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"And the *zasu* Changed his Shoes": The Resurgence of Combinatory Rituals in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract It is often assumed that the combinatory practices that have characterised Japanese religious history were wiped away by the separation of Buddhism and Shinto imposed by the Meiji restoration. Yet field evidence attests that *shinbutsu* rituals are still performed today in major Shinto institutions. This paper offers a reflection on the nature of contemporary combinatory rituals through three study cases: rituals that continue premodern traditions at Kasuga and Hiyoshi Taisha; new rituals created to emphasise the combinatory as the proper dimension of religion in Japan; exorcistic rituals recovered as a contribution to the current health emergency.

Keywords Combinatory rituals. Shinbutsu. Hiyoshi Taisha. Iwashimizu Hachimangū. Pilgrimage. Goryōe.

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1 Introduction

The academic discourse on *shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合 (lit. 'association of *kami* and buddhas') has generally interpreted the combinatory systems that shaped Japanese religion as a feature of the premodern world. Post-war scholarship

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tended to see the symbiotic relationship between Buddhism and what we now call Shinto as characteristic of the medieval period. More recent research, in Japan as well as in Europe and North America, has demonstrated that it pervaded Japanese life throughout premodern history, with different dynamics depending on the specific historical circumstances.[1] However, both perspectives maintain that the ritual, spatial and artistic world of combinatory beliefs was wiped away by the forced separation of Buddhism and *kami* worship (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) which occurred in the late 19th century.[2] Often regarded as the beginning of the modern understanding of religion, this separation undoubtedly destroyed many of the places and rituals of the combinatory system. Yet several instances of combinatory practices can still be observed in contemporary Japan.

This study offers a reflection on the continuity of institutional combinatory liturgies as well as the creation of new forms of combinatory ritual which has occurred in recent years. My concern here rests with the official and institutional level of ritual performance, rather than with popular expressions of combinatory beliefs. Other scholars have highlighted the persistence of practices of combinatory nature in everyday life, arguing that ordinary women and men have continued to turn to deities for practical benefits, indifferent to their formal genealogy as *kami* or buddhas (or other beings in between these two main categories of deities).[3] This emphasis on private purposes, however, shifts the focus to the informal and individual and obliterates the fact that the combinatory systems of premodern Japan were first of all sophisticated elite creations that legitimated institutions.

While the shrines and temples that were once part of a single economic, social, administrative (and liturgical) system are now independent bodies, their efforts to continue, reinstitute or invent performances that emphatically display the high clergy of shrines and temples next to each other in a complex interaction of gestures, objects, colours and sounds suggest a rethinking of their history and the fragile success of their modern identities. Although this is in many ways an unexpected development, it forces us to interrogate the staging of once-rejected hybridity as well as its consequences for the definition of the 'combinatory'. What has triggered these remnants of

1 The space of this article does not allow for a general discussion of the meaning and history of combinatory systems, on which an extensive literature exists in Japanese and in English. See, for instance, Murayama 1957; Matsunaga 1969; Yoshie 1996; Satō 1998; Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003; Faure, Como, Iyanaga 2006-2007; Doruche, Mitsuhashi 2013; Grapard 2016.

2 On the separation policy of the Meiji government see the classic studies by Tamamuro (1977), which includes the separation edicts, and Yasumaru (1979).

3 Reader and Tanabe (1999) have demonstrated this point with a wealth of examples.

the past? Are institutions formally separated ill at ease with abiding by the exclusivistic stance that self-determination has implied? Are these rituals nostalgic moments of recollection of a more prosperous past and an attempt to capitalise on cultural heritage to improve visibility? Or do they point to a different logic of understanding of the religious, which necessitates revisiting the notion of 'combination' as a historically confined phenomenon, overcome by modernity and the adoption of western (i.e. monolithic) models of religion?

My analysis was set in motion by field evidence and has been emboldened by an arguably progressive amplification of the phenomenon that has occurred in the last two decades.[4] A comprehensive analysis that contextualises and questions such occurrences cannot be undertaken here. This paper offers only snapshots of different case studies to give a sense of the diverse contexts in which contemporary *shinbutsu* practices are upheld. I firstly survey traditional Buddhist rituals performed at two grand shrines (*taisha*) of the Kinai region, well-known until the Meiji period for their century-long traditions of combinatory practices. Secondly, I explore new associations between a shrine and a temple of the Kyoto area which were not linked in any significant way in the past, and probe into a newly created *shinbutsu* pilgrimage route in the Kinai area which presents itself as the embodiment of Japanese spirituality. In conclusion, I consider the reenactment of a long-forgotten Buddhist ritual in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Continuity: Buddhist Rituals at Shrines

One of the lasting consequences of the Meiji-period separation campaign undoubtedly was the redefinition of official shrines as solely *kami* sites. The elimination of Buddhist objects, rituals and clergy from shrines was central to the process of transformation of the religious landscape and eventually led to the constitution of Shinto as the distinct religion we encounter today. Shinto institutions that had been emblematic of the combinatory system were more affected by its dissolution. Yet a close analysis of their liturgical calendar attests to the performance of associative rituals that seem to reverse the implementation of *shinbutsu bunri* and challenge the official discourse on Shinto. Liturgies conducted at two prominent institutions

4 This article presents material from an on-going long-term project. Early findings were presented at a panel on revisiting the Meiji restoration at the 2007 AAR and at an international workshop on revisiting syncretism at SOAS in 2011. Repeated fieldwork has been facilitated by a number of funding bodies, whose support I gratefully acknowledge: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Ritsumeikan University, Meiji jingu and Kanazawa University.

in Nara and Kyoto, Kasuga Taisha and Hiyoshi Taisha, illustrate these dynamics. Both shrines are now part of the national umbrella organisation for shrines, Jinja Honchō – a conservative organisation that seeks to maintain an identity for Shinto predicated on modern assumptions of differentiation. The combinatory rituals I shall analyse have been restored at different times of the postwar history of the shrines. Crucially, they are maintained not as occasional or minor liturgies, but as significant annual events (*reisai* 例祭) inscribed in the liturgical calendar of the shrines (*nenju gyōji* 年中行事). As such, these are solemn performances defined by a protocol established centuries ago (albeit abbreviated or modified in some details). These are by no means 'popular' rituals that cater to the need of devotees, even though recent media attention has made the wider public more aware of their occurrence.

2.1 The Visitation Ceremony at Kasuga Taisha

The beginning of the new year at Kasuga Taisha is marked by an official visit of Kōfukuji monks to the Kasuga deities (*Kasuga shasan shiki* 春日社参式).[5] It takes place on 2 January, the day in which the *kami* are presented the first offerings of the year (*nikku hajime shiki* 日供始式). Hence this important dedication ceremony may be considered to consist of a Shinto and a Buddhist segment. At the start of the visitation high clerics from both institutions progress together towards the main building of the shrine. The first step of the ritual is performed by Kasuga priests: at the sound of *kagaku* 雅楽, priests offer vegetables and fruits to the *kami*, then the head priest recites a *norito*. After that, Kōfukuji monks take the stage over: sitting in front of the four shrines of the Kasuga deity they offer the *kami* a reading of the *Heart Sutra* (*Hannya shingyō* 般若心経), followed by the recitation of a hymn called *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-only* (*Yuishiki sanjūju* 唯識三十頌). At the end of the liturgy at the main building, the monks visit the small shrines (*sessha* 摂社) within the Kasuga precincts and proceed to Wakamiya jinja, where they again recited the *Heart Sutra* to the young Kasuga deity.[6] The visitation is a public event and is covered in local and national media. In 2020, for instance, *Asahi shinbun* reported that the current *gūji* 宮司, Kasan-no-in Hirotada 花山院弘匡, accompanied by seven Kasuga priests, progressed solemnly in one

5 For convenience's sake throughout this article I shall use the term 'monks' to indicate Buddhist clergy, although in modern Japan Buddhist clerics do not observe celibacy nor usually live as monastics and therefore may more appropriately be called 'priests'.

6 See Kasuga's website: `https://www.kasugataisha.or.jp/calendar/winter01`. A 2010 NHK short documents that year's visitation: `https://www2.nhk.or.jp/archives/michi/cgi/detail.cgi?dasID=D0004500425_00000`.

line with the current abbot (*kanshu* 貫首) of Kōfukuji, Moriya Eishun 森谷英俊, and nine senior monks from the temple.[7]

The recitation of a *sutra* in front of *kami* may be regarded as the quintessential form of *shinbutsu* practice. In premodern times it reiterated the close connection between *kami* and buddhas and at the same time affirmed the nature of the *kami* as beings who benefited from listening to the Buddhist teachings and who 'rejoiced in the dharma'. It is one of the earliest attested Buddhist practice for the *kami*. At Kasuga, there is evidence that readings of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* (*Yuimagyō* 維摩経) were carried out by Kōfukuji monks in front of the four shrines that enshrine the Kasuga deity since 859 (Grapard 1992, 73). Kasuga shrine and Kōfukuji constituted a grand shrine/temple complex from the Nara period throughout the medieval period, and one of the most-studied *shinbutsu* system of premodern Japan. Sponsored by the Fujiwara family, the two parts of the complex had complementary roles: the shrine was devoted to the tutelary and ancestral deities of the Fujiwara, while the temple attended to the memorialisation of Fujiwara members. The importance of Kasuga as a 'national' shrine, however, should not be overlooked: their grand rite, for instance, by the Heian period was sponsored by the state.

While the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* is now replaced by the more widely known *Heart Sutra*, the meaning of a *sutra* recitation as an appropriate oblation to the *kami* is reasserted and indeed amplified by its performance at the moment of the first offerings of the year. By pairing it with the recitation of the *Verses on Consciousness-only*, an expression of the Yogacara notion of reality, the celebrants signal the sectarian position of Kōfukuji as a representative temple of the Hossō school and underline that it is not just a group of monks who reads Buddhist texts to the *kami*, but the monks of Kōfukuji who attend to their tutelary *kami*. The liturgical performance thus serves as a vivid reminder of the institutional links that existed between the shrine and the temple when the management and operational running of the shrines was carried out by temple monks and rituals for the *kami* were often performed by monks designated for that (*shasō* 社僧). In fact, the liturgy is registered in the calendar of yearly events not only of the shrine but also of the temple.[8]

Before the Meiji period Buddhist monks officiated within the shrine every day. The New Year visitation is what is left of the traditional modes of religious interaction. By giving it an official status as

7 *Asahi shinbun*, 3 January 2020: https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASN1231D9N12POMB001.html.

8 See the Kōfukuji's website: https://www.kohfukuji.com/event/kasugashasanshiki. On the Meiji period transformations at Kasuga, see especially Grapard 1992, 249-56.

an annual event with a formal performance, however, the contemporary keepers of the tradition send a clear message to their supporters as well as the political bodies that dictate their identity. Both shrine and temple openly legitimise the event as an enactment of a *shinbutsu* tradition which, they argue, had been the 'natural' (*shizen* 自然) course of events until the Meiji restoration.

2.2 The *Lotus Sutra* Debate at Hiyoshi Taisha

Hiyoshi Taisha is the modern name of Hie jinja, tutelary shrine of Mount Hiei and centre of one of the most powerful combinatory systems of the premodern period, the so-called Sannō Shinto 山王神道. The Hiyoshi complex extends at the foot of the mountain in Sakamoto, on the south-west side of Lake Biwa, and consists of three main areas, today called Higashi Hongū, Nishi hongū, and Hachiōji. It enshrines a group of *kami* collectively called Sannō (lit. 'Mountain King'). Its combinatory identity was defined in the mediaeval period by Tendai monks, who also administered the shrines for most of their history. The shrines were violently affected by Meiji period policies and subjected to profound changes to their identity, from new names for their deities and their buildings, to the stripping down of Buddhist paraphernalia and rites and the disappearance of the Tendai monks from their precincts (Breen, Teuween 2010, 108-22). After World War 2 Hiyoshi Taisha restored some of its premodern rituals.[9] Today it maintains two liturgical moments that reiterate the century-long association with Enryakuji. Both rituals take place at Nishi Hongū, the western compounds of the shrine complex, known in pre-Meiji times as Ōmiya 大宮 (or Ōbie 大比叡), and abode of the main deity of the Sannō group.[10]

The first ritual is a worship liturgy known as *sannō raihaikō* 山王礼拝講 (lit. 'Liturgical Lectures for Sannō'), consisting of a ceremonial debate on the *Lotus Sutra* (*Hōkekyō* 法華経). Every year on 26 May about thirty monks, led by the Tendai *zasu* 座主, abbot of Enryakuji and head of the Tendai school, descend from Enryakuji to perform this liturgy for the Sannō deity. Shrine priests are in attendance. The ritual protocol instructs that priests and monks enter together the shrine precincts, lined up according to ranking, in a procession led by the head priest of Hiyoshi Taisha. They position themselves in

9 Breen and Teeuwen note two occasions before the end of the war when monks from Enryakuji returned to the shrines: in 1937, on the occasion of the celebrations for the funding of Enryakuji, a senior monk visited the shrine; in 1938 a party of monks attended the Sannō festival (Breen, Teeuwen 2010, 124).

10 The status of Ōmiya vis-à-vis the deity of Higashi hongu (Ninomiya) has been debated, but the rank and visual representations of Ōmiya confirm its preeminence in the premodern system.

different areas of the space in front of the main hall: the monks take the central stage in the worship hall, while the priests sit to the left side of the hall as spectators. Invited guests are seated on the opposite side of the worship hall.[11] At the centre of the worship hall, closer to the side that faces the main hall, a high platform is set, flanked by an altar adorned with large candlesticks, flowers and an incense burner: a stand in the middle holds the eight scrolls of the *Lotus Sutra*, which give the liturgy its proper name, *Eight Lectures on the Lotus* (*hokke hakkō* 法華八講); on two opposite sides are the seats for the two main ritualists, the reader and the lecturer **[fig. 1]**.[12] The ceremony begins with the shrine's head priest blessing the ritualists in the worship hall. The priest then climbs the steps of the main hall and recites a *norito* 祝詞 at a small altar placed in front of the inner sanctuary (the curtains of the main hall remain down on this occasion)[13] **[fig. 2]**. The debate on the *Lotus Sutra* then begins. It is conducted by two young monks, who are questioned by their seniors on various doctrinal points informed by the scripture. According to the procedures, the reader declaims the titles of the chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* one by one, while the lecturer gives his interpretation of important passages and answers questions posed by the monks seated around the hall, who act as auditors and interrogators. At intervals during the debate, the monks raise and intone a liturgical hymn, scattering paper flowers or *shikimi* leaves in the hall **[fig. 3]**. Interestingly, the seat at the back of the performing platform, directly in front of the main hall, is left empty. Called *enza* 円座 or *sannōza* 山王座, it is supposed to be occupied by the Ōmiya deity, who thus enjoys the merits of listening to the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. Priests remain in attendance until the very end. When the ritual is completed, the monks are invited to a banquet to partake of the offerings of food and sake made at the ritual (*naorai* 直会), as it is customary at the conclusion of a *matsuri*.

Before the Meiji restoration the *sannō raihaikō* were held twice a year in the third month. The first, at Ōmiya, was the original ritual, conducted by monks from the Eastern Pagoda quarters of Mt Hiei. The second, at Jūzenji shrine 十禅寺 (now Juge no miya 樹下宮), was a new liturgy created in 1224 by Jien and executed by the monks of

11 This account is based on fieldwork conducted in May 2003. I am grateful to the Tendaishū for an invitation to attend the ritual. This was a rainy day and therefore all monks sat inside the worship hall. On bright days, according to protocol, the monks who are not performing sit in the space between the worship hall and the main hall and exchange seats with their peers when their turn comes.

12 The most used edition of the *Lotus Sutra* in Japan is in eight fascicles, thus one lecture for each fascicle. On the early history of the *hokke hakkō* see Tanabe 1984.

13 Interestingly, the central pillars of the *honden* are decorated with stripes in five colours and the three regalia (*sanshu no shingi* 三種の神璽) are hung on top, the mirror on the one side and the sword and a string of *magatama* on the other (visible in fig. 3).

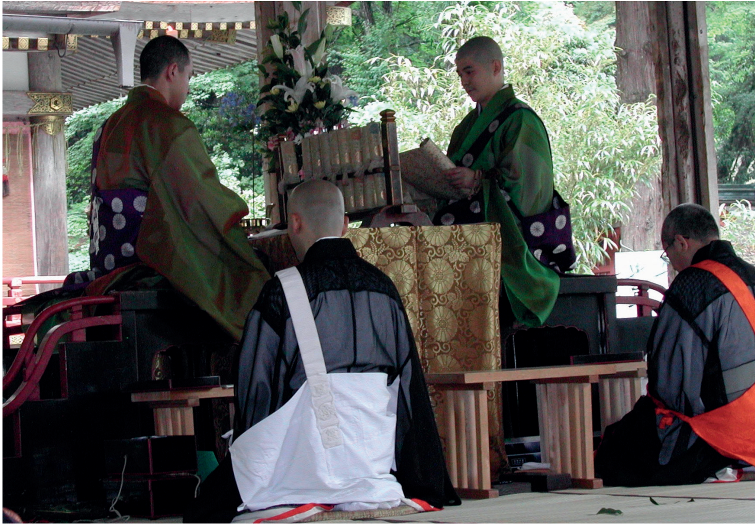

Figure 1 *Raihaikō*: Platform for debating the *Lotus Sutra* in Nishi hongū's worship hall. Sakamoto, 2003. © Lucia Dolce

Figure 2 Nishi hongū's head priest recites a *norito* before the starting of the Buddhist ritual. Sakamoto, 2003. © Lucia Dolce

Figure 3 Liturgical chanting during the *raihaikō*. Sakamoto, 2003. © Lucia Dolce

Shōreni, Jien's lineage headquarters in Kyoto. After the ceremony was halted by Meiji ideologues, the monks continued to perform it in one of the halls on Mount Hiei, Sanbutsudō 讃仏堂. It was reinstated at Hiyoshi Taisha in 1947, as soon as the shrine regained its autonomy from the government and constituted itself as an independent juridical persona (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人). Today's procedures by and large followed the amendments that had been made when the ritual moved to Sanbutsudō. While in premodern times this was a grand ritual that took as long as four days to complete (two scrolls per day were debated, one in the morning and one in the afternoon), today it lasts less than a full day.[14]

Medieval narratives place the beginning of the performance of the Lotus Lectures at Hie jinja in 1025. That year all trees in the precincts of the shrine complex and the mountain behind it had withered away mysteriously. At a certain point the *kami* of Ōmiya appeared to a Shōgenji priest, Hafuribe Maretō 祝部希遠, and lamented the decline of the dharma on Mount Hiei and the idleness of the monks who had relinquished the study of the scriptures to wear armours.[15] The *kami* threatened to abandon the place because monks were not letting him fulfil his role of protector of the dharma, which he claimed

14 A detailed outline of the history and protocol of the liturgy is in Yamada 1976.

15 The reference is to the growing number of warrior monks (*sōhei*).

Saichō, founder of the Tendai school, had assigned him. This oracle was reported to the monks of the Eastern Pagoda, who were in charge of Ōmiya shrine. To apologise to the *kami* the temple gathered thirty of his most learned monks and organised a debate on each of the twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* at the shrine. Soon after the liturgy the trees revived to their original green, revealing that the *kami* had been pleased (Murayama 1994, 137; Sagai 1992, 122-5). This narrative is significant to understand the relationship between *kami* and Buddhism: it defines the role of the *kami* as guardian of Mount Hiei and it highlights that a Buddhist ritual is needed to appease him and express gratitude for his role in protecting the place as well as the dharma, in this case embodied by the Enryakuji establishment.

Unsurprisingly, the scripture performed is the most important text for the Tendai school, the *Lotus Sutra*. Debating the content of a scripture was not merely a placatory offering. It also was a way for monks to show their knowledge of the doctrine and put into action a mechanism by which *kami* intervention was necessitated, whether to exert ethical control over the monastic community or to be a source of instruction.[16] By the time the *Eight Lectures on the Lotus* were established at the Hie shrines, they had become a popular Buddhist rituals, conducted at temples and shrines as well as private residences. Monastics and lay people believed that the benefits accrued by dedicating a debate on the *Lotus Sutra* were higher than those gained by sponsoring a reading or copying of the *sutra*, given the resources needed to stage it and the preparation demanded to the lecturers. All these factors undoubtedly shaped the meaning of the Lotus Lectures as the most significant offering to the Sannō *kami*. Hiyoshi Taisha today maintains this significance and regards the liturgy as the crystallisation of the intimate relationship between its *kami* and the Buddhist institution on Mount Hiei.

2.3 Hiyoshi Taisha (II). The *Shinji* of Sannō *Matsuri*

Sannōsai 山王祭 is the grand festival of the town of Sakamoto which celebrates the Hie deities. Held every year in the fifth month, it was famous throughout the early modern period for its magnificence, which we find portrayed in artworks and even described by the early Western visitors to Japan, the Jesuits missionaries. Today the festival unfolds over three days, from 12 to 14 April, through discrete

16 Debates performed at other temples illustrate the active role of the *kami*: at Kōfukuji the Kasuga deity is said to instruct the monks on the topic of the debate and the presiding abbot is seen as *kami* in attendance (Matsuo 2009).

segments taking place at different locations within the shrine complex and the town of Sakamoto. Its climax remains the descent of the portable shrines of the seven major Hie deities, carried by local men from Nishi hongū to the Lake Biwa on the afternoon of 14 April.[17] Before that, however, the shrine ritual (*shinji* 神事) takes place. Shrine priests conduct offerings at both Higashi hongū and Nishi hongū, but it is at the latter site that the main procedures are carried out. This ritual of dedication is considered the most important event in the Hiyoshi Taisha calendar, and many representatives from Hie Shrines around the country, starting from those of the Ōmi region, are invited to attend. Significantly, it is within this liturgy that segments staged by Buddhist monks have been maintained. Let me review the setting and sequence of the ritual.[18]

The shrine priests meet the monks from Enryakuji, led by the *zasu*, on the slope that takes to the shrine and proceed together towards Nishi hongū. A representative from Jinja honchō and the leaders of the *sannō* confraternities (*sannōkō* 山王講) are also in attendance. In front of the gate the two groups, lined up one opposite the other, receive a purificatory blessing from shrine priests before entering the precincts **[fig. 4]**.[19] The *zasu* alone changes his sandals into the ceremonial wooden shoes (*asagutsu* 浅履) used by shrine priests, to mark that he is entering the territory of the *kami*, taking over the appearance of a shrine monk (*shasō*). (On my most recent attendance the clogs were symbolically brought in front of the gate but the *zasu* did not wear them, apparently for fear that he, then a frail ninety-year-old man, would fall) **[fig. 6]**. The two parties are seated next to each other in hierarchical order under a canopy arranged at the left of the worship hall **[fig. 7]**. In the worship hall in front of the main hall are placed the seven portable shrines of the principal *kami* of Hie.

The first part of the ritual is carried out by shrine priests. The doors of the main hall are open following an established protocol. Offerings from Jinja honchō are presented to the *kami*. The head priest recites the *norito*. Then the first Buddhist segment takes place:

17 On Sannō *matsuri* see Kageyama 2001; Yamaguchi 2010 and Breen, Teuween 2010; on Jesuit descriptions of the festival see D'Ortia, Dolce, Pinto (forthcoming). For a classic analysis of *matsuri* see Raveri 1984.

18 This account is based on fieldwork I carried out in 2004 and 2018. A number of details were different in the two performances and I have noted them when relevant. A shorter dedicatory liturgy is performed at Higashi hongū before the rite at Nishi hongū, but there only priests are in attendance. I am grateful to the officiating priest for providing me with a copy of the order of procedures.

19 In recent years, an area for the blessing has been created on the right of the main gate **[fig. 5]**. One may note that other Buddhist representatives (recognisable from the *wagesa* they wear on their suits) are also present, lined up on the monastics' side.

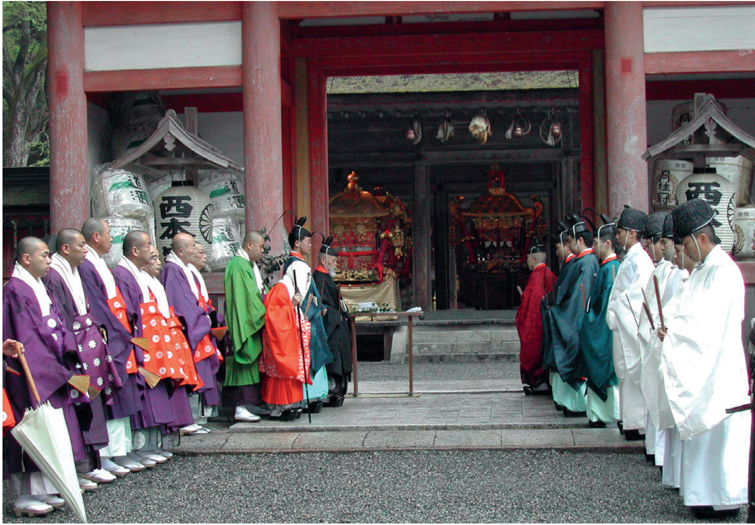

Figure 4 *Sannōsai*: Monks and priests at the entrance of Nishi hongū. In the background the portable shrines of the main Sannō deities. Sakamoto, 2004. © Lucia Dolce

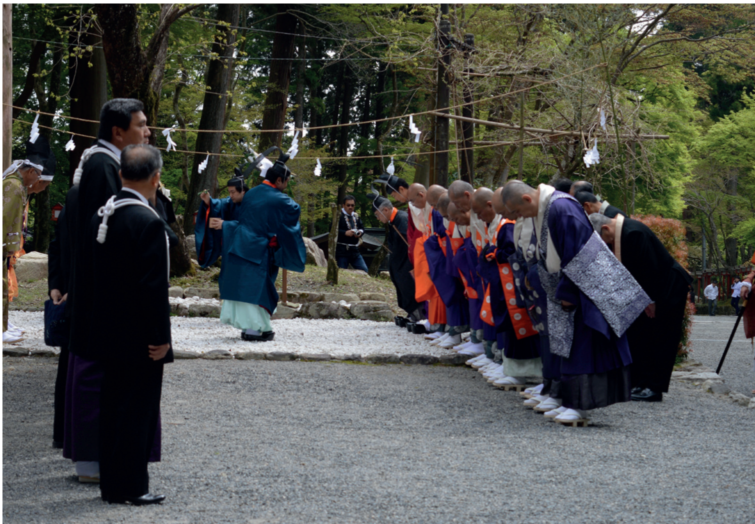

Figure 5 Monks and priests receive a purificatory blessing before entering Nishi hongū. Sakamoto, 2018. © Lucia Dolce

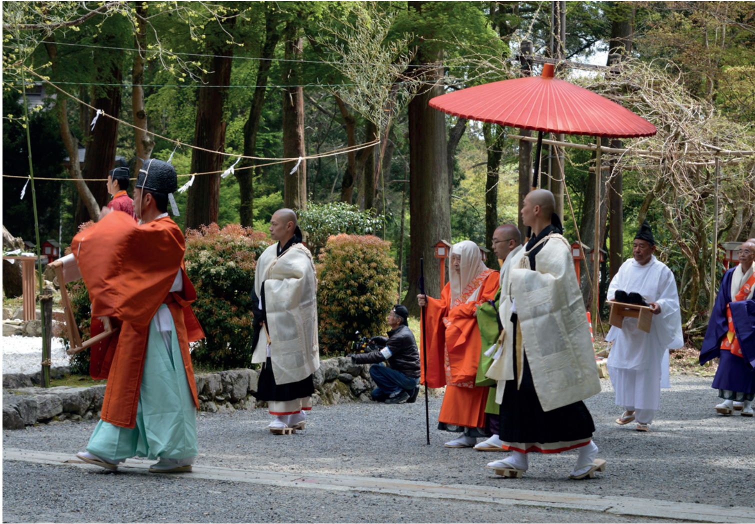

Figure 6 The Tendai *zasu* arrives at Nishi hongū. A shrine attendant carries his *asagutsu*. Sakamoto, 2018. © Lucia Dolce

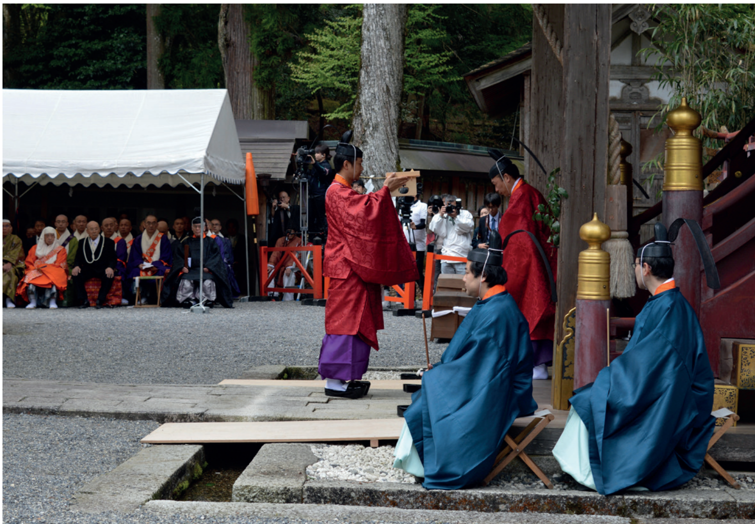

Figure 7 Offerings to the *kami*. In the background monks and priests sit together. Sakamoto, 2018. © Lucia Dolce

Figure 8 Senior monks from Enryakuji dedicate five colour *gohei* to the Sannō kami. Sakamoto, 2004. © Lucia Dolce

a dedication of *gohei* in five colours (*goshoku no hōhei* 五色の奉幣).[20] At the sound of *gagaku*, played by musicians sitting at the border of the worship hall, the officiating monks pass around five *gohei*, in succession green, red, yellow, white and black, and hand them over to the *zasu*. The *zasu* presents them to the attendant shrine priest, who for each *gohei* climbs up to the hall and places it on an altar therein **[fig. 8]**. The playing of *gagaku*, the ancient court music that has become the distinctive sound of Shinto shrines, underscores that this is a *kami* ritual. After this dedication, the second Buddhist segment takes place: the *zasu* climbs the high steps that distinguish the main halls of the Hiei shrines and sits in the outer space (*gejin* 外陣); he utters a mantra, makes a *mudra*, and starts reciting the *Heart Sutra*, joined by the attending monks[21] **[fig. 9]**. In the last segment of the ritual the priests offer a bunch of blessed *katsura* branches to the *kami* and then to the *zasu*. The *katsura* tree is considered the sacred tree of the Hiei shrines, for a branch is said to have been used as a

20 This offering might reiterate a step in the protocol of the 'secret visitation to shrines' (*himitsu sansha*), a practice popular in the medieval period, when monks purified themselves and offered *gohei* in five colours before they set out to the nightly pilgrimage to the shrine buildings (Sagai 1992, 173-4). Although the oblation today is performed in front of the main hall, seventeenth century records indicate that the *zasu* offered *gohei* to the seven portable shrines (Yamaguchi 2010, 79).

21 In 2018, undoubtedly due to his age, the *zasu* stood in front of the *honden* with the monks intoning the *sutra* behind him.

Figure 9 The *zasu* recites the *Heart sutra* in front of the kami. In the foreground, *gagaku* players. Sakamoto, 2004. © Lucia Dolce

staff by the god enshrined at Nishi hongū when he moved there from Miwa, in the Nara prefecture. Twigs are then distributed to all participants, who wear them on their body, the priests distinctively on their headgear, the monks on their robes and other attendees behind their right ear or on their suits.[22]

Thus, the ritual protocol of this segment of the Sannō *matsuri* reiterates the Buddhist credentials of Hiyoshi Taisha. Shrine literature explains the liturgy with the long association of the shrine with the Tendai school, which started in the early Heian period when Saichō established his hermitage on Mount Hiei and chose the local deity as protector of his temple.[23] The importance of the performance for the institutions involved is indisputable, and the efforts to continue the ritual in its combinatory form attests to the crucial role that the association with the temple still plays for the identity of the shrine. Even when in 2020 the popular part of the celebrations, the procession of portable shrines, was cancelled because of COVID-19 pandemic, the combinatory rites at Nishi hongū continued to be conducted by shrine priests and Buddhist monks together.

22 The *zasu* and the senior Tendai monks visit Higashi hongū after the rite at Nishi hongū, to recite the *sutra* for that *kami*.

23 This was also emphatically stated by the shrine head priest in the public speech he gave at the end of the ritual in 2018 – particularly significant because in 2018 the shrine celebrated the 1350th anniversary of the enshrinement (*chinza* 鎮座) of its deity.

As with the two rituals reviewed earlier, this liturgical combination is not concerned with individual worshippers. It is performed for the *kami* and promoted by the highest clerical ranks of the institutions that inhabit the territory of the *kami* as an affirmation of their existence. It is a ritual petition for the collective well-being of the town and of the Japanese nation – and, by extension, the entire world.[24] Its efficaciousness is accomplished thanks to the symbiotic power of its combined actors, human as well non-human: the monks and the priests on the stage, the *kami* and the buddhas invisible in the background.

3 Reinventions: New *Shinbutsu* Associations

While the liturgies analysed so far disclose and acknowledge the historical alliances of the shrines and temples that carry them out, the two examples that I shall discuss now are practices that have been devised in recent years to call attention to the *kami*-buddha combination as constitutive of Japanese religiosity. These practices may be deemed new because no specific association is attested historically between the institutions concerned. Yet the terms of these interactions are anything but new or unconventional. Rather, they reiterate the patterns that characterised the construction of *shinbutsu* practices in the premodern period.

3.1 The Sacred Water of Kiyomizudera and Iwashimizu Hachimangū

On 7 November 2003, on the occasion of the public display (*kaichō* 開帳) of the main object of worship of Okunoin at Kiyomizudera, in Kyoto, a special liturgy was performed jointly by the abbot of Kiyomizudera and the head priest of Iwashimizu Hachimangū. The ceremony consisted of a ritual offering of Iwashimizu water to the *honzon* of Kiyomizu. The stated purpose of the ritual was to pray for the safety of the nation (*kokka antai* 国家安泰) and peace in the world (*sekai heiwa* 世界平和).

The liturgy is documented in a publication that includes the ritual protocol, an origin story, the text of the statements of purpose (*saimon* 祭文 and *hyōbyaku* 表白) recited at the beginning of the ritual and the charts of the ritual space – that is, all the elements one finds in pre-

24 World peace is mentioned in the head priest's speech, as it has become customary in such occasions, where world peace becomes an extension of the traditional Japanese intent for a peaceful and prosperous country.

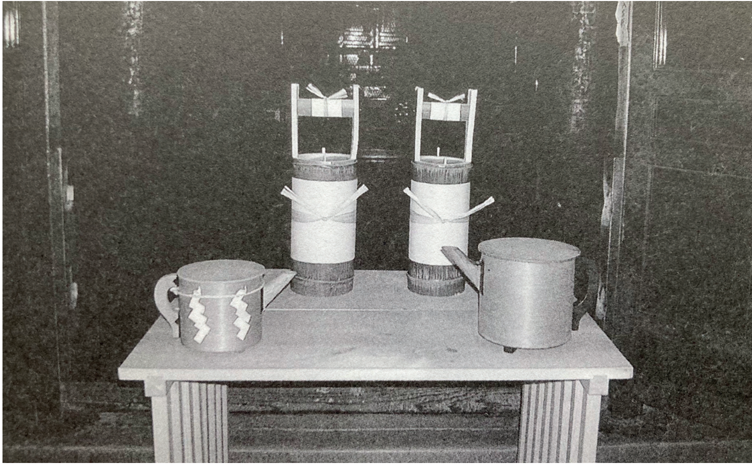

Figure 10 Altar with sacred water from Iwashimizu Hachimangū and Kiyomizudera (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai 2004, 112)

modern liturgical manuals (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai 2004, 85-117).[25] According to this source, the ritual unfolded as follows.

The two groups of ritualists lined up in the hall, the monks on one side, led by the abbot, and the shrine priests and the *kagura* performers on the other, led by the head priest. The attendant priest of Kiyomizudera tutelary shrine (*jinushi* 地主) stood on the side of the priests. Ritualists cleansed their hands and proceeded to the ritual space, where everyone occupied an assigned seat according to clerical hierarchy. Water from the two cultic sites was placed on the altar **[fig. 10]** and in front of it the abbot pronounced the *hyōbyaku*. Then the head priest invited the deity by clapping his hands, and shrine attendants presented offerings of food – washed rice, sake, mochi, vegetables, fruits and sweets. The head priest recited a *norito*. After a *kagura* dance performance, Iwashimizu priests bestowed a blessing on all participants. At this point joint acts of worship (*raihai* 礼拝) for the water, addressed both with a Buddhist term, *reisui* 霊水, and a Shinto term, *shinzui* 神水, were performed in the style required by each ritual tradition, the priests clapping their hands, the monks joining theirs in *gasshō*. The climax of the ritual was the moment in which, through a complex protocol of gestures, the heads of the two institutions symbolically merged the water of the temple and the water of the shrine.

Mori Seihan森清範, *kanshū* of Kiyomizudera, and Tanaka Tsunekiyo 田中恆清, *gūji* of Iwashimizu Hachimangū, explain the decision to hold

25 The publication includes several photos of each step of the ritual.

this ritual by recalling the origins of both shrine and temple as sacred places for clear water (清水, read *kiyomizu* or *shimizu*). Kiyomizudera is famous for a waterfall, which is believed to be miraculous and is presented in premodern narratives as a manifestation of Kannon. Within the precincts of Iwashimizu shrine is a pure water well that attests to the existence of a temple where the god of water was venerated before the funding of the shrine dedicated to Hachiman (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai 2004, 63). Further, the waterfall at Kiyomizudera receives water from the northern stream of the Kizu river and Iwashimizu Hachimangū stands next to the Kizu river. Thus, the material element of water serves to shape and legitimise the institutional alliance. This element is not only used rhetorically for the construction of a new combinatory discourse. By emphasising that it is reflected in the names of both institutions (*mizu* 水 means 'water' in Japanese) and in their past cultic practices, and by employing it physically in the new joint ritual, the creators of the liturgy deploy a relational logic that draws on myth, language and rite to forge the association – the same logic used in premodern combinatory systems, where such associations were expressed in linguistic strategies, origin narratives, visual representations and liturgical practices.[26]

In his introduction to the ritual, Mori wished for the restoration of the *shinbutsu* unity of old, suggesting that the ritual reproduced the "marvel" (*biji* 美事) that existed before the Meiji separation of *kami* and buddhas (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai 2004, 87). The point explicitly made here is that the effects of a ritual can be enhanced by joint efforts, for *kami* and buddhas working together produce better benefits. Both Mori and Tanaka were members of a Tourist Cultural Association called 'Old Capital Forest' (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai), whose purpose was to stimulate a return to traditional religion. In the wave of the 'return to nature' movement, the association emphasised that in Japan *kami* and buddhas abide in nature; hence to go back to worship *kami* and buddhas jointly is a 'natural' action for the Japanese. The Association took explicit stance against the separation of *kami* and buddhas accomplished by the Meiji government for, they declared, it has obscured the roots of Japanese religiosity and has had negative consequences on the spirituality of the Japanese. To counter the present situation, the association purported to assess what was left of the practices performed in Kyoto before the Meiji period and to devise interactions between temples and shrines which could improve the understanding of traditional reli-

26 We see this dynamic in act in other cases documented by the same publication. For instance, a new association between Yoshida Shrine and Nanzenji, marked by the performance of a joint ritual, is explained by reformulating legends related to Yoshida Kanetomo, the founder of Yoshida shrine (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai 2004, 121-36).

gion (Koto no mori Kankō bunka kyōkai 2004, 51-8).[27] The new ritual at Kiyosumidera was part of this strategy.

Since 2003, and modelled after the ritual performed in that occasion, Kiyosumidera and Iwashimizu clerics have established an annual ceremony to pray together for the well-being of the nation and world peace. Presented as a flower offering liturgy (*kenkasai* 献花祭) and described as a revival of a pre-Meiji combinatory ritual, it showcases the head priest reciting a *norito* and the head abbot a *hyōbyaku* and culminates in the symbolic merging of the waters of Kiyomizu and Iwashimizu. The liturgy was conducted in the main hall of Kiyomizudera until 2010. That year marked the 1700 commemoration of Ōjin and the 1150th anniversary of his enshrinement as Hachiman at Iwashimizu, and for the occasion the liturgy was performed in the main hall of the shrine. This was a crucial development in the new *shinbutsu* discourse, for it was the exclusion of Buddhist objects and clergy from shrines that defined modern Shinto.[28] Indeed, Iwashimizu sources emphasises that it reverted the first time in one hundred and forty-two years after the Meiji restoration that a *shinbutsu* ritual occurred at the shrine. Since then, temple and shrine have performed it every year at both locations, usually at the end of May at Kiyomizudera and in mid-June at Iwashimizu.[29]

It should be noted that Iwashimizu Hachimangū has also continued to hold the famous *hōjōe* 放生会, the Buddhist ceremony of release of animals, performed during its major festival in mid-September. It is therefore significant that rather than promoting this ritual as a form of continuity with the past, the institution engaged in the construction of a novel combinatory ritual with Kiyomizudera. In fact, while the *hōjōe* had been maintained as an important segment of the festival, it had no longer been performed by monastics and its Buddhist meaning had been lost. This might have been one reason for creating a new liturgy. However, following on the institution of the new ritual and undoubtedly precipitated by it, in 2004 a *hōjōe* in pre-Meiji style was revived with the participation of Tendai monks from Enryakuji.[30] The recent evolution of this format awaits to be examined.

27 The association was established in the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake.

28 *Shinbutsu*-type rituals at temples are less controversial and have been maintained in several places, not least because temples have continued to house specific *kami*. One can also think of cases in which Shinto priests take part in a liturgical performance at a temple. The segment of the *shunie* performed at Tōdaiji, where the priests of the nearby Tamukeyama Hachimangū attend with the specific function of guarding the palanquin housing a small image of Kannon, seems a case in point (Dolce 2010).

29 See the archive of Iwashimizu webpage: http://www.iwashimizu.or.jp/event/schedule_more.php?seq=537. Dates are not fixed, but have changed depending on the year. See, for instance, *Sankei shinbun* 産経新聞, 2014-06-01 (https://www.sankei.com/article/20140601-AGCKY2HHEFNXZF6CBOBFAKF4HA/).

30 See http://www7b.biglobe.ne.jp/~s_minaga/m_iwasimizu_2.htm.

3.2 Walking New 'Combinatory' Paths: *Shinbutsu Reijō Junrei*

A second example of the establishment of a novel practice that reinterprets traditional combinatory models is the creation of a new 'pilgrimage to spiritual sites of *kami* and buddhas' (*shinbutsu reijō junrei* 神仏霊場巡礼). It consists of an extensive circuit that starts from Ise jingū and finishes on Mount Hiei, visiting one hundred and fifty-two shrines and temples of the Kinai region. Among them are Japan's most famous religious establishments, from Tōdaiji and Kasuga Taisha in Nara, to Shitennōji in Osaka and the three Kumano shrines in the Kii peninsula, to Kiyomizudera, Iwashimizu Hachimangū and Kamoshimo shrine in Kyoto. Although many of these sites have historically been destinations of discrete pilgrimages and some are part of a premodern circuit, the Saikoku pilgrimage, they had never been joined together in such a grand spiritual course.

The new pilgrimage is arranged along seven routes. The first focuses on Ise Jingu, which stands apart as the object of 'special visit'; it is called 'the Path where *kami* and buddhas abide together' (*shinbutsu dōza no michi* 神仏同座の道). The other routes revolve around each province of the region: Wakayama, 'Path of Purification' (*shōjō no michi* 清浄の道); Nara, 'Path of Protection' (*chingo no michi* 鎮護の道); Osaka, 'Path of Plentiful Enjoyment' (*hōraku no michi* 豊楽の道); Hyōgo, 'Path of Fertility' (*hōjō no michi* 豊饒の道); Kyoto, 'Path to Paradise' (*rakudo no michi* 楽土の道); and Shiga, 'Path of Earnest Quest' (*gongu no michi* 欣求の道) (Shinbutsu reijōkai 2008). This division in seven paths seems to me a compelling allusion to the seven major roads that in ancient times served to map out the geopolitical territory of Japan and later on became a metaphor for the sacred nature of this territory, marked as it was by the powerful shrines-temples of the Kinai area. In fact, even the choice of Ise and Mount Hiei as the beginning and end points of the pilgrimage recalls two main points in the sacred cartography of medieval Japan, the Ise bay and the lake Biwa, on which shore Mount Hiei stands.[31] This suggests a conscious rethinking of the national territory and of the role of religious institutions therein, supported by an erudite knowledge of the past.

The pilgrimage was inaugurated in September 2008, with a large group of two hundred and twenty Buddhist and Shinto clerics dressed in their distinctive attires entering the Ise shrines together, the abbot of Kiyomizudera and the high priest of Iwashimizu on the foreground. This was a performance of particular symbolic significance, clearly intended to capitalise on the perception of Ise as the sacred place of Japan *par excellence* and at the same time to re-appropriate it as a place that belongs to Shinto and Buddhism alike. In a sense,

31 On the seven roads and the sacred mapping of Japan see Dolce 2007.

monks entering Ise might be seen as an open challenge even to tradition, for a taboo had existed since early times which forbade things Buddhist in Ise (*shinbutsu kakuri* 神仏隔離).[32] The kick-off at Ise demonstrated that this pilgrimage was a new beginning, albeit predicated on received patterns. The inauguration of the *shinbutsu* pilgrimage was a big media event, widely featured in newspapers and broadcasted in the national television channels.[33] A book of stamps (*goshuinchō* 御朱印帳), since the Edo period part and parcel of a pilgrim's accessories, was purposely created to be purchased for the new pilgrimage – a thick book about three times the usual size of a stamp book, to fit the seals of all hundred and fifty sites. The publicity produced to advertise the pilgrimage invited people to follow the "ancient Japanese pilgrimage path of Shinto and Buddhism" which had been destroyed by Meiji policies, and insisted that the *shinbutsu* pilgrimage would "contribute to the stability of modern people's minds and society" (*Sankei shinbun*, 2008-03-02).

The pilgrimage was conceived by an Association of Shinto-Buddhist Spiritual Sites (Shinbutsu reijōkai), established in March of the same year at Enryakuji, which served as the first administrative office for the association. At that time, it was chaired by Morimoto Kōsei, abbot of Tōdaiji (the current president of the association is Kasuga Taisha's high priest).[34] The temples and shrines that are on the pilgrimage route are members of the association. Eighteen names are listed as its founding members. These are leading figures of the religious world, including the heads of the shrines and temples discussed above; intellectuals, such as Yamaori Tetsuo, eminent scholar of Japanese religion, already involved in the Old Capital Forest Cultural Association, and Hirokawa Katsumi, formerly of Doshisha University, who had tried for many years to create an action group around the idea of *shinbutsu*; and distinguished scholars of combinatory beliefs whose research has shaped the field, and who are themselves high clerics of major establishments: the late Sugahara Shinkai, professor at Waseda University and abbot of the Tendai *monzeki* Myōhōin in Kyoto; Sonoda Minoru, former professor of Kokugakuin University and head priest of Chichibu Taisha; Miyagi Tainen, Shugendō specialist and abbot of Shōgōin; Matsunaga Yūkei, former president of Kōyasan University and abbot of Kongōbuji on Mount Kōya, to cite a few. In many ways the composition of the

32 Satō 2007; Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003, 21-3. Satō has demonstrated that the prohibition was linked to the role of Ise as an imperial shrine.

33 See, for instance, *Yomiuri shinbun*, 30-09-09.

34 For a detailed chronology of the institution of the society and its immediate actions see the history page of their new website: `https://shinbutsureijou.net/history.html`.

Association makes the new pilgrimage an intellectual and political movement, fed by scholarly awareness of the history of Japanese religion.[35] As with the new alliance between Kiyomizu and Iwashimizu discussed above, whose advocates are closely connected to the *shinbutsu* pilgrimage, the creators of the pilgrimage lament that the separation of *kami* and buddhas has obscured the roots of Japanese religiosity and see their actions as necessary means to convey the merits of traditional religion.

To mark the institution of the new pilgrimage two publications were produced. One is a pocket guide to the sites to be visited during the pilgrimage, which gives basic details of their history and the deities enshrined, a small map of the area and a handsome drawing of a representative building, dedicating two pages to each site; it also carries a few columns written by leading figures of the movement (Shinbutsu reijōkai 2008). The second publication is an essay book that provides an outline of the history of combinatory beliefs and discusses the meaning of Buddhist rituals historically performed at shrines, such as the liturgy for releasing animals at Iwashimizu Hachimangū (Hirokawa 2008). Both publications convey the need to "restore the original relationship between *kami* and buddhas" in uncompromising terms and maintain that to keep the world of Buddhism and the world of Shinto separate creates an "unnatural" (*fushizen* 不自然) relation between the two (Hirokawa 2008, inner cover). They call on the Japanese people's long history of worshipping nature and sensing invisible gods and buddhas in mountains, rivers, plants and trees, and envisage the revival of practices which are "the roots of the Japanese people' soul" (*nihonjin no tamashii no moto* 日本人の魂の元) (Hirokawa 2008, 19).

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the pilgrimage, a new guidebook was published, which presents the pilgrimage as a practice for the Reiwa era (Shinbutsu reijōkai 2019). It by and large provides the same information as the previous guide, but includes a reproduction of the vermilion stamps that each of the hundred and fifty-two shrines and temples had created for the pilgrimage.[36] Like the earlier publication, it draws on the ever popular guides to the practical benefits that may be acquired by visiting sacred places in a particular area (*riyaku no gaido bukku* 利益のガイドブック) and capitalises on current

35 Some of the online commentators of the time compared the new pilgrimage to the so-called 'En no gyōja Renaissance' 役行者ルネッサンス that started in 1998 and set out a Shugendō revival. A similar success is contemplated for the *shinbutsu* movement. http://yosino32.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2008/03/post_5ff9.html.

36 Shinbutsu reijōkai 2019. The guidebook is sold in bookshops, next to scholarly works on historical combinatory beliefs, as well as at temples and shrines of the area. Hasedera even advertises it on its webpage: https://www.hasedera.or.jp/promotion/1/blog_detail.html?key=entry&value=446.

fashions: by inserting the seals of each temple and shrine, the 2019 guidebook caters to the frenzy for collecting stamps, which in recent years has spread across Japan.[37]

4 Reenactment: *Goryōe* at Kitano Tenmangū

Just as I conclude my writing, a new compelling episode in the revival of *shinbutsu* practices has taken place, which begs reporting even if briefly for it fleshes out the multiplication of contemporary combinatory rituals.

On 4 September 2020, a liturgy to exorcise vengeful spirits (*goryōe* 御霊会) has been reenacted at Kitano Tenmangu in Kyoto, to invoke the end of the Coronavirus pandemic and to plea for the good health and safety of the nation. In premodern Japan, epidemics were thought to be caused by unhappy spirits (*goryō*) who brought about havoc in the country until they were ritually placated, often by enshrining and transforming them into deities.[38] Kitano Tenmangū was established in 947 to appease one such vengeful spirit, that of the bureaucrat, scholar and poet Sugawara no Michizane (845-903), there enshrined as Tenjin.[39] In 987 the shrine celebrated the first, court-sponsored, festival for the deity: it included a ritual segment performed by Tendai monks, consisting of liturgical lectures on the eight fascicles of the *Lotus Sutra* (*hokke hakkō*). Such *goryōe* were combinatory rituals, just as the deities they celebrated, and it is in that format that the liturgy has been revived in 2020.

The celebrants of the contemporary ritual are Tendai monks from Enryakuji and shrine priests from Kitano. Following a protocol similar to the other cases of *shinbutsu* rituals analysed above, the monks, led by the Tendai *zasu*, Morikawa Kōei, are welcomed at Kitano's Sankōmon gate by the shrine priests, headed by the *gūji*, Tachibana Shigetoku. The two parties entered together the precincts of the shrine and proceeded to the main hall. The liturgy started with the proclamation of intent to the *kami*: the *zasu* pronounced a *saimon* and offered a sprig of *sakaki* tree (*tamagushi* 玉串); the *gūji* read a *norito*. Then the core of the liturgy took place. The monks recited the *Heart Sutra*, followed by the chanting of the formal Buddhist name

37 This renewed 'stamp fever' was often pointed out to me in 2019 by resident priests of small temples of the Tokyo area, who were not used to occasional pilgrims turning up at their doors to request a stamp.

38 On *goryōe* see McMullin 1988. Several festivals still celebrated to this day in Kyoto, such as the Yasurai *matsuri* at Imamiya Shrine and the famous Gion festival, originated as attempts to repel epidemics that had spread in the capital.

39 On the cult of Tenjin see Murayama 1996 and Borgen 2020; on the combinatory dimension of Tenjin see Iyanaga 2003.

of the deity, “Namu Tenman Daijizai Tenjin 南無天満大自在天神” (lit. ‘Praise to the Heavenly Deity of Great Power that Fills the Sky’) – a name that itself reflects the combinatory nature of Tenjin. The highlight of the liturgy was a debate on the eight fascicles of the *Lotus Sutra*, similar to that performed at Hiyoshi Taisha. On this occasion, a senior monk, Imadegawa Gyōkai 今出川行戒, General Director of the Worship Division 参拝部 of Enryakuji, acted as lecturer.[40] Widely covered by the media, newspapers and TV channels have reiterated that this is the revival of a *shinbutsu* ritual that had not been performed at Kitano since 1467, when the outbreak of the Ōnin War interrupted it.

The bond between Kitano Tenmangū and Enryakuji might have been forgotten with the postwar emphasis on the Shinto identity of Tenjin, but it is intrinsic to the history of Kitano. At the mythological level, foundation narratives of the shrine claimed that the Tendai *zasu* Son’i, a renown exorcist, whom Michizane had regarded as his teacher in the last years of his life, was the only ritualist with the power to appease Michizane’s spirit. As an institution, Kitano was a *miyadera* 宮寺, that is, a temple administrated by Buddhist monks where the main object of worship was a *kami*. The first head priest of Kitano was a monk from Mount Hiei called Zesan 是算, a member of the Sugawara family, who found the temple that would later become Manshuin 曼殊院. Manshuin was in charge of the management of Kitano up to 1868.[41] These links are showcased in the contemporary reenactment of the *goryōe*, revealing a renewed confidence in bringing premodern institutional relationships to the fore: Enryakuji monks are welcomed not only by the head priest and other clerics of Kitano Tenmangū, but also by the abbot of Manshuin and his acolytes, who throughout the liturgy sit alongside the priests of Kitano, as if they were the shrine monks servicing Kitano in premodern times.

The performance of the *goryōe* appears to reiterate tropes highlighted by other *shinbutsu* rituals: historical continuity in the institutional identity of the shrine; enhanced efficacy of the combined action of Buddhist and Shinto ritualists; and the power of the rituals they execute to affect the wellbeing of the nation. It should be noted that the current pandemic has engendered a significant response from religious institutions in Japan, and many have organised events

40 This account is based on newspaper reports and a brief by Hongō Masatsugu (Hongō 2020) of Ritsumeikan University, to whom I am grateful for informing me of the liturgy. Images of the salient steps of the performance can be perused on `https://mainichi.jp/english/graphs/20200904/hpe/00m/0na/001000g/1`. A detailed report of the ritual was published in *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報, 2020-09-09. In Tendai sources the event is also linked to the celebrations for the 1200 anniversary of Saichō’s demise, which falls in 2021 (`https://1200irori.jp`).

41 Manshuin, one of the five Tendai *monzeki* monasteries in Kyoto, is now located in the North-eastern part of the city, but was originally built closer to the Kitano area.

to auspicate the end of COVID-19. Among traditional temples, Tōdaiji in Nara was perhaps the first when, at the beginning of the pandemic, gathered representatives of different religious faiths to stage a socially distanced, collective prayer in front of Tōdaiji lecture hall.[42] The reenactment of the *goryōe* at Kitano, however, has a different flavour: not only does it restate the association of a well-known shrine with a Buddhist school; it also evokes the efficaciousness of traditional healing rituals, which had been relinquished by Meiji ideologues because perceived at odds with modern science. In so doing, it acknowledges premodern patterns of coexistence of human and non-human agency in the management of calamities. Interestingly, these notions are surfacing in practices at other less-known Shinto shrines in Japan.[43]

5 Concluding Remarks

The case studies addressed in this paper demonstrate that *shinbutsu* combinatory practices are well alive in Japan today and have become an opportunity to assert the very existence of the institutions that perform them and showcase their public significance.

Ritual is the language of contemporary *shinbutsu* discourse. The liturgies explored above, whether executing old procedures or staging more imaginative segments, articulate the materiality and sensorial dimension of the combinatory, and convey it through the objects that are held, exchanged, offered (*gohei*, sakaki, water); the sonic elements that alternate the sounds of the shrines (*gagaku*, *kagura*) and the sounds of the temples (chanting hymn, reciting *sutras*); the gestures of the celebrants, simultaneous, in succession, swapped one for another. The ritual protocol discloses the dynamics of integration and distinction, identity and dissimilarity, which constitute the combinatory configuration of religion in Japan, now as in the past.

The actors of these performances share an unambiguous interpretation of the world of the *kami* and the world of the buddhas as interconnected, and assert that this relational dimension of religion is fundamental to the definition of Japanese spirituality. In this way, they deny the success of the political intervention of the Meiji peri-

42 *Mainichi shinbun*, 25 April 2020, https://mainichi.jp/articles/20200425/k00/00m/040/097000c. See also McLaughlin 2020.

43 An example is the combinatory ritual to pray for the end of the pandemic at Togakushi shrine in Tsubame, Niigata prefecture. On the occasion of the local spring festival in May 2020, the head priest was joined by Shingon monks from Manpukuji, the temple that managed the shrine before the Meiji period, to offer prayers at three places in town. See http://www.kenoh.com/2020/05/18_taisai.html and a video of the crucial moments of the ritual at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1R2Keng_r0&feature=emb_logo.

od and at the same time prove that the standardisation of the *kami* world attempted by Jinja honchō in postwar years has not worked either. The liturgical calendars of Kasuga and Hiyoshi Taisha and the reenacted practices at Kitano Tenmangū, by bringing historical continuity to the foreground effectively dismiss the more recent history of discontinuity represented by the repositioning of Buddhism and Shinto as separated entities. The new forms of *shinbutsu* practices, at Iwashimizu Hachimangū or along pilgrimage routes, articulate a more explicit, intellectual take on that history through the activism of individuals at the headship of famous shrines and temples, who seem determined to give a novel course to their traditions. Taken together, these practices suggest a new ideological stance that not merely looks at the past nostalgically, but recovers the premodern to reclaim (local) identity and, further, sets out to forge a new role for traditional religious bodies in defining what is the true national identity.

The practices reviewed above also provide material to reconsider the conceptualisation of the combinatory. Syncretistic phenomena have often been associated with popular forms of religion. *Shinbutsu* rituals, however, do not display the spontaneous, devotional character of popular actions, but are validated at the very official and institutional level.[44] A theological justification does not seem to be as central as the institutional one. One may note that the ontological identity of *kami* and buddhas that underpinned premodern combinatory systems does not emerge prominently in the contemporary discourse on *shinbutsu* practises. This suggests that pairing the two is more pertinent than proving that they may be the same entity – after all, the changes brought by modern history cannot be completely disregarded. In fact, the guidebook to the new *shinbutsu* pilgrimage includes detailed instructions on how to worship at each site, acknowledging the distinctiveness of temple and shrine. (Shinbutsu reijōkai 2008, 352-4). The combinatory nature of the *kami* is not dismissed – as it can be evinced from the use of the term *gongen* 権現, a term that indicates a combinatory deity. At Hiyoshi Taisha, for instance, an image of the deity as Sannō gongen may welcome priests, monks and parishioners to the *matsuri* **[fig. 11]**. However, in the whole the rhetoric of contemporary *shinbutsu* discourse relies more effectively on current concerns about environment, spirituality, and return to a vaguely defined tradition.

44 *Shinbutsu* rituals seem to have attract more interest from the general public in recent years, as attested, for instance, by the larger crowd attending the *shinji* of the Sannō *matsuri* in 2018, compared to the handful of curious watching the procedures in 2004. This, however, may be due to a new interest in what I would call 'ritual tourism', which in the last two decades has escalated and seen many Japanese people travel across the country to attend ritual performances.

Figure 11 Sannō *gongen* board at the entrance of the Hiyoshi shrine complex. Sakamoto, 2004. © Lucia Dolce

The space of this article has not allowed any in-depth analysis of each of the rituals presented and the specific issues each of them raises, but some questions may be pointed out that apply to all, in varying degrees. A first issue concerns the power dynamics between the institutions that put forward associative patterns of religious action and Shinto's alleged 'central authority', Jinja Honchō. Informal discussions with representatives of the latter have suggested that initially they saw the new alliances as propelled by economical concerns. Commenting on the rituals established by Kiyomizudera and Iwashimizu, for instance, an argument is made that Iwashimizu Tenmangū is today no more than a local shrine, which has lost the relevance and visibility it held in historic times even within the religious landscape of Kyoto; joint activities with a famous temple such as Kiyomizudera can enhance Iwashimizu standing and hopefully increase its touristic intake. But can the upsurge of interest in *shinbutsu* practices be justified on the basis of purely economic reasons? Is this just a marketing operation?

A second point to consider is the broader context in which this shift of focus to the combinatory has taken place. A rethinking of the nature of Shinto vis-à-vis Buddhism has happened in other areas of cultural life in the past two decades. There has been a growing academic interest in the relation of *kami* and buddhas, which has seen an explosion of scholarly publications on the textual sources and diverse incarnations of premodern combinations. Perhaps even more importantly, the material culture produced by combinatory beliefs has been much displayed, in exhibitions at major museums and less

famous venues.[45] These have brought to public attention the extent of the symbiotic relation of Buddhism and Shinto and unveiled a remarkable number of tangible examples of *kami* as combinatory beings. One such exhibition, for instance, showcased a collection of *kami* statues that had their dual appearance as *kami* and buddhas carved in the wood (Kanagawa kenritsu rekishi hakubutsukan 2006). Interestingly, these objects came from the depositories of several shrines in Kanagawa prefecture, where they had remained hidden for almost a century. This in itself shows that shrines are more relaxed as to what they can unveil of their past practices without compromising their modern identity.

Finally, one also needs to question whether the executors and initiators of combinatory rituals, who advocate the *shinbutsu* association as the main paradigm of Japanese *and* as a peculiarity of Japanese culture, are in danger of producing a new bent of conservative Japanese exceptionalism (*nihonjiron*). Whether the interest in the combinatory will become a feature of postmodern Japanese religion or fill a political agenda filtered through traditionalist positions, this is a development to be watched.

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45 For instance, Kanagawa kenritsu rekishi hakubutsukan 2006; Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan 2007; Tōkyō kokuritsu hakubutsukan; Kyūshū kokuritsu hakubutsukan 2013.

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