.250-251). This focus on the 'Ikki' tradition is an excellent insight, but I think Sakamoto's perspective is narrow-minded. I do not think that the tradition of the 'Ikki' was alive and well in some of the ideas and institutions of the Meiji Restoration, but that the Meiji Restoration was itself a huge national 'Ikki' against the Western powers. I got this idea from a discussion with Professor Takeda Hideaki of Kokugakuin University.

The following is my own summary of what Katsumata Shizuo says in his book *Ikki* (Tokyo: Iwanami-syoten). The 'Ikki' are nowadays considered to be peasant uprisings, but it was not originally a phenomenon limited to peasants. The 'Ikki' that flourished in the Middle Ages were formed when it became necessary for people, regardless of their status, to transcend their traditional ties and create new communities in order to deal with problems that could not be solved by normal means. For example, in the Kamakura Shogunate after the death of Minamoto no Yoritomo, 'Hyōjōsyū [評定衆 The Council of Ministers]' was established, and at that time, in order to make the council an executive body of public power that transcended the private interests ('En 縁') of the individual ministers, 'Kisyōmon [起請文 Pledge]' was signed, in which it was sworn to Kami and Buddha that they would only follow 'Dōri [道理 Reason]' and be 'Ichimi [一味 all together]' and 'Dōshin [同心 One Mind]' i.e., take joint responsibility. Katsumata interprets that here was the starting point of the tradition of the 'Ikki'.

The characteristics of the 'Ikki' described by Katsumata can be summarized as follows: Decision-making through discussion; Joint responsibility; Pledge to Kami and Buddha called 'Ichimi-Shinsui [一味神水]' and Equality among the members. Katsumata says that the 'Ikki' had been "a collective consciousness that had existed latently as the substratum of Japanese history" (p.i). Referring to

Katsumata's point, I would define the 'Ikki' as: "the creation of a new community to cope with an emergency, under or centered on the sacred something, with discussions and equality of the members as important elements". In the light of this definition, it is not a phenomenon confined to the Middle Ages. At the time of *Taika-no-Kaishin* [大化の改新 the Taika Reform] , which was the starting point for the creation of the *Ritsuryō* State [律令国家] in ancient times, the Emperor gathered his subjects under an big tree and made them swear to the Kami that they would obey him. Further back into mythology, at the riverbank called Amano-Yasuno-Kawara [天の安の河原] , the Kami discussed how to bring Amaterasu out of her hiding place [Amano-Iwato 天の岩戸] and in front of her hiding place they performed a joint ritual.

According to my definition, the Meiji Restoration would be a grand 'Ikki' that created a nation-state by reviving the tradition of 'Ikki' that had existed at the base of the collective consciousness of the Japanese people as a whole, from the mythical age to the modern age in terms of time, and from the Imperial Court to the common people in terms of hierarchy, to deal with the crisis situation at the time. The proclamation of the 'Saisei-icchi [祭政一致 Unity of Shinto rituals and government] ' ; the ceremonial oath of the Emperor to Kami, in which he pledged to carry out five reforms with his subjects of feudal lords [五箇条の御誓文 Gokajyō-no-Goseimon] ; the policy of equality between the four social status [四民平等 Shimin-Byōdō] and military service obligations for men [国民皆兵 Kokumin-Kaihei] ; and the establishment of central and local assemblies. They can all be understood consistently in the context of the 'Ichimi-Shinsui [一味神水] "Ichimi-Dōshin [一味同心] '. Also various seemingly inexplicable facts could be interpreted without contradiction.

For example, because Saikō Mankichi who was born in the last temple of the *Jyōdo Shinsyū*, intuitively sensed that the Meiji Restoration included the tradition of equality of 'Ikki', he sought to realize the liberation of the people in the discriminated areas by thoroughly implementing the ideals of the Meiji Restoration, and he made efforts to realize national socialism with the emperor at the center ("Saikō Mankichi to Kami-no-Kuni [Saikō Mankichi and The Heaven] ", in *Ittō Ryōdan* by Nitta Hitoshi, Tokyo: Kokusyo-kankō-kai). The *Jinja Cyūshin no Setsu* [theory of placing shrines at the center of local administration] advocated by Mizuno Rentarō and Inoue Tomoichi appears at first glance to be

merely a rationalization and justification of shrines based on modern rational thinking, but it can also be seen as the collective consciousness of "Ichimi-Shinsui" being invoked in response to the circumstances of the time, which demanded regional revitalization. What would happen if we talk about the people's thought and religious systems at that time under such a hypothesis which can be called the *Maiji-Ishin 'Ikki' Shikan* [The historical view of the Meiji Restoration as 'Ikki'] ?

A Syncretism called as *Kokutai* [National Polity]

Assuming that the Meiji Restoration was a reform in which "council", "equality" and "joint responsibility" under the "sacred one" were the key elements, the ideology that justified it, and religious policy as one of its concrete policies, would naturally have had to meet the elements. In other words, while it assumed the existence of the "sacred" and could not deny it, it would also have been impossible to enforce an idea or enforce a policy which would have broken the 'Ichimi-Dōshin [一味同心]' (national unity), for a long time except temporarily. Moreover, since the aim of the reform was to "overcome national emergencies", all policies had to be expressed in accordance with the international situation and diplomatic agenda. If we look at the 'ideology' and 'religious policy' of the time from this perspective, we can better understand their changes.

What I am assuming here as the central element of the "Ikki" is the concept of *Kokutai* [National Polity] . The term originated in late Mito Studies [後期水戸学 Kōki-Mitogaku] (especially in Aizawa Seishisai's *Shinron* 新論), but in the course of the subsequent history of modern Japan it has often been the subject of debate, changing its form and content each time. The concept was so diverse and controversial that a book entitled *Kokutai-ron-shi* [国体論史 The History of Theories of National Polity] was published in 1921, edited by the Department of Shrines of the Ministry of Interior.

Even as long as in the field of jurisprudence, there were five main controversies surrounding the concept; First there was the debate that took place about from 1878 to 1888, before the enactment of the Imperial Constitution. At that time, "Kokutai" came to be discussed in relation to the Western political and legal concept of "sovereignty" for the first time, and thereafter, the *Kokutai* and the

sovereignty became inseparable; Next, there was the controversy between Uesugi Shinkichi and Minobe Tatsukichi in the early Taisyō period; Then there was the debate in the Imperial Diet over The Law for the Maintenance of Public Order at the end of the Taisyō period; The case of the Emperor's organ theory [天皇機関説事件 Tennō-kikansetsu-jiken] and the movement for the clarification of *Kokutai* [国体明徴運動 Kokutai-meicyō-undō] around 1935; And last the controversy over whether or not *Kokutai* had changed after the defeat.

Why had the *Kokutai* been such a controversial concept? Perhaps it is because what was expected to it was so important and diverse that it was difficult to construct a single idea. In my opinion, as the central idea of the *Ikki* as the Meiji Restoration, it naturally presupposed the existence of something sacred, but in its expression it must not be essentially opposed to the diverse ideas of the members of the nation-state, but must rather give them basic satisfaction and respond to the changes of the times. Therefore, it had to be "syncretic", but the integration of the diverse ideas was not so easy. It seems to me that the key to opening up new perspectives is to take the *Kokutai* as syncretic, and to try to read the challenges and struggles of modern Japan in the changing debates about it.

Ordinary religion-state relations: the public religious organization system

The common problem in the construction of the Meiji State would be how to express the idea of a national "Ikki" as an institution. In other words, in my opinion, the question was how to realize and express in each part of the government a state of "Ichimi-Shinsui", a state of equal unity centered on the sacred. And I believe that this challenge was typified in the field of religious policy.

At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, in the fervor of revolutionary restoration, Shinto prevailed. But when it became clear that the Shinto was not enough to unite the whole nation, the policy was quickly changed. The question of how, according to the circumstances of the moment, to promote national unity or, on the contrary, not to hinder it, had become the basic concern of religious policy. Based on this awareness of the problem, it was not possible to adopt absurd religious policies which would be contrary to the will of the majority of the people, and the only possible outcome after trial and error became an ordinary system which would satisfy most of them. What was it? It was the public religious

organization system, common in Europe at the time, in which each country, according to its own historical origin, granted privileges to certain religious organizations and control them, while at the same time allowing freedom of religion to its citizens.

I would like to say that the political-religious relationship in modern Japan was, in fact, a kind of the public religious organization systems, although at that time, with the exception of a few scholars, no one admitted or called it so. On the basis of the freedom of religion of the people, Shinto (including Shrine Shinto and Sectarian Shinto), Buddhism, Christianity and the new religions, each according to its own history, had their own distance and relationship with the Imperial Household and the government, maintained a balance of and influence each other, which was the basic form of political and religious relations in modern Japan. In this view, the theory of "Shrine Shinto as non-religion" could be considered as a method of reconciling Japan's unique situation with the new ideas from Western and of giving privileges to the shrines and control them.

The public religious organization system was an "ordinary" system in Europe at the time. But the process by which Japan came to adopt and maintain such an ordinary system was neither ordinary nor easy. Rather, it required an extraordinary effort. This is because the religious situation in Japan at that time was much more complex than in the West. Unlike in the West, where religious policy could base on a single tradition, Christianity, and consider only the differences between its sects, in Japan there were two traditional religions, Shinto and Buddhism. At the dawn of modernity, another traditional religion, Christianity, came into the country. In addition, various new religions arose. It was not until the 1960s that the West was confronted with the arrival of another traditional religion, Islam, and the emergence of new religions.

Moreover, there was no concept of "religion [宗教 Syūkyō]" on which to establish various policies; rather, it had to be established through trial and error in policy implementation. In other words, at the same time that Japan was beginning to learn the basic theories of religious policy, it was also required to solve the complex application problems that the West would face ninety years later. Moreover, the times were fast moving and the common sense of the people was changing rapidly. By the time, after much trial and error, the government had

finally settled a particular concept and a policy based on it, the public's common sense had already changed. However, the administration, which was required to be consistent, was not able to adapt itself flexibly to the change. It can be said that the administration of religion in modern Japan has been a constant struggle with the question of how to relate to the existence as religion which had both centripetal and centrifugal forces.