PAPERS COMMUNICATED

67. Shinto Ideas as seen in the Noh Plays.  

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In the preceding paper on the Noh plays we have noted that the Buddhist ideal of the attainment of Buddhahood by plants has found a congenial soil in the original animistic conceptions held by the Japanese people. This animism in a general sense does not necessarily denote a definite notion of the soul life in plants or inanimate objects but means a broad sense or sentiment that human life is in living communion with the vital force pervading nature and therefore with all beings. This sense of vital continuity is the basic factor of Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, which primarily rests upon the agricultural, especially rice cultivating, life of the people, and permeates their life and ideas. It is manifested in their daily life, in rites and observances, in arts and poetry; its stage is placed in the family, in the community, in the national life.

Now the object of the present paper is to show how these Shinto ideas and beliefs are represented in the Noh plays, though always tinged by more or less Buddhist admixture. In fact a "pure Shinto" could hardly be discerned in any historical record, and the period of the Noh plays was pre-eminently an age of the "Double-aspect" Shinto, or Buddhico-Shinto religion. Yet we speak of Shinto plays which explicitly enunciate the indigenous cult and exalt the national deities, and we shall proceed to review the ideas expressed in those plays.

It is a quite remarkable fact that the Noh plays representing the idea of the vitality pervading nature have plants as their theme and not any animal. The typical example is the play Takasago, a place on the sea-beach eminent for its forests of pine trees. A traveller meets there an old couple, one of whom proves to be the genius of a female old pine tree of Takasago and the other that of a male from Suminoye, another beach across the sea. The couple meet from time to time on either side of the sea and exalt the peaceful reign, thanks to which they enjoy their happy conjugal life for a long time on the beautiful sea-sides. Then the traveller is invited to come over to Suminoye, there he sees the male, who is in fact the deity of Suminoye, the patron of agriculture and poetry and the protector of navigators. The play closes with a divine dance played by the god himself. The motifs herein are: the spirits of the pine trees identified with the genii of the places; the beautiful forests on the sea-side; the quiet sea in the moonlight; the exaltation of the happy conjugal life and the adoration of the reign and country; all saturated with the sense of continuity of human life with nature. In fact, this play is wellknown

1) For a fuller exposition, see the Proceedings (Japanese edition), Vol. I, No. 3.
2) Proc. 18 (1942), 32.
throughout the whole country, even in its remote corners, as one to be recited on wedding ceremony.

Similarly, though various in motifs and surroundings, the genii of plum flowers, of cherry blossoms, of maple leaves, are more or less personified and adored in connection with the several sacred spots, mostly scenic sites, where Shinto sanctuaries stand in honor of the genii of the places and accompanied by mythic narratives.

This basic idea of the communion of vitality is applied to many things, and the most important one is the genius of agriculture, especially of rice cultivation. The play Awaji 淺路 places the scene in the island of that name, which is said to have been produced from the coagulation of the sea-water dripping from the tip of the sword pended from the sky by the god Izanagi, the Male-who-invites, who gave birth to all the islands of the country in his conjugal life with Izanami, the Female-who-invites. In the play the two deities are interpreted to represent the acts of seed sowing and of harvest crop respectively. The play closes with a dance danced by Izanagi in praise of agriculture and giving benediction upon the whole country and its reign. Though containing various Buddhist and Chinese notions in its clauses, the play as a whole is a typically Shinto piece, Shinto as based on and expressed in the rice cultivating life of the people.

In the examples cited above we see the apparition of the deities marking the culmination, and this is common to most other Shinto plays based on the particular myths and legends connected with the consecrated spots which supply the scenes of the plays. This is technically due to the nature of the Noh performance centered on dance, mostly in solo or duet, but at the same time ideationally due to the sense of the nearness of the spiritual world or of the affinity of the spirit of nature with human life. The play Kamo 雲居 represents the thunder-god rising to heaven amidst the clouds, giving benediction upon the country; in the Shironushi 銀山, the deity of the peak Kazuraki, dances in extolling the varying aspects of the four seasons and promising to guard the sovereign's residence; in the Ohyashiro 大社, i.e. the Grand Sanctuary of Izumo, the assembly of the gods held there is represented by its presiding deity Oh-Kunikunishi (Great Land-master), and his apparition is glorified by the coming together of the spirits of the sea paying homage and presenting tributes to the gods of the land. In fact these plays culminating in the divine apparition are mostly derived from the actual festival performances celebrated at the spots, in which the invisible presence of the divinities is felt or told. Thus these Shinto plays are artistic refinement of the mystery plays belonging to several consecrated places.

Beside the adoration of the deities for general benefits, there are cases of individual worship for the sake of particular benefits to be besought. Quite frequent is the divine mediation in re-uniting the separated loving man and woman, a conspicuous contrast to the salvation of the lost souls in the Buddhist plays. There is here a division of spheres arranged between the two religions, to which we shall return at the close of the paper.
Another theme of frequent occurrence is the divine tutelage upon poetry, especially *waka* poetry, which is regarded as an almost sacred heritage from the Age of the Gods and a precious expression of the national genius. The deity of Suminoye is eminently a guardian of poetry and the play Takasago cited above contains this feature too. Another play *Ugetsu* 雨月 makes the same deity appear before the monk poet Saigyo in appreciation of his poetry and piety. The same deity works also in competing a Chinese poet — the theme of the play *Haku-Rakuten* 白楽天. This is the Japanese way of calling the name of the Chinese poet Po-Letien. In the play he is on his route to Japan where he has the intention of examining the poetic talent of the people; on the sea he meets an old fisherman in a tiny boat and is astonished at the high talent of the fisherman, who finally proves to be the deity of Suminoye. In this connection a point to be noted is the great influence of the *Kokinshū* anthology 3) upon the Noh plays, in which its poems and its introductory remarks are freely used, being interpreted and applied in Shinto or Buddhist sentiments.

No less conspicuous is the exaltation of the mysterious powers abiding or manifested in the sword and jewel, but quite little of the mirror. The sword, from the one believed to have been used by Izanagi, the progenitor of the land, down to the one made by Kokaji, the eminent sword-maker of the tenth century, and also those used by famous warriors, all are glorified as endowed with miraculous power, due to the intervention of some deities. The casting of the sword is also under divine patronage, which reflects the belief that arts and crafts are divine gifts, — a point quite similar concerning poetry as said above. The mysteries of the jewels or crystals is also associated with those of the depths of the sea, and these are represented by the appearance of the spirits of the deep which are mostly identified with the Hindu Nāga princes and girls.

Another important theme is the benediction upon life and praying for longevity. In the *Tamanoi* 玉の井, the story of the kingdom of the deep sea and its miraculous crystals, a spring supplies a medicament for longevity. In the play *Yōrō* 養老, the waterfall of the name is transformed into wine by divine blessing upon a child faithful to his father and the miraculous wine is presented to the sovereign. In the *Nezame* 納覺, a mysterious old man of an unknown age living in a rocky islet Nezame in the Kiso river is in possession of a divine medicament and a messenger from the court visits him, who finally proves to be the Buddha Yakushi (Medicine-master). A small shrine stands even today on the islet in honour of the old man. For the same theme Chinese legends and Taoist ideas also are called for, such as *Tōbo-saku* 東方皆, the Prime-man of the East, *Seiwōbo* 西王母, the Mother Queen of the West, *Kiku-Jiō* 菊慈童, the ever-young Grace-boy of the Chrysanthemum Fountain 4).

3) See Bonneau (Georges), *Le Kokinshū*, especially Vol. I.
In nearly all these plays of benediction and prayer, of whatever motifs or themes they be, an unvarying expression is given to the wish for the security of the land and an abundance of crops, whether as the chief theme or in casual reference. All this is naturally summed up in the exaltation of the reign, together with the wish for the long life of the sovereign. In the famous play Hagoromo羽衣, the Robe of Feathers, the celestial maiden, before leaving the human world for her home, dances the Azuma-asobi dance, which is in fact the piece danced on a felicitous occasion in the court. The beach of Miho with the background of the conic peak of Fuji is the scene; there the pine trees and the gentle breeze, the azure sky and the whole scene in the moonlight, all join in the glorification of the reign. Similarly, in the play Yoshino Tennin 吉野天人, the celestial maidens or fairies dance the "five section" dance, hovering in the air over the Yoshino hills covered by cherry blossoms in the moonlight. This is derived from, or is said to be the origin of, the one danced in the court at the banquet celebrated following the enthronement ceremony. In these and other similar plays never fails the association or background of the beauty of nature, though not represented on the stage but expressed in the words and music.

Among the plays of similar motif of adoring the reign there are some, in which particular deities are invoked, and they appear on the stage, dance being common to all. These are, for instance, the deity of Himuro氷室, or ice-house, the guardian of the seasons who presents ice to the court; the god of Kōra, who was in human life the guardian of the divine prince Hachiman, appears in front of the Hachiman sanctuary and adores the military virtue of the latter, in the Yumi-Yawata 弓八幡; Tatsuta-hime, the goddess of Tatsuta, the genius of autumn and the guardian of the heavenly sword, in the Tatsuta 龍田, and so forth. Each of these deities confirms his or her care for the country and reign.

The glorification of the reign is necessarily accompanied by that of the capital city, Miyako; praying for its security makes an integral part of the Shinto religion, because it has ever been regarded as a sacred domain, where the three insignia of the throne rest with the person of the sovereign. Since its foundation late in the eighth century, several deities, particularly that of Kamo, have been invoked as its guardians,—Kamo has been referred to above. The Noh plays flourished in the period when Miyako was restoring its dignity and prosperity after half a century of internecine strife, during which time the sacred insignia were out of the capital. Thus we see in a number of plays the sanctity of Miyako re-affirmed and its guardian deities adored anew.

All this can be called a national expression of Shinto ideas and be summed up in one phrase: "Nippon is the Land of Kami or Gods" 日本は神國也5). It means that the land founded by the gods is guarded by them for ever. Their functions vary but are all for the benefit of the people and directed towards the security and prosperity of the land.

5) See p. 35.
as a whole. This idea is expressed, at least implicitly, in nearly all the Shinto and many other plays, but it is notable that an explicit statement of the formulated phrase is found once in the Buddhist play Zekai, and once more in the highly syncretic piece Sakahoko, less definite in all other plays. This is a point to be referred back to the preceding paper on the Buddhist plays and further comment is to be made somewhere else.

In fine, the plays representing the national phase of the Shinto religion amount to 24 among the 56 which make up the material of the present paper. This is a number perhaps much below the expectation of many contemporary Japanese, because modern Shinto emphasizes the national trait much more than the fourteenth century Shinto. Similar is the case with the Uji-gami, the tutelary deity of the clan or family, which is interpreted by some modern Shinto theorizers to amount to ancestor worship. The Uji-gami finds only casual references, and a definite one once in a Shinto play. It is the case of the Kokaji, the sword-maker referred to above. There his Uji-gami, Inari, is invoked for perfecting his new casting. But in this case Inari is not his ancestor but the patron deity of his guild, Inari being the spirit of earth, therefore of metal too.

Thus we have seen various motifs and themes in the plays representing Shinto ideas and spoken of the deities appearing in those plays. Now these are certainly Shinto deities but none of them is represented in purely Shinto conception. Their titles, natures, functions, and their figures and dress are more or less conglomerate, being products of the syncretism of the time, some derived from old Buddhico-Shinto combinations, some modifications made by the playwrights suited to their fancy and technique. Here we shall not enter into details of these combinations, but it is to be noted that the metamorphosis is explained as due to the intentional expedience on the part of the deities themselves. The idea may be summed up in two phrases, wakō "mitigating the glow" and dōjin "mingling in the dusts," which together means a condescension (somewhat like the Christian conception of Kenosis) of the higher for the sake of the lower, of the divine wisdom and power for benefiting human beings and leading them higher up. A specific utterance is given, for instance, in the Miwa as follows:—

The ancient legends coming down from the Age of the Gods are perpetuated for the sake of the people of the latter ages, in order to benefit them through expedient methods, all adapted to the needs of their various inclinations and capacities. And indeed, in this land of Shikishima (or Yamato, Japan) the divine power is enhanced as much as the people adore the deities.

This is said in connection with a Buddhist monk’s seeing the appearance of the god of Miwa, who meets the monk first in the disguise of a wretched woman and then manifests his divine figure. The story as a whole is rather incoherent and the interpretation seems to aim at a rationalization of the irrational. This is not common in other plays which express the same idea of condescension in more pious ways. Anyway, the notion of condescension evidences the influence of the
Tendai Buddhist idea of expediency or educative method, both in the conception and the vocabulary. This is an aspect of the Double-aspect Shinto interpreting Shinto pantheon as an adaptive manifestation of Buddha’s original entity. However, the relationship between the entity and manifestation involves delicate problems concerning the relationships not only between the two religions but within each of them. We shall here not take up these questions but be content in stating that the Buddhico-Shinto conceptions as seen in the Noh plays rest upon the idea of the correlation between entity and manifestation.

Another way of interpreting the correlation between Kami and Buddha is the Shingon Buddhist conception of the world in general in its two cycles, the Indestructible (金剛 Kongō, Vajra-dhātu) and the Womb-store (胎蔵 Taizo, Garbha-kukshi). This double-spect relationship applied to the two religions, to the respective pantheons, makes up the Double-Aspect Shinto, in which Buddha represents the former cycle and Kami the latter in general. But the same relationship can be established within each of the two religions and also concerning one and the same divinity in each,—the entity and manifestation. See in this light there is no wonder that pretty free ways are open for combination and crossing from one side to the other. The whole result is a highly syncretic religion which is chiefly represented in the Noh plays, though we call them Shinto ones for the sake of convenience.

The double-aspect conception of the world and deities has as its corollary a division arranged between the two religions, not only in religious ideas but in actual life too. We have seen above a double-aspect assignment of functions to the two deities, Izanagi and Izanami, in the play Awaji. Two sacred peaks are often interpreted as representing the two aspects, and revered as such and as harboring the corresponding spirits, for instance, in the plays Shironushi 御嶽, Arashi-yama 雷山, Makiginu 卷絨. We have spoken above of the Shinto deities’ tender care for the loving man and woman, in contrast to the Buddhist preoccupation with the lost souls. This means, otherwise expressed, the welfare of the present world assigned to Shinto and the spiritual care for the beyond to Buddhism, as evidenced in the presentation of the newborn child before a Shinto sanctuary and the burial of the dead in a Buddhist graveyard. This division of spheres can be traced even in details of home life and social functions. It can be discerned in the majority of Noh plays and it is not otherwise even in those plays which have been treated in this paper as mainly Shinto ones.