# Folklore Studies in Postwar Shinto Research and Future Prospects[1]

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**Keywords: folk Shinto (*minzoku shintō* 民俗神道), Shinto studies (*shintōgaku* 神道学), folklore studies (*minzokugaku* 民俗学), Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男, Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫**

***Author's Statement***

I published this article in 2022, the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of Kokugakuin University's Faculty of Shinto Studies, as part of a collection providing perspectives on the future of Shinto studies. My article discusses the role that folklore research has played in the field to date and ways forward for future research.

## *Introduction*

This paper considers the role of folklore studies in postwar Shinto scholarship and future research directions. Integration of folklore studies insights into Shinto research emerged in response to the 1945 Shinto Directive (*Shintō shirei* 神道指令), which mandated fundamental changes to established research frameworks. At Kokugakuin University, Professor Orikuchi Shinobu's 折口信夫 leadership of the Religious Studies Research Group (Shūkyōgaku kenkyūshitsu 宗教学研究室) and the appointment of Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 as a professor during the establishment of the university's graduate school led to a deepened the relationship between Shinto studies and folklore studies. Therefore, this paper will focus on the period of restructuring in postwar Shinto research from around 1945 to the mid-1960s and assess how Shinto scholars and the shrine community saw folklore studies. Furthermore, it will go through trends

[1] This article is a translation of Kashiwagi Kyōsuke 柏木亨介, "Sengo Shinto kenkyū ni okeru minzokugaku no ichi: Minzokugakuteki Shinto kenkyū no tenbō" 戦後神道研究における民俗学の位置―民俗学的神道研究の展望―, Kokugakuin zasshi 國學院雑誌 123: 12 (2022), pp. 149–167. Translated by Dylan L. Toda.

*Kokugakuin Japan Studies*, volume 6, 2025, pp. 28–52

in shrine- and Shinto-related research within folklore studies that followed and outline future prospects for Shinto research from a folklore studies perspective.

## *1. The Place of Folklore in Shinto Studies: Folk Shinto within the Concept of Shinto*

To explore the role of folklore studies in Shinto research, it is first necessary to examine how the term "folklore" (*minzoku* 民俗) is treated therein.

The *Religion Yearbook* (*Shūkyō nenkan* 宗教年鑑), published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō 文化庁), describes Shinto as comprising three categories: "Shrine Shinto centered on shrines," "Sect Shinto established in the *bakumatsu* 幕末 period and onward," and "Folk Shinto practiced within households and by individuals without, unlike the first two categories, forming religious organizations."[2] While shrine Shinto and sect Shinto are explained in detail, folk Shinto is described only vaguely as "widely transmitted attitudes and ideas embedded in daily life," indicating its peripheral status.

Some Shinto scholars adopt this threefold categorization when explaining Shinto.[3] As this fact suggests, this framework follows the field of Shinto studies' accumulated knowledge, and typically folk Shinto is positioned at the periphery when categorizing Shinto phenomena. Introductory works such as *Prestep Shinto Studies* (*Puresuteppu shintōgaku* プレステップ神道学) and The *Tradition and Ceremonies of Shinto Rites* (*Shintō saishi no dentō to saishiki* 神道祭祀の伝統と祭式) categorize Shinto rites into state rites, imperial rites, Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮 rites, shrine rites, and folk rites. We can understand the last as referring to folk Shinto.[4]

State rites refer to ceremonies historically conducted by the Department of Divinities (*Jingikan* 神祇官) in ancient times or by state and local governments in the modern era to pray for the peace and security of the state. Imperial rites are those performed by the imperial family at the imperial court, Ise Jingū rites are those dedicated to the ancestral deities of the imperial line, and shrine rites encompass ordinary shrine rites, such as the annual and other ceremonies held at large central and regional shrines as well as at the tutelary shrines of communities. In contrast, folk rites include private rites conducted outside of shrines, such as those involving household altars, roadside shrines, sacred groves, or prayers for abundant harvests in fields and paddies.

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[2] Bunkachō, *Reiwa san-nendo shūkyō nenkan*, p. 2.

[3] For example, Hirai, "Shintō to minzoku," pp. 221–222.

[4] Nakanishi, "Jinja no matsuri," pp. 96–97; Numabe, "Jobun." The classification of rites varies depending on whether it is based on location or purpose. Some combine imperial and Ise Jingū rites into "court rites," while others do not categorize state rites separately. However, all include the category of folk rites.

This classification suggests that Shinto encompasses both public and private dimensions, with state, imperial, Ise Jingū, and shrine rites constituting its public aspect, and folk rites its private one. While the former typically involve dedicated shrines, fixed ritual dates, and ceremonies officiated by priests, the latter are characterized by occurrence in everyday spaces, lack of fixed dates or officiants, and pronounced local variations.

Nevertheless, explanations of Shinto often omit folk Shinto, reflecting a tendency within Shinto studies to prioritize public over private rites. That said, shortly after the end of World War II, Yanagita Kunio authored the *On New Kokugaku Studies* (*Shinkokugaku dan* 新国学談) trilogy, explaining Shinto from a folklore studies perspective,[5] and, later, as a professor at Kokugakuin University (serving from 1951 to 1960), lectured on Shinto theory and the history of Shinto doctrine as part of the newly established graduate program in Shinto studies.[6] This indicates that, immediately following the abolition of state Shinto, the shrine community was expected to reconsider Shinto and its shrines through the lens of folk rites.

## *2. The Background to the Formation of Folklore Studies Shinto Research*

### (1) Positive Reasons

On 15 December 1945, the Shinto Directive issued by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP/GHQ) led to the abolition of state Shinto. Even without delving into the debates about what constituted state Shinto, it can be said with certainty that the social landscape surrounding Shinto shrines and Shinto studies subsequently underwent a dramatic transformation. Ten years later, during a New Year's roundtable discussion hosted by the shrine newspaper *Jinja shinpō* 神社新報, participants reflected on the state of Shinto research as follows:

> Moderator: It is said that folklore studies Shinto research has increased after the war.
>
> Iwamoto: There is no established system or methodology for Shinto studies. Shinto studies began with positivist research during the Meiji period [1868–1912], which later shifted to historical and folklore studies-type research. After the war, Dr. Kishimoto Hideo 岸本英夫 suggested that Shinto research should proceed through folklore, as historical approaches tend to become nationalistic. As a result,

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[5] Yanagita, *Saijitsu kō*; Yanagita, *Yamamiya kō*; Yanagita, *Ujigami to ujiko*.

[6] Kokugakuin Daigaku Kōshi Shiryōka, *Kokugakuin Daigaku hyakunen shi*, pp. 1156–1175. Courses related to folklore studies and religious studies offered in the master's program in Shintō studies included Advanced Research in Theoretical Shintō Studies by Orikuchi Shinobu, Advanced Research in History of Religion by Hori Ichirō 堀一郎, and Advanced Research in Religious Studies by Kishimoto Hideo 岸本英夫. In the doctoral program, established in 1958, after Orikuchi's passing, Yanagita continued to teach Shintō Theory (see p. 1169).

> Kokugakuin University adopted a dual approach of folklore studies and religious studies. Currently, historical research is also being revived. While postwar research methodologies should be critically reexamined, it is first necessary to establish a systematized framework and methodology for Shinto studies.[7]

Given that Kishimoto Hideo had served as an advisor to SCAP's Civil Information and Education Section (CIE), his suggestion, if accurately represented, suggests that he sought to redefine Shinto as a religion in response to sociopolitical circumstances, he saw Shinto's foundation as being in the social lives of ordinary people, and he thought that Shinto could be understood through folk customs. "Iwamoto" here refers to Iwamoto Tokuichi 岩本徳一, then an assistant professor at Kokugakuin University. He was one of the people who at the time saw Shinto research in the decade after the war as being heavily influenced by folklore studies.

When the Society of Shinto Studies (Shintō Shūkyō Gakkai 神道宗教学会) was established at Kokugakuin University in 1947, its founders included Orikuchi Shinobu and Yanagita Kunio. Furthermore, when a master's program in Shinto studies was established in 1951, Yanagita, then advanced in age (seventy-seven by traditional Japanese reckoning), was invited to serve as a professor. The program gathered some of the foremost scholars of folklore, classical Japanese literature, and religious studies, including Yanagita Kunio, Orikuchi Shinobu, Hori Ichirō 堀一郎, and Kishimoto Hideo. In this way, the Shinto studies community at the time was an interdisciplinary mix of people from those fields and Shinto scholars.

Against this backdrop, efforts were made to introduce folklore studies methodologies into Shinto studies over the course of about twenty years starting in the mid-1940s. For instance, Nishitsunoi Masayoshi 西角井正慶, who taught a class on rites research in the Shinto studies graduate program, frequently cited works by Yanagita Kunio and the *Dictionary of Folklore Studies* (*Minzokugaku jiten* 民俗学辞典) in his book *An Overview of Rites* (*Saishi Gairon* 祭祀概論).[8] In the afterword, Nishitsunoi explicitly states, "No one now blindly believes that Shinto studies relies solely on textual analysis. Folklore, above all, is facts carried out in reality, and rites cannot be properly theorized without considering them."[9]

This interdisciplinary research environment led to further developments. In 1956, the Shinto Cultural Association (Shintō Bunkakai 神道文化会) established a committee to investigate indigenous Japanese culture. This committee conducted fieldwork in

[7] "Seinen gakkyū no shinshun zadankai."
[8] Minzokugaku Kenkyūjo, *Minzokugaku jiten*.
[9] Nishitsunoi, *Saishi gairon*, pp. 181–182.

Takachiho 高千穂 (Miyazaki Prefecture) and Aso 阿蘇 (Kumamoto Prefecture), focusing on the ancient culture of central Kyushu.[10] The fieldwork group included specialists from various fields: an archaeology team led by Komai Kazuchika 駒井和愛 (University of Tokyo), a religion team led by Harada Toshiaki 原田敏明 (Kumamoto University), a folklore team led by Kon Wajirō 今和次郎 (Waseda University), and an art history and literature team led by Andō Kōsei 安藤厚生 (Waseda University). Additionally, Nishitsunoi Masayoshi (Kokugakuin University) and Okada Yoneo 岡田米夫 (Director of the Research Division [Chōsabu 調査部], Association of Shinto Shrines [Jinja Honchō 神社本庁]) were among the more than thirty participants. It was an interdisciplinary outfit.

In 1955, Kokugakuin University also established the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics (Nihon Bunka Kenkyūjo 日本文化研究所), with members such as Tsuboi Hirofumi 坪井洋文 and Itō Mikiharu 伊藤幹治. This institute later contributed significantly to reexamining the standard folklore studies theory of rice monoculture (*inasaku bunka ichigen ron* 稲作文化一元論).[11]

The on-the-ground involvement in Shinto research and education of scholars well-versed in folklore studies was partly due to the Shinto Directive, which led to many prominent Shinto scholars being ousted from their teaching positions. Orikuchi Shinobu delivered the commemorative lecture for the first anniversary of the Association of Shinto shrines, while Yanagita Kunio did so for its second anniversary.[12] This reflects the rising expectations for folklore studies within the shrine community, which, having lost state support, sought to strengthen its ties with parishioners and believers. The inaugural issue of *Jinja shinpō* (8 July 1946) featured an article on local festivals—"Washing Away the Bureaucratic Odor, Adding Fun and Charm"—emphasizing that "shrines throughout Japan are shedding their bureaucratic formalism and boldly taking giant steps toward rejuvenation as a *folk religion*" (emphasis added), highlighting the shift in festivals' leadership to parishioners and characterizing this as a "folk religion."[13]

In the postwar era, as Shinto shrines transitioned into religious corporations (shūkyō hōjin 宗教法人), greater emphasis was placed on outreach and educational activities that aligned with the perspectives of parishioners. In this context, young Shinto priests looked to folklore studies to reconstruct postwar Shinto. A roundtable discussion among young Shinto priests published in the aforementioned Shinpō underscored the necessity of doctrine in outreach and edification efforts: "It is only by thoroughly investigating

[10] Shintō Bunkakai, *Takachiho Aso*.
[11] Tsuboi (Gōda) and Itō's articles in *Nihon Bunka Kenkyūjo kiyō* 日本文化研究所紀要 were later expanded as Tsuboi, *Imo to Nihonjin and Itō, Inasaku girei no kenkyū*. These works, though not purely studies of Shintō, emerged from a research environment where Shintō and folklore scholars were in contact with each other.
[12] The lectures were Orikuchi, "Minzokukyō yori jinruikyō e," and Yanagita, "Jinja to shinkō ni tsuite."
[13] "Kanryōshū o issenshi tanoshimi to miryoku o."

religious views on the human body, the soul, and transgressions and impurity that Shinto can emerge as a truly salvific religion with a capacity for evangelism (*dendōsei* 伝道性)," and "such efforts should not rely solely on classical sources but must also pursue insights from all religions as well as from folklore studies."[14] To avoid what they described as the folly of "rejecting medieval practices in favor of an uncritical return to ancient examples under the guise of classical restoration," they proposed the following approaches: Shinto priests "1. should discard their opinions and instead seek the opinions of ordinary people; 2. research and incorporate practices from a diverse range of shrines rather than relying solely on the examples of prominent ones; and 3. listen broadly to the views of folklore studies scholars, not just to so-called knowledgeable scholars."[15] Additionally, it was argued that "the new transformation and rebirth of Shinto must be firmly grounded in classical texts while also rooted in the historical facts about the mind of folklore studies and other disciplines."[16] Other voices emphasized that the future of postwar Shinto should be considered while referring to "folk traditions" as "source material" while keeping in mind that kokugaku 国学 in the form of revivalist Shinto (fukko shintō 復古神道) did not reach the Shinto alive in ordinary society."[17] Such perspectives reflected expectations that folklore studies could provide a way to overcome the limitations of past research, which had been overly focused on classical texts. Such opinions also extended to rituals, with calls for knowledge drawn from folklore studies, linguistics, archaeology, and other fields.[18]

Folklore studies interpretations of Shinto and shrines were welcomed. *Jinja shinpō* serialized articles on folk customs, including "Customs Almanac" (*Shūzoku Goyomi* 習俗ごよみ) in 1950 (47 installments; January to December) and "Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Customs" (*Shinkō to shūzoku* 信仰と習俗) in 1951 (46 installments). Reader feedback on these series included requests such as, "I would like esteemed scholars like Harada Toshiaki, Ishii Shikanosuke 石井鹿之助, and Yanagita Kunio write about the essential issues of Shinto," and comments like, "These articles are useful for explaining the actual events at shrines to parishioners."[19] Articles introducing and explaining folk customs were also frequently contributed by folklore studies scholars or those well-versed in folklore studies, such as Makita Shigeru 牧田茂, Nōda Tayoko 能田多代子, Miyanaga Masamori 宮良当壮, and Hōri Miyashizu 祝宮静.[20]

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[14] "Seinen shinshoku no shoshin (1)."
[15] Sakurai, "Seinen shinshoku no shoshin (10)."
[16] Hata, "Shinshoku no yūmon."
[17] Yamada, "Shintō no tenkai."
[18] Yoshizaki, "Yamabiko"; Yoshizaki "Saishikigaku juritsu no tame ni."
[19] "'Ugoku shakai.'"
[20] Makita, "Kami o ogamu kotoba"; Makita, "Ryūjin no hanashi"; Nōda, "Kita to minami"; Miyanaga, "Kita to minami no oshōgatsu fūkei"; Hōri, "Oshōgatsu ki [*sic*] ma o matsuru."

Furthermore, cultural properties (folklore materials) related to shrines were covered in the periodical, and updates on cultural property surveys frequently shared.[21]

Shrine Shinto was also discussed on NHK's radio program "Religion Hour" (*Shūkyō no jikan* 宗教の時間). "Broadcasts by Orikuchi Shinobu, Yanagita Kunio, and others" were well-received, but Nishitsunoi Masayoshi's folklore studies-based discussions" were particularly praised for being "easily understandable to everyone." This suggests that such explanations of Shinto resonated even with the general public.[22]

Topics related to folk customs that attracted attention during this period included the relationship between deities and ancestral spirits (*sorei* 祖霊), ritual organizations, clerical organizations, and the structure of festivals. Regarding conceptions of deities, the works of Yanagita and Orikuchi were often referenced, while research on ritual organizations frequently cited the works of Hagiwara Tatsuo 萩原龍夫, Higo Kazuo 肥後和男, and Harada Toshiaki. For festivals, the theories of Yanagita and Orikuchi were often consulted.

**(2) Negative Reasons**

On the other hand, the introduction of folklore studies methodologies into Shinto research was not always welcomed by those who emphasized doctrinal studies. Concerns were raised about the state of affairs at Kokugakuin University, particularly regarding the training of future clergy. The following remarks from Kōno Seizō 河野省三 and Iwamoto Tokuichi reflect these concerns:

> Particularly after the war, the Shinto studies chair at Tokyo Imperial University was abolished, and the Jingu Kōgakkan 神宮皇学館, considered a specialized Shinto educational institution, was dismantled. At the same time, philosophical or intellectual Shinto, which had just begun to mature, came to be dismissed as ultranationalistic or militaristic. As a result, it was permitted to exist solely under the guise of folklore-based Shinto. This situation must be carefully and calmly reconsidered. Even at Kokugakuin University, under this direction, many young scholars deeply imbued with philosophical and intellectual perspectives who had taken that kind of path were driven from their positions. (Most of them, by now, are nearing the age of becoming grandparents.) . . .[23]

[21] "Minzoku shiryō no hozon"; Hōri, "'Matsuri' kenkyū no soshikiteki hensei."
[22] "Shūkyōkai no denpa gassen."
[23] Kōno, "Shizuka ni umarani."

> As for the approval of Kokugakuin University's doctoral course in Shinto studies, it appears that for several years, the problem was securing specialists and successors in theoretical Shinto studies and Shinto philosophy. . . . Even so, the number of Shinto scholars remains far too small. Of course, before the war's end, Shinto research was primarily dominated by positivist scholarship and focused on national morality and ethics, as seen in the inclusion of philosophy and ethics divisions in the Faculty of Morality and Ethics. However, after defeat in the war, Shinto research based on national history was rejected under the Shinto Directive as something that researches state Shinto, and the field was rapidly redirected toward the study of popular Shinto through religious studies and folklore methodologies.[24]

As these statements by Kōno and Iwamoto illustrate, the interdisciplinary nature of Shinto research from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s was not the result of organic academic development but rather a methodological limitation imposed by political circumstances. In other words, this situation represented a crisis of stagnation or even a rupture in Shinto research. This became particularly evident in the case of the Ministry of Education's decision to reject the establishment of a doctoral course in Shinto studies at Kokugakuin University.

In the 1953 academic year, Kokugakuin University applied to the Ministry of Education (Monbushō 文部省) to establish a doctoral course in Shinto studies as part of its graduate school. While approval was granted for Japanese literature and Japanese history, the application for Shinto studies was rejected. The Ministry cited two key issues: the lack of "pure Shinto scholars, particularly young researchers," and the absence of "theological and philosophical elements." The initial plan proposed appointing Yanagita Kunio, Kōno Seizo, and Nishitsunoi Masayoshi as professors, but of these, only Kōno was considered a Shinto scholar. Furthermore, among the undergraduate assistant professors, there was only Iwamoto Tokuichi, highlighting the shortage of mid-level faculty members. According to University President Ishikawa Iwakichi 石川岩吉, the lack of theological and philosophical elements in Shinto studies stemmed from its nature as a field. As he explained: "The content of what has traditionally been called Shinto studies has been largely research on the history of deities and intellectual history, literary research on interpretations of classical texts, and more recently, research employing folklore studies methods to draw inductive conclusions from customs and folk traditions. As a result, theological and philosophical research has been minimal."[25]

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[24] Iwamoto, "Wakagi rondan."
[25] "Kokudai hakase katei mondai no shisa"; Kokugakuin Daigaku Kōshi Shiryōka, *Kokugakuin Daigaku hyakunen shi*, pp. 1165–1168.

In response, in 1954, the university strengthened its faculty by converting dual appointments to single appointments. It also increased the number of board members from fifteen to twenty, appointing individuals from outside the university and from the Shinto shrine community who were understanding of Shinto to reinforce the university's management structure. Additionally, Shibusawa Keizō 渋沢敬三 was invited to serve as an advisor.[26] As is widely known, Shibusawa was not only a prominent figure in political and financial circles, having served as a former Minister of Finance, but also actively engaged in the field of folklore studies.

### *3. The Backlash Against Folklore Studies Shinto Research*

#### (1) The Premise for Accepting a Folklore Studies Perspective

If we hold that adopting a folklore studies perspective in Shinto research is academically meaningful, that significance would lie in its focus on aspects of Shinto that had traditionally been overlooked. In the 36th issue of *Shinto Research* (*Shintō kenkyū* 神道研究), Hirai Naonofusa 平井直房 (then an assistant professor at Kokugakuin University) remarked the following a roundtable discussion titled "The Current State and Future of Shrine Shinto" (*Jinja shintō no genjō to shōrai* 神社神道の現状と将来): Shinto exists "primarily on the foundation of naturally occurring social groups, such as kinship-based groups (e.g., families and clans) and locality-based groups (e.g., hamlets, villages, and towns)." It lacks "notable outreach, education, and guidance activities consciously carried out by professional leaders like priests." Instead, devotion to tutelary deities (*ujigami* 氏神) is passed down through child-rearing and education between parents and children or elders and young people in homes and villages.[27] This statement reflects the understanding that, historically, Shinto teaching and guidance occurred in rural villages through oral transmission from the old to the young in households and local communities, often embedded in annual events and other customs. This recognition provided a foundation for accepting a folklore studies perspective in Shinto research.

However, Hirai also identified the "disintegration of rural folk society" as a critical issue for Shinto outreach, teaching, and guidance in postwar Japanese society.[28] If such disintegration were to occur, the premise for adopting a folklore studies perspective would become unstable. As such Shinto activities shifted toward more deliberate efforts by priests and endeavors targeting urban populations, attention began to turn away from folklore studies-based interpretations that had periods before the modern era in mind. Instead, greater emphasis was placed on establishing a Shinto theology fit for

[26] "Kokudai kyōjujin o kyōka."
[27] Ono et al., "<Kyōdō tōgi>," p. 38.
[28] Ibid., p. 38.

contemporary society. Against this backdrop, the Association of Shinto Shrines marked its tenth anniversary by adopting the "Guidelines for a Life of Reverence for the Deities" (*Keishin seikatsu no kōryō* 敬神生活の綱領) as guiding principles for shrine Shinto.

**(2) The Critiques of Folklore Studies Shinto Research**

By the mid-1950s, the Shinto shrine community had regrouped, and research findings on Shinto from various disciplines were emerging. In a contribution to *Jinja shinpō*, Okada Yoneo, head of the Research Division at the Association of Shinto Shrines, emphasized the importance of having diverse approaches to address various issues, given that shrine Shinto had developed alongside societal life. He remarked:

> Regarding shrine Shinto, what is the essence of deity beliefs and practices? And how has it unfolded alongside societal change? Only by working to examine and analyze these two issues—*essence* and *unfolding*—from multiple perspectives and grasp their true characteristics can we understand Shinto's significance today and ensure its correct development for tomorrow. These efforts cannot be done by a single individual; they require collective work from many people, each addressing a different facet, with these contributions then synthesized to form a complete understanding.[29] (Emphasis added by author)

Okada went on to acknowledge the contributions of five early scholars—Orikuchi Shinobu, Miyaji Naokazu 宮地直一, Kōno Seizō, Takeda Yūkichi 武田祐吉, and Katō Genchi 加藤玄智—who elucidated "the essence and unfolding of Shinto" by publishing works from the standpoints of Japanese literature, Japanese history, ethics, and religious studies. He further noted that Yanagita Kunio, who "has provided illuminating foundational signposts for the field from a folklore studies perspective," and Harada Toshiaki, who has contributed similarly from the standpoint of the sociology of religion, should both "should serve as guiding references for future generations."[30]

Okada's emphasizes addressing both "essence and unfolding." Folklore studies, with its inductive methods and focus on phenomena, would be effective for the latter aspect.

However, as the Occupation period ended, for about fifteen years starting in the early 1950s, a period that includes Japan's era of rapid economic growth, there was increasing demand within the shrine community for education, guidance, and outreach efforts attuned to contemporary societal changes, resulting in a demand for explorations of Shinto's essence. This brought about dissatisfaction and critiques of folklore studies Shinto research.

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[29] Okada, "Wakagi rondan."
[30] Ibid.

> Shinto today, as seen in our university, is no longer what it once was. While shrine management has been restored to some extent, Shinto itself has lost its *center*. Shinto without a center is akin to the state when Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神 retreated into the Heavenly Rock Cave (*Ame no iwaya* 天の石屋), where "the voices of myriad deities (evil spirits, folk [*dozoku* 土俗] deities) resounded like buzzing flies, and myriad calamities" arose. Shrines turned into shamanistic altars. Shinto studies merely circles the domains of deity history and folklore studies, showing not even the seeds of a grand philosophy capable of correcting the ills of socialism and democracy.[31] (Emphasis added)

> Although the shrine community has seemingly stabilized a decade after the war—with, wonderfully, an increase in shrine visitors and a rise in shrine construction—numerous basic issues needing to be solved remain. These included establishing a doctrinal system for shrine Shinto, compiling scriptures, methods for societal proselytization, and training Shinto priests and their successors. . . . Until now, Shinto research has primarily focused on historical studies, such as the history of deities, Shinto, and shrines, while neglecting the Sollen dimension. . . . Folklore studies and archaeology, while valuable as auxiliary disciplines, are insufficient on their own to grasp the full scope of shrine Shinto. We must avoid defining shrine Shinto solely based on such fields.[32]

Additionally, in his review of Kobayashi Kenzō's 小林健三 *Research on Contemporary Shinto* (*Gendai Shintō no kenkyū* 現代神道の研究; Risōsha, 1956), Ashizu Uzuhiko 葦津珍彦, asserting that "folklore studies cannot provide guidance on the future direction of Shinto," approvingly quotes Kobayashi's following passage: "Among young Shinto professionals after the war, folklore studies have been enthusiastically welcomed. Many hold the hope that by studying old folk traditions without being constrained by traditional Shinto doctrines, a Shinto of a new era might be able to be produced. However, does folklore studies as a discipline have the purpose or methods to meet such expectations?"[33]

These critiques frequently underscored that folklore studies, as an auxiliary discipline, was not directly relevant to addressing contemporary issues in Shinto. These scathing criticisms not only held that folklore cannot be the center of Shinto studies, but were also connected to criticism of Orikuchi Shinobu, as seen in reactions to his postwar theories

[31] Gamō, "Nijusseiki kōhan ni tachite shintō o omou."
[32] Umeda, "Tōhō no ao."
[33] Ashizu, "Kobayashi Kenzō-shi."

on Shinto. When the Society of Shinto Studies published a special issue titled "What is Shinto?" (*Shintō to wa nani ka* 神道とは何か) in 1964, one reader remarked:

> The Society of Shinto Studies started after the war along the folklore studies lines established by Dr. Orikuchi, and this approach has now taken root as Kokugakuin University's academic tradition. But if that is the case, where has the spirit of Kokugakuin's founding, kokugaku, gone?[34]

This less-than-appropriate criticism of postwar Shinto research—which Orikuchi, recognized as one of Kokugakuin University's representative scholars, devoted significant effort to leading—holds that it contradicts Kokugakuin's founding spirit. As Motegi Sadasumi 茂木貞純 has aptly argued, Orikuchi's postwar writings on Shinto—such as his "On the Emperor's Non-Deity Status" (*Tenshi hi soku shinron* 天子非即神論) and "On the Religionization of Shinto" (*Shintō shūkyōka ron* 神道宗教化論)—should be understood as responses to the Occupation-era context.[35] Nevertheless, even though people were aware of their status as academic theories produced in response to the times, critiques arose from emotional dissatisfaction,[36] manifesting as opposition to folklore studies-based Shinto research in the period immediately following Japan's defeat in the war.

It is true that not all folklore studies of the time adhered to rigorous inductive methodologies. Speculative and unsubstantiated interpretations occasionally appeared, which made such work difficult for Shinto scholars committed to a positivist approach to accept. However, the issue was not inherent to folklore studies itself; it was precisely because Yanagita Kunio advocated empirical and inductive methods that he focused on folk customs. Instead, direct criticism tended to focus on Orikuchi's research. Regarding Orikuchi's work, Nishitsunoi Masayoshi states, "His methods are not something anyone can replicate. They required his unique reading and fieldwork, combined with a level of genius."[37] Nishitsunoi further contrasts the approaches of Yanagita and Orikuchi by stating, "Yanagita's methods were more of the folklore studies type, placing oral traditions and texts side by side and explaining them empirically, while Orikuchi used ethnological preparation (*minzokugakuteki yōi* 民族学的用意) to elucidate the Shinto predating ancient Shinto."[38] Orikuchi was a prominent figure: as Nishitsunoi notes, "Until his death, Orikuchi remained a central figure not only at Kokugakuin University but also in Shinto studies overall, and his statements on the relationship between the imperial family and

[34] Kobayashi, "Jūjiro ni tatsu shintō."
[35] Motegi, "Orikuchi Shinobu no sengo shintōron."
[36] Sagai, "Tennō to shintō no bunriron' hihan."
[37] Nishitsunoi, "Orikuchi Shinobu," p. 162.
[38] Ibid., p. 165.

Shinto influenced discussions even into the late 1960s." Although Orikuchi's "On the Emperor's Non-Deity Status" was not an officially sanctioned view of the Association of Shinto Shrines, this prominence likely intensified the severity of critiques against him.[39]

Uchino Gorō 内野吾郎, who served as director of Kokugakuin University's Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, compares Yanagita and Orikuchi, noting that both proposed a "new *kokugaku*" but with distinct differences in content. Orikuchi drew from the Meiji period movement to return to early modern *kokugaku* and adopted folklore studies as a method to explore ancient culture. Yanagita, on the other hand, introduced folklore studies as a new method aimed at exploring modern culture. Uchino argues that these differences stemmed from their respective backgrounds: Orikuchi, descended from a family of shrine priests, studied at Kokugakuin University and lived a life steeped in the traditions of the old *kokugaku*. Yanagita, however, was a modern elite—a graduate of the Tokyo Imperial University's Faculty of Law, an agricultural policy bureaucrat, and someone who expanded his knowledge through experiences in the West.[40]

From the 1960s onward, Shinto teaching, guidance, and outreach efforts were increasingly expected to align with the modernization of Japanese society and changes in lifestyles. As a result, Orikuchi's theories, often based on uncertain evidence and focused on ancient culture, became less practical and were difficult to reference. Consequently, critiques of Orikuchi continued to emerge.[41] Direct criticism of Yanagita was relatively rare, likely due to his emphasis on modern elements in his scholarship and his dedication to empirical research methods.

## *4. Trends in Folklore Studies Research on Shrines and Shinto*

### (1) The Relationship Between Folk Shinto and Folklore Studies

I have reviewed the historical context in which the term "folk Shinto" was established as a category within Shinto, though its definition and content remain unclear.

In 1996, the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Association of Shinto Shrines, Sano Kazufumi 佐野和史 presented an opinion piece titled "The Concept of 'Folk Shinto'" ("Minzoku Shintō" to iu gainen「民俗神道」という概念) in *Jinja shinpō*.[42] Reflecting on history, Sano noted that when Buddhist teachings were borrowed to explain Shinto, it was framed as "Shinto-Buddhist syncretism" (Shinbutsu shūgō 神仏習合), and when Confucian teachings were borrowed, it was framed as "Shinto-Confucian unity" (*shinju icchi* 神儒一致). He argued that postwar Shinto, borrowing from folklore studies,

[39] Jinja Shinpōsha, *Shintō shirei to sengo no shintō*, p. 84.
[40] Uchino, "Nihon bunkagaku toshite no shinkokugaku no hōhō josetsu."
[41] For example, in *Ōnie no matsuri* 大嘗の祭り, Okada Shōji 岡田荘司 rejected Orikuchi's theory of *matoko ōfusuma* 真床覆衾, presented in "Daijōsai no hongi" 大嘗祭の本義, as baseless.
[42] Sano, "Minzoku shintō to iu gainen."

could be described as a form of "folklore studies syncretic Shinto" (*minzokugaku-teki shūgō shintō* 民俗学的習合神道). Sano expressed concern about Shinto studies becoming "trapped in the fixed ideas of folklore studies" and called for a clearer conceptual distinction between shrine Shinto and folk Shinto.

In contrast, Mogi Sakae 茂木栄 argued that the theoretical foundations of Shinto studies were not derived from postwar folklore studies but rather from the achievements of prewar folklore studies, and that the folklore studies scholars who graduated from Kokugakuin University showed significant interest in Shinto. Mogi identified three approaches to Shinto of postwar folklore studies scholars—the Orikuchi school, the Yanagita school, and the Tokyo University of Education school—but concludes that these approaches had not produced research findings substantial enough to significantly influence postwar Shinto studies.[43]

Mogi's view is an affiliation-based classification that focuses on genealogical relationships among researchers, but if we are to respond squarely to the issue Sano raised, we should organize such scholarship based on research content (subject matter, materials, and methodology). Notably, the term "folk Shinto" has rarely been used in research on shrines and Shinto conducted by folklore studies scholars. What are the main themes and characteristics of folklore studies research on shrines and Shinto from the postwar period to the present? The following sections will provide an overview of research trends in this area.

**(2) Four Research Trends**

As mentioned earlier, folklore studies has focused not on the public aspects of shrines and Shinto but on their private dimensions, particularly their connections to everyday life. The research conducted after Yanagita Kunio can be categorized into four major trends based on content: studies about (a) tutelary deities, (b) parishioner organizations (*miyaza* 宮座), (c) festival events (*sairei* 祭礼), and (d) the impact of the modern nation-state's policies and academic knowledge.

**(a)** The study of tutelary deities has been a focus of folklore studies since its early days, examining the relational structures among tutelary deities, ancestral spirits, and agricultural spirits (*inadama* 稲霊), as well as the connections between tutelary deities and their parishioners. Yanagita laid the groundwork for this research and explained the relationship between enshrined deities and festivals as follows. After a certain period, the deceased become ancestral spirits and remain in the mountains near the village. Periodically, they descend to the village to watch over the prosperity of their descendants and the safety of agricultural practices. At key moments in the agricultural cycle, descendants erect temporary altars (*mitegura* ミテグラ) made of brushwood to invite the

[43] Mogi, "Yanagita Kunio no shintō kenkyū."

deity from the mountains and share meals with the deity. This was the original form of the festival. Initially, tutelary deities were ancestral spirits of kinship groups (*shizoku* 氏族). However, as these kinship groups dissolved around the medieval period, those living on the same land began worshiping together, giving rise to birthplace deities (*ubusuna gami* 産土神).[44]

This theory systematized the diverse practices of rites within the framework of "tutelary deities-as-ancestral spirits" and positioned tutelary deity shrines and birthplace shrines in historical sequence. This was a significant achievement in folklore studies' research on shrine rites. Later, this hypothesis was enriched through the accumulation of case studies that examined the regional diversity and historical transformations of notions about tutelary deities.[45] Some scholars challenged Yanagita's theory. Harada Toshiaki argued that birthplace deities preceded tutelary deities as a deity concept, emphasizing the importance of local social ties.[46] Tsuboi Hirofumi criticized research on tutelary deities theory for being a monocultural interpretation based on rice farming and juxtaposed it with dry-field farming culture, proposing a pluralistic perspective on deity concepts.[47] These debates prompted a reexamination of academic ideas regarding ancestral worship. Recent studies have continued to analyze the features and development of Yanagita's writings on Shinto,[48] and his ideas have been introduced to general readers,[49] demonstrating the ongoing originality and influence of tutelary deity studies in shrine and Shinto research.

**(b)** The study of parishioner organizations examines the social organizations responsible for shrine rites. The Kinki region's ritual system, in which a specific group of villagers rather than a Shinto priest presided over Shinto rituals, was first researched by historian Higo Kazuo, who classified them into *kabuza* 株座 and *muraza* 村座.[50] Higo and other scholars have examined this ritual system's establishment amidst the formation of self-governing bodies called *sōson* 惣村 during the late medieval and early modern periods.[51]

Scholars have highlighted the interconnections between village organizations, such as those for water management (*suiri* 水利) and communal land usage (*iriai* 入会),[52] with parishioner organizations, as well as their operation based on age-based hierarchies.[53]

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[44] Yanagita, *Saijitsu kō*; Yanagita, *Yamamiya kō*; Yanagita, *Ujigami to ujiko*; Yanagita, *Nihon no matsuri*; Yanagita, *Shintō to minzokugaku*; Yanagita, *Senzo no hanashi*, etc.
[45] Naoe, *Yashikigami no kenkyū*.
[46] Harada, *Mura no saishi*.
[47] Tsuboi, "Shintōteki kami to minzokuteki kami."
[48] Yoshitani, "Yanagita Kunio Shintō shiken"; Yoshitani, "Yanagita Kunio Shintō to minzokugaku"; Yoshitani, "Senjika ni okeru Harada Toshiaki "; Yoshitani, "Yanagita Kunio 'Yamamiya kō.'"
[49] For example, Shintani, *Ujigami-sama to chinju-sama*.
[50] Higo, "Ōmi ni okeru miyaza no kenkyū"; Higo, *Miyaza no kenkyū*.
[51] Wakamori, *Chūsei kyōdōtai no kenkyū*; Hagiwara, *Chūsei saishi soshiki no kenkyū*; etc.
[52] Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan kenkyū hōkoku 98-shū*.
[53] Takahashi, *Miyaza no kōzō to henka*; Sekizawa, *Miyaza to rōjin no minzoku*; Sekizawa, *Miyaza to bosei no rekishi minzoku*; etc.

Recent studies, analyzing parishioner group documents, have revealed postwar developments in such groups and differences in festival orientations between communities and shrines.[54] Discoveries of *obisha* オビシャ documents in the Kanto region have advanced analyses of ritual organizations. In this way, research is moving outside the previously dominant focus on the Kinki region from the end of the medieval period to the start of the early modern period.[55]

**(c)** Studies on festival events explore the social functions, and by extension the mentality of city residents, of sacred carnival events (*kami nigiwai* 神賑) and celebratory events (*hōshuku gyōji* 奉祝行事) in which parishioners and believers engage. Building on Yanagita's discussion of the transformation of local purification rituals (*matsuri* 祭り) into festival events due to the emergence of spectacles and spectators,[56] studies have examined the roles of individuals outside parishioner organizations. This has led to research drawing from not only folklore studies but also interdisciplinary fields that focus on the relationship between religion and society, such as social anthropology and the sociology of religion. This scholarship has included symbolic analyses to uncover the gestalt meanings that have been hidden from categorizations of festival event representations, as well as discussed festival events as moments of social order regeneration through the disruption of the ordinary.[57] More recent research critiques earlier works for relying on arbitrary indicators and interpretations, and instead focuses on phenomenological approaches, analyzing the narratives and actions of participants to understand their perceptions of the festivals.[58] On the other hand, because festival events are spectacles, they have a high affinity with the analysis of social trends, and case studies focusing on change and novelty are being conducted on an ongoing basis.[59] In recent years, there has been discussion about the impact of cultural policy.[60]

**(d)** Studies on the impact of the modern nation-state's policies and modern society's academic knowledge position shrines within broader societal and historical contexts. It challenges the idea, proposed by tutelary deity research, that contemporary shrine rites represent an unbroken continuity from ancient times. Instead, these rites are argued to have been created amidst the modernization process.[61] Emerging from historical research

[54] Watanabe, "Tōyaku saishi no shūkenteki kōsei."
[55] Mizutani and Watanabe, eds., *Obisha monjo no sekai*.
[56] Yanagita, *Saijutsu kō*; Yanagita, *Yamamiya kō*; Yanagita, *Ujigami to ujiko*; Yanagita, *Nihon no matsuri*; Yanagita, *Shintō to minzokugaku*; Yanagita, *Senzo no hanashi*, Yanagita, *Nihon no matsuri*.
[57] Sonoda, *Matsuri no genshōgaku*, etc.
[58] Nakano, *Kokura Gion taiko no toshi jinruigaku*; Nakazato, "Sairei ni okeru momegoto no shori to rūru"; etc.
[59] Yajima, *'Yosakoi-kei' matsuri no toshi minzokugaku*; Anami, "Kōdo keizai seichōki"; Akino, *Kanda matsuri*; etc.
[60] Murakami, "Yunesuko mukei bunka isan to minzoku bunkazai"; Nakazato, "Minzoku geinō kenkyū to sairei kenkyū"; etc.
[61] Kikuchi, *Yanagita Kunio to minzokugaku no kindai*; Ichida, "Rekishi no kyōyū to shūkyō girei"; Ichida, "Minzoku shūkyō kūkan no rekishisei"; etc.

critiquing modernity,[62] this body of scholarship initially sometimes sought to denounce the malice of government officials, portraying shrine rituals, nurtured and handed down by innocent people in their daily lives, as having become tools of state apparatuses designed to mobilize people to emperor worship through various policies. However, subsequent studies, such as those examining the restoration of deities to local shrines (*jinja fukushi* 復祀), revealed that shrine rituals were shaped not only by religious policy but also—to a greater extent—by the actions of parishioners and the unique social, economic, and historical contexts of local communities.[63] Recent empirical studies have deepened this understanding through localized research.[64]

This overview of the four research trends in folklore studies on shrines and Shinto demonstrates that the goal has not been to define "folk Shinto" as a distinct category. Instead, scholars have focused on documenting and analyzing people's actual engagements with shrines and Shinto through folklore studies methodologies. Scholars do not see the existence of a unique folk practice called folk Shinto. Focusing on understanding each research topic and offering explanations, they have conducted research in an interdisciplinary manner, referring as appropriate to functional structuralism, structuralism, phenomenology, constructionism, and other theories that have influenced postwar Japanese humanities, and have introduced perspectives such as *denshō botai* 伝承母体 (transmitter of tradition), *hare* ハレ (sacred) - *ke* ケ (profane) - and *kegare* ケガレ (pollution), and *saigi* 祭儀 (ritual) - *shukusai* 祝祭 (festival). Some of these models have also been used to explain items in books and dictionaries on Shinto shrines and Shinto and have contributed to Shinto studies research. However, folklorists focus on understanding and explaining actual situations without directly referring to notions of deities, except for some of the work on tutelary deities. This is why they are criticized by Shinto scholars for not grasping the essence of Shinto.

**(3) Methodological Characteristics and Challenges**

In recent research trends, studies like the early ones examining the relationship between society and tutelary deities have stagnated. Research addressing the significance and function of deities and rites, which could influence Shinto theology, inherently allows for subjective elements. Therefore, contemporary folklore studies scholars, striving for objectivity and empiricism, tend to avoid directly addressing the topic of deities, focusing instead on phenomena like rituals and rites.

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[62] Kōmoto, "Jinja gōshi"; Yonechi, *Sonraku saishi to kokka tōsei*; Morioka, *Kindai no shūraku jinja to kokka tōsei*; etc.
[63] Sakurai, *Yomigaeru mura no kamigami*; Suzuki, "Jinja ga aru mura to jinja ga nai mura"; Kitamura, *Jinja gōshi to mura shakai*; etc.
[64] Azegami, *'Mura no chinju' to senzen Nihon*; Yoshitani, ed., *Jinja gōshi saikō*; etc.

As noted by Okada Yoneo and Ono Sokyō 小野祖教, Shinto research encompasses two aspects: "essence" and "unfolding,"[65] or "internal, theological foundations" and "objective descriptive studies."[66] Folklore studies research has not sought to explore the ideal form of Shinto but has instead advanced descriptive and analytical studies of its phenomena. It is important to note here that folklore studies research on shrines and Shinto has analyzed the phenomenal aspects of Shinto through a folklore studies lens, rather than studying the domain called "folk Shinto" established by the field of Shinto studies.

Therefore, in response to Sano's earlier question, folklore studies scholars might answer as follows: Folk Shinto is not a substantive concept classified by superficial criteria such as time, place, or organizer. Instead, it refers to notions regarding deities revealed through the causal relationships underlying these superficial phenomena, as seen in people's concrete daily experiences. While entirely a metaphysical concept, for all intents and purposes, it refers to divine rituals performed within local communities and households. Some of these are conducted as shrine or sectarian Shinto rituals. Therefore, folk Shinto is "the substructure of shrine Shinto and sectarian Shinto," and it is "difficult to draw clear boundaries between folk Shinto, shrine Shinto, and sectarian Shinto."[67] Rather than a substantive entity, folk Shinto functions as a methodological framework within Shinto studies, similar to theories like Ise Shinto 伊勢神道, Yoshida Shinto 吉田神道, *suika* Shinto 垂加神道, and *fukko* Shinto 復古神道. The term "folk Shinto" refers to Shinto phenomena observable from a folklore studies perspective. For example, if a connection to local harvest festivals is found, even the imperial court's Niinamesai 新嘗祭 could become a subject of study.

Folklore studies scholars do not treat folk Shinto as a substantive concept because contemporary folklore studies does not study folklore itself but uses a folklore studies perspective—focusing on people's everyday lives—to understand societal conditions and provide explanations.[68] From this perspective, Orikuchi's theories remain relevant despite criticism from Shinto scholars because they still have explanatory utility as analytical concepts. Concepts such as *marebito* まれびと or *matoko ōfusuma* 真床覆衾 do not exist as tangible entities, yet they provide explanatory frameworks for phenomena.

The very establishment of folk Shinto as a category in defining Shinto acknowledges

[65] Okada, "Wakagi rondan."
[66] Ono, "Shintō no teigi to shingaku," p. 65.
[67] Hirai, "Shintō to minzoku," p. 222. Hirai referenced Sakurai Tokutarō's 桜井徳太郎 explanation: "In summary, folk Shinto is not grounded in doctrines or teachings but is the reverence for deities (folk deities, deities of folk beliefs and practices) that unfolds within the traditional lives of the Japanese people and the religious beliefs and practices manifesting through that. Therefore, this deity reverence may also appear in the rites of the imperial family or central famous/ancestral shrines, but it is more typified by the ceremonies at local community shrines and small folk altars run by locals or exemplified in seasonal events and rites of passage." See Sakurai, "Sōsetsu," p. 22.
[68] Furuie, *Gendai minzokugaku no firudo*.

that Shinto exists as a foundation of the people's cultural life. As Uchino Gorō pointed out, if Yanagita's folklore studies aimed to investigate modern culture through empirical observation of current realities, then folklore studies research on shrines and Shinto should logically continue describing contemporary lived realities. This approach produces research outcomes known as "folklore descriptions" (*minzokushi* 民俗誌), "ethnographies," and so on. In the future, folklore research should descriptively analyze everyday life, that is, contemporary society or individuals that support the traditions of shrines and Shinto, and focus on the religious aspects glimpsed therein.

One area of future focus is on the aforementioned "folklore descriptions." Having passed through a period of high economic growth, Japanese society is changing as part of the global society. Understanding the substance people attribute to deities and rites in this context should not be approached metaphysically. Instead, analyzing the structures of rituals, rite organizations, and particularly the representations of enshrined deities is a more suitable methodology.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has reviewed the role of folklore studies in postwar Shinto research and examined the future direction of folklore studies research on shrines and Shinto. Here, I want to review the relationship between Shinto research and folklore studies.

In the 1940s, due to the political circumstances of the Occupation period, the shrine community was compelled to rely on folklore studies. During this time, figures like Yanagita Kunio and Orikuchi Shinobu participated in the field of Shinto studies, leading to the emergence of folklore studies-based Shinto research. By the mid-1950s, as the restrictions of the Occupation were lifted and the living environments of parishioners and believers changed, calls for establishing a theological foundation for Shinto grew louder, and voices advocating a departure from folklore studies-oriented Shinto research began to emerge. From the mid-1960s onward, doubts about Orikuchi Shinobu's theories started to surface. On the other hand, folklore studies research on shrines and Shinto continued on topics such as tutelary deities, parishioner organizations, festival events, and the role of the modern nation-state and academic knowledge. However, these studies were descriptive analyses of Shinto phenomena and rarely addressed the essence of Shinto, such as the question, "What is a deity?"

From this examination, it can be concluded that the future direction of folklore studies research on shrines and Shinto lies in descriptive folklore writings. Through the descriptive analysis of Shinto phenomena in contemporary society, this approach seeks to understand the inner substance that people attribute to deities and rituals.

(Translated by Dylan L. Toda)

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