“She’s like a quiet mountain lake whose waters are rushing beneath the surface toward a waterfall. She’s like the face on a Noh mask, wrapped in her own secrets” (Patrick 7). According to Fumiko Enchi in *Masks*, “she” most resembles a personification of Japan. From the time Japan became an international player and has competitively recognized in the early 20th century, Japan’s identity as Shinto has been overly generalized and remained conservative. In a more globalized and interconnected world, the manifestation of the Japanese identity leaves states with the only guide for actions when communications fail. These manifestations pose a problem to the Japanese cultural identity because it is not an accurate representation of the existing Japanese ethos, especially after World War 2. With that being said, I do not wish to scrutinize or disassemble every characteristic of historical Japanese Shinto, but to challenge the reader to reconsider if what he or she believes is a true modern reflection or a mix of generational attitudes imposed on a nation. In analyzing Japan, we can understand how to overcome identarian pressures from a historical nationalism in order to improve global relations.

For the purpose of this paper, I hope to distinguish this underlying understanding of the Japanese identity as a complex transforming convention through analyzing what most people associate characteristics of Japan’s true identity to be –Shintô. I will look at the history of Shintô and the comparisons made throughout history, the miscalculations of Shintô, the presence of Shintô during the development of the World Wars, and finally the impact of Shintô today on the people of Japan and international governance; all for the purpose to understand *What is the Shintô or identity of this period?*

**Section I: History and misconceptions: What was quintessentially Japanese?**

In order to understand the current involvement of Shintô, we must first look at the assumptions of Shintô’s origins and the history that arose from the misinterpretations into Japan. The information in this section will be provided in three subcategories which consider the history of Shintô into Japan beginning with ancient Shintô, the development into the Shogunate, and then in the Tokugawa period. In this section, I hope to divulge where Japanese Shintô originated and when the conservative Shinto manifestation diverged from a culturally distinction endemic to Japan.

Ancient Shintô:

As citizens of particular nations, we face the reality of identifying ourselves with a preconceived identarian remolded through generational variations. This identity becomes engrained in all aspects of a nationalistic perspective that it becomes difficult to refute or challenge. For example in the United States, associated nationalistic identity points to a land derived on freedom, regardless of the existence of gender roles, slavery, and prejudices. The nation consistently acknowledged and arguably blindly prioritized this role as “free.” In the case of Japan, Shintô has also been prioritized as a unique ancient Japanese manifestation. Although the Japanese sentiment to the origins of Shintô as uniquely Japanese remain an integral part of the Japanese identarian, the statement is scholarly refutable. With that being said, ancient Japanese Shintô poses to be a misguided identity manifested from a more complex history beginning in China.

A Japanese historian, Tsuda Sokichi, has studied the meaning and use of the word Shintô in Japanese history (Kuroda 4). He noted that in China the word Shintô, originally meant “various folk religions in general (Kuroda 4). In this case, the Japanese identarian remained protected by implying various folk religions…in general, to include myths and folklore from various clans within Japan. Shintô was becoming a multi-faceted identity engraving the Japanese. From an early age, the manifestation diverged from traditional word-of-mouth to a more permanent form in written documents. Historically, the Japanese *Kojiki*, written in 712, and the *Nihon shoki* written in 720 became as permanent and important as the Christian bible, which made modern contest even more difficult to ascertain **(Borgen et al. 61).** The books included stories of ancient heroes, creation myths, and gods, all validating Japan’s uniqueness. However, there is still the question of Japanese originality and the implications for Japanese sanctity.

China argues that the various folk religions spoken about under the term Shintô originated from Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism (Kuroda 4). Therefore, when one speaks about *Nihon shoki* as a pure Japanese phenomenon, we are challenged to rethink Tsuda’s *Nihon shoki* assolely Japanese when evidence exists that Shintô derives from a variety of Chinese assemblages (Kuroda 4). If the term, Shintô, survived as an original Japanese word, why would China possess an identical yet defying term to all that is Japanese? Japan, arguably, adopted many words from China, therefore, can one argue that Shintô is nothing more than a Chinese word in Japan?

“Another possible interpretation of Shintô in the *Nihon shoki*, is Taoism” (Kuroda 6). In China, Taoism is described as another word for Shintô, which may have provided the Japanese Shintô a source or influence on how to be conducted (Kuroda 6). For example: In the first century AD, China’s Taoism influenced the incorporation of swords and mirrors, titles such as *mahito* or *shinjin*, and terms such as *taiichi* and *jingo* (Kuroda 6). Therefore, this is an undeniable historical similarity with China.

Through various cultural resources, the preconceived Japanese identarian can be argued as Chinese, but it is difficult to refute as a native Japanese born what strongly has become a source of nationalism in Japan. As a child, I remember hearing stories from my grandfather about the spirits of Japan. They had the ability to become tangled in our everyday lives because of the connections we all shared. I called them kamisama out of respect versus kami. He told me, *a o yorozu no kami* (八百万の神), which in its literal translation means eight million kamis. They were all personified yet mystic and undeniably inhuman. They intervene in our lives during times of need, whispering a simple thought, or playing tricks at night out of boredom. The kamisamas are everywhere. In the dirt, trees, homes, and oceans surrounding the Island. Even today, I find it difficult to identify what Shintô is as a religion in the modern complex because there is no distinction from where lives end and Shintô begins. Shintô is manifested in everything the Japanese do.

However, Shintô originally did not have a set practiced ritual for everyone. Again, Shintô came from localized cults and individual rituals held for specific kamis and natural spirits (mountain or spring), deities from mythology, and heroes (Kuroda 6). This is what made it different from Christianity and even Buddhism. Shintô had no organized and universal way of practice. Shintô was formalized from generations. With that being said, specific practices and ideals have been prioritized through time branding the Japanese identarian in a certain way.

According to Fumiko Fukase-Indergaard and Michael Indergaard, the descendants of the Yamato Clan began the transformation of Shintô to one recognizable today (Fukase-Indergaard 350-352). The descendants developed State Shintô after they incorporated Buddhism and Confucianism in the 6th century from China (Fukase-Indergaard. 350-352). Although some conflicts exist in this theory, like the specific time when Buddhism and Confucianism was introduced, the underlying idea that Shintô is an outside concept remains. We also identify how historical assemblages, like those with family hierarchy, begin to direct the development of Shintô.

The Indergaards theory says that the Yamato clan declared to instill Buddhism as a state religion, erected temples, and allocated official ranks to priests in order to formalize a new state-Shintô. These three actions provided the infrastructure of state-Shintô, which was further compounded with elements of an “indigenous animistic religion- Shintô” (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). The clan incorporated their own local and ritualistic beliefs, which enabled them to legitimize their family’s divinity (Fukase-Indergaard 351). This happened sequentially through the merge of two ideas. First, the clan’s proximity to the local sun-goddess, Amaterasu, supported the belief that the family chief, or emperor, will forever reign among the divine and upon death become a part of the *kami* elite (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). Second, the family mandated their divinity as permissible by declaring Amaterasu as supreme goddess over all (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). Therefore, the clan’s belief made possible their own agenda and fabricated Japanese nationalism for the first time by homogenizing all Japanese people under the power of divine emperor gods (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). This became State-Shintô.

Historically, State Shintô and the Shintô religion are rarely brought up independently because of their implications. On cannot exist without the other. A state-Shintô without the authenticity of the emperor *kami* rooted by the beliefs in the Shintô religion would extinguish the preservation of the Japanese island as a sacred and impenetrable nation. It would defy the presence of Japan’s historical existence and reasoning for what is accepted by the Japanese to be Japanese -which is to uphold the duty and respect of the *kamis* Therefore, without either Shintôthe Japanese identarian would be compromised and Japan to the Japanese would no longer be like Heaven to Christians.

Nonetheless times begin to change and political prowess backed by religious divinity changed the course of Japan. Japan became stronger as nationalism coalesced from political reforms in opposition to Buddhism (Kuroda 9). Japanese awarded hierarchy on Shintô ignited the divergence from Buddhism (Kuroda 9). This remained possible because Shintô was seen as an indigenous religion unlike Buddhism and “the Shintô ceremonies were formalized” (Kuroda 9). However, opposition emerges that discredit the separation so early on in history. The author of Kuroda challenge this idea and proclaim that Japanese Buddhism and Shintô did not separate until the 11th century, therefore falsifying the Shintô’s secular role (Kuroda 10). According to Kuroda, Japan instead regulated a more heightened understanding of the role of *kami* and their veneration, but did not distinguish Shintô as its own religion (Kuroda 10). With that being said, conflicting theories exist, but it remains true that Shintô began to diverge early on in ancient Japan, whether originating in Japan or not, as a unique distinction that was becoming Japanese identity.

Medieval/Feudal era:

As time progressed into the medieval era, which included the Shogunate, Japan’s understanding of Shintô changed to include the “authority, power, or activity of a kami, being a kami, or in short the state of attributes of a kami” (Kuroda 10). This notion would make one believe that Shintô had matured and promoted a sense of stability because of the new meaning and understanding, however another author predicted something quite contrary. Sarah Thal, author of *Shintô: Beyond Japan’s indigenous religion,* wrote that during the medieval era, the classical system of kami fell apart (Thal). Therefore, Shintô became a part of Shugendo, Buddhism and Confucianism (Thal). Thal also wrote that the imperial authority tried to resurrect the power of Shintô through symbolism of shinkoku (Japan as a sacred land of kami) and integrated the imperial regalia to include the sword, mirror and jewel (Thal). Thal’s analysis presents a point of reference and begins to paint a setting for the atmosphere in Japan. The reader might think: *pre- The Last Samurai* with Tom Cruise in order to help grasp the change in Japan. At this time, Samurais are revered and, contrary to popular belief, held significant amounts of power. Thal argues that historically samurais “bypassed emperors” during the Feudal and Tokugawa period as leaders (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). Therefore, the emperor retained less or shared the power with samurai leaders (Thal). The emperors did not regain authority until the Meiji period when they were cloaked under Shintô trappings (Fukase-Indergaard 351). The modernizing imperial authority (emperors) became so powerful. At the end of the feudal era in the 15th to 16th century, a Japanese Shintô Priest also worked to systemize what was distinctly Shintô in order to promote the kami throughout all of Japan (Thal). As I begin to further delve into the history of Shintô, I am perplexed by the inconsistencies with many of the resources, which are mostly by Japanese authors, on a topic that is inherently Japanese.

Tokugawa:

According to Fukase-Indergaard, “important elements of religious nationalism were created in early modern (Tokugawa) Japan, and the regime made use of religiously administered disciplinary institutions” (Thal 18). These important elements coupled with the previous distinctions of Shintô and the *kami* further develops the nationalism most recognized today. However, I do not believe these specific characteristics distinguish the Japanese identity forever. Therefore contrary to belief, the effects of the Tokugawa period to improve nationalism under Shintô were not successful in homogenizing an identity in Japan (Fukase-Indergaard. 354).

It is not until agricultural stagnation, peasant revolts, and Western pressures, do religio-nationalist attitudes emerge (Fukase-Indergaard. 353). Buddhism and Confucianism were identified as the reason for Japan’s “moral decay, disorder, and fragmentation” (Fukase-Indergaard. 353). Under such disorder, a samurai with the name, Mito, proposed “education to reunite governance and religion,” therefore merging indoctrination of the people and the government (Fukase-Indergaard 353). The educational themes were, arguably, the start to a homogenous Japan. Through the nationalistic discourses of *kokutai* (the national body) and *sonno* (revere the emperor), one can begin to see the nationalism verified and the fine line with Japanese identity (Fukase-Indergaard. 353). It is also important to take note the outside conflict ensuing in Asian while Japan became more homogenous. The Japanese people began to see threat of neighboring countries like China to Japanese “nativeness” (Fukase-Indergaard. 353).

On another level, one element that continuously is brought up is the power of Shintô religion. In comparison to European religions, Shintô practiced less autonomy, which was fragmented by class and locality, and stressed the importance of ritual rather than doctrine (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). In addition, comparatively to Christianity, Shintô and Buddhism were below the state (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). A higher respect to civil disobedience to *the mastery of the country* trumped any and all religion values (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). Also, contrary to belief, it was even once argued that Buddhism stood above Shintô as the “dominant religion in medieval Japan” (Fukase-Indergaard. 351). Staunch religious-nationalistic ideas were also concentrated in the elites and intellectuals, which consequently falsely connected it to the entire general population and deemed it as a “mass phenomenon abetting cultural homogeneity” (Fukase-Indergaard. 354).

Nevertheless, in 1862, Komei, the emperor, developed the Yasukuni shrine, which is one of the most publicized location and attraction in Japan today, in order to foster a place for ritual for those soldiers who died against the Shogunate soldiers (Nelson 446). The Yasukuni shrine will be talked about in more detail later, but the announcement of the shrine is critical in the analysis of the overarching miscalculations driven by unawareness to the general population versus the leaders.

It is also important to note that in the late Tokugawa, “no word existed to designate a separate sphere of life that could be called religion,” so although religion was not revered as the most important attribute to Japanese lives, ritual and communal observances had “fully entwined with their social lives” (Fukase-Indergaard. 352). In addition, it is important to take note that according to Robert N. Bellah’s Tokugawa studies, the earliest Japanese word for government…means religious observances or worship” (Fukase-Indergaard. 350). Therefore, we see through historical and cultural research on religion, how a nation with a lack of identity and homogeneity can manufacture the perfect scenario for powerful leaders with western enticements. This example is powered by the manifestation of a sphere of coercion. With that being said, the emperor in the Meiji Restoration began to lose power as efforts to modernize became more apparent, but remained a symbol of Japanese identity for the purpose of coercion.

Wrap up of ancient history:

Although my observance of Shintô does not provide every thorough example and evolutional point, I hope a few main themes were portrayed. First, Shintô is not an authentically ancient Japanese religion. Second, Shintô is enduring and is the underlying will of the Japanese culture (Kuroda 2). Whether from China or a branch of Buddhism, Japan has made a form of Shintô innately Japanese. The lack of inconsistency proves a necessity to take notice, that Shintô cannot be generalized. Shintô has continuously remolded from China to include the cultures, religions, and practices of various nations within Japan. However, the dangers occur when we compile the obviously distinguishable variations of Shintô in order to justify actions of Japan in international conflicts

**Section II: Empire of Japan – the threat of a cultural identity or brotherhood in a modernizing state?**

The beginning of the Meiji Restoration confirms the development of the vehicle, Shintô, fueled and maneuvered by political ingenuity and divine intervention. Through my investigation, the information in this section lacks inconsistencies compared to the ancient history of Shintô stated in part I. Here we also see the implications of Japanese Shintô beliefs in global governance. The empirical manifestation of Shintô from this time resonates in the minds of a majority of people even in the year, 2012. In this section, I will begin the inquiry through the following sub-categorical themes: The Meiji Restoration, The development of Yasukuni Shrine and the reverberations that followed, World War 2, and United States intervention.

The Meiji Restoration

In 1868, the Meiji Restoration invigorated a new set of actions understood as *saisei-itchi* “a unity of governmental and ritual affairs” (Nelson 6). Japan modified their nation’s doctrine because of the growing awareness of encroaching Western European advancements. At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, Japan lacked legal protection, especially religious, from encroachment (Fukase-Indergaard 355). In one instance, a French priest held a mass in Nagasaki in 1865, and to his surprise, a majority of the community attended (Fukase-Indergaard 355). Appalled, the Japanese oligarchs and officials tortured 68 village leaders and charge the Shintô and National Learning functionaries to “reeducate” those who participated (Fukase-Indergaard 355). The number of detainees grew over to 4000, and by the end of their release 600 had died (Fukase-Indergaard 355). Christianity and any other religion in Japan were from then on banned (Fukase-Indergaard 356).

Shintô became a state religion in 1868-1871. However, the reinvention of the Japanese government, emperor’s divinity, and state-Shintô closely resembled the powerful religious engines of Christianity and Protestant discourse (Nelson 447). These two religious discourses from the west emphasized the states’ nationalism (Fukase-Indergaard. 347). For example, British Protestantism avowed Britain as “God’s chosen people” like the divine Japanese emperor and Japanese sacred origin stories (Fukase-Indergaard. 347). Japan incorporated the same state ideology more thoroughly and restrictively, therefore inventing and molding a religion and tradition inherent to Japan. However, I find it interesting that at the time western countries were so critical on Japanese actions calling them immoral and wrong when, in fact, the Japanese modeled their state to be identical to the west. The state officials succeeded the incorporation by inculcating the National Learning Movement across Japan (Fukase-Indergaard 356). This movement forced Shintô to separate from Buddhism and re-instate a “Department of Divinity (Indergaard 356). Therefore, priests were called to enter into Buddhist shrines as Buddhist priests and destroy the temples (Fukase-Indergaard 356). However, factions between Shintô and Buddhism proved difficult to distinguish between so the majority of Japanese maintained their “traditional customs with their family funerals and graveyards” (Fukase-Indergaard 358). There was not enough force and police to stabilize the movement across all of Japan in order to create the nationalism and identity the Japanese officials desired.

In order for the empirical government to engineer a social phenomenon, the officials with the help of a puppeteered emperor resurrected power through closely orchestrated shrines working together in every village to promote strict state agendas (Nelson 447). According to my family, around the same time, the government urged each family to place a state-Shintô shrine elevated above the ground in their homes. Here they would respectfully acknowledge the emperor’s reign towards becoming a *kami* and symbolically show that they respectfully observe the new implemented calendar holidays (Fukase-Indergaard. 361). An authoritarian Japan took the reign.

There were evidences of revolt, but many were immediately suppressed. In the 1880s, liberal political opposition generated a National Assembly to promote popular rights, however, the state reacted by immediate repression through “the Ordinance on Public Meetings” to restrict freedom of assembly, movements, and press (Fukase-Indergaard. 362). Therefore, the Japanese state finally attained the ability to restrict freedom and mold the culture through Shintô support.

By 1885, Japan closely resembled other modern states, like Germany, therefore accomplishing to construct a new Japan. Japan had “left Asia behind” (Smith 127). According to Patrick Smith, the Meiji Restoration left very little Japanese, but certain things did endure- *Nihongo,* which literally means Japanese (Smith 127). In addition, the Japanese idea or misconception erected from ancient understandings of “belonging” stayed in modern Japan (Smith 127). The Japanese stayed “Japanese” through the sanctity of preserving the nation’s blood, which meant not producing offspring with anyone out of the nation in order to muster more state power (Smith 127). Therefore, the question next becomes how the current “crystallized distinct identity of Japanese pre-war nationalism (*kokutani)”* was shaped enough so that the general population embraced the idea that the “state is the agent of the emperor and defender of his subjects” (Fukase-Indergaard 366). We see the change in political power resonate from the Meiji Restoration through religious Shintô shrines and symbolic architecture like the Yasukuni Shrine.

The growing importance of Yasukini Shrine and the reverberations that followed

Historically, the Yasukuni Shrine proves to be a location of great significance with vast amounts of symbolism. Omura Masujiro, the founder of the imperial army, built the shrine in the late 19th century atop Kudan Hill (Nelson 449). The location was said to symbolize a blur of status distinctions in Japan between the *shitamuchi,* the equivalent to a lower class or those living at the bottom, and the *yamanote,* the upper class, or those living at the top of the mountain (Nelson 449).The shrine became instrumental for the “state decision to institutionalize state-sponsored spirit enshrinement,” which thus helped to “establish a new state religion with long standing traditions” (Nelson 449). These deceased all became part of the imperial shrine devoted to war heroes on behalf and for the country and emperor (Nelson 449). The Yasukuni shrine was unique in comparison to others because of the association or partiality of its deceased members. The Japanese believed that the spirits of the dead were initiated into a *kami* in order to avoid contamination (Nelson 449). They felt there was an impurity to death as a “defilement to the community,” therefore the people invigorated a calm and benevolent atmosphere for the deceased to become *kamis,* or gods (Nelson 449). If not done under these terms, the deceased would become “unqiet spririts” (*onryo)* because of their violent deaths (Nelson 449). The development of the belief that heroic military men become a *kami* forced family members to disassociate from their deceased and feel unattached to specific people (Nelson 451). The deceased now became a part of the nation intertwined in the island’s divine origin (Nelson 451).

From these actions, a problem arose between the sanctity of a deceased military man once thought to be a family possession versus the state’s implemented new religious principle that stated they were a universal property (Nelson 451). However, regardless of the implications, the people still remained loyal to these ill-conceived state institutions. Symbolically, the embraced change by the Japanese people implies great government power. The people, however, were blind by their “civic morality and loyalty” (Fukase-Indergaard 366). Remorse for a loss of a family member at the Yasukuni shrine, implied immoral behaviors to the state, and therefore the Japanese people repressed their emotions and continued to vehemently protect their state that their family members died to protect. However, it is important to remember not all people accepted these views, and it is not to say that these actions were in the majority’s interest to follow the state’s decisions. Nevertheless, the Yasukuni Shrine’s importance remained ubiquitous in history. The Shrine ignited the strongest form of Japanese identity yet to be seen in history. These ideals were present through their forms of respect, duty, and restrained emotions.

However, Fukase-Indergaard calls us to distinguish between religion and Shintô by saying that “worship and indigenous Shintô shrines are the symbolic expression of acknowledging civic obligation human virtues, and shall not be understood as a matter of religious belief” (Fukase-Indergaard 365). Therefore, the officials were able to portray a separation between state and government, while inculcating the conventions of Shintô. It became a civic right rather than a religion (Indergard et al 366). The subjugation of Shintô as a civic right enforced the Japanese to accept a cultural mobilization and promoted an enduring conservative Japanese identarian abroad.

The conservative identarian was confirmed further through the imperial government and state official visits to the Yasukuni shrine. According to Nelson, the first emperor to visit was in 1874; and was characterized as a “significant departure from established custom” (Nelson 450). With that being said, the visit symbolized a significant change about to occur in Japanese history. Consequently, even today visits to the Yasukuni shrine are catalogued and questioned during times of global instability. So, why the attention in the media pre War, post War and even today?

According to Nelson, author of *Social Memory as ritual practice commemorating spirits of the military dead at Yasukuni Shintô shrine,* the people of Japan *“*shared assumptions about the indebtedness of the living to the heroic compatriots and ancestors” (Nelson 443). The respect these assumptions bolstered led those states outside of Japan to assume that nationalistic Japan may become too powerful, unified, and emotionally unstable. The fear germinated from the immediate response and willingness by the Japanese people to protect their home. Recall that the Japanese were taught to believe and associate the Japanese island as an equivalent to Christianity’s heaven under state Shintô. In addition, the emperor was like a real-life Jesus Christ.

The atmosphere presented a staunchly nationalistic Japan, which branded the Japanese with a particular identity. But, I believe we are challenged today to revisit historical dialogue and situations through modern cultural ethics. With this I hope the Japanese identarian will not continue to emit negative attention and fear. Instead, I challenge the reader to understand the historical hierarchy placed on these events post Meiji Restoration, which has branded a nation throughout its existence. However, The precursor to the war was only the beginning to a more conservative advocacy, which we see during World War 2.

World War 2

“Haunted by a sense that the world they once knew was being lost in a mindless rush to modernity, radical thinkers searched for ‘myths of rootedness,’ in advocating a ‘return’ to an idealized past in Japanese antiquity” (Large 102). Unfortunately, these radical thinkers provided the fuel of ill feelings toward outside pressures, which was though to have curtailed Japanese nationalism. Therefore, the Japanese frequented aggressive behaviors towards neighboring Asian nations in order to ensure purity in their bloodline (Grimmer-Solem 286).

The state utilized Shintô for state control (Fukase-Indergaard 370). Shintô began to develop all parts of Japanese lives, which made an easy access for the state to maneuver state promotion (Fukase-Indergaard 370). A Japanese nationalism was so detrimental because of the accompanying power it bolstered. Many negative allegations exist for the veneration of the military dead because of the connotations coupled with Japanese nationalism. For example the idea that the Japanese were so tied to their country that any and all actions would be made in order to protect their islands and the emperor associated substantial negativity. These negative associations were mostly connected to the extremes like suicide bombers, otherwise known as kamikaze pilots. Unfortunately, these extremists remained what is associated with Japan today. Sadly, the Japanese would be appalled to understand the meaning behind “suicide bombers” under the English cultural context. I believe there is an injustice to the translation to the word, which cannot be understood unless a person is from the country. The Japanese believe those who enacted in this way were honorable in willing to take literally the imperial directive to “offer oneself courageously” (Nelson 455). The men and women offered oneself freely and surrendered their own live so that a nation might survive (Nelson 455). Interestingly, even though the Japanese suffered a defeat after World War 2, the people felt an initiative even in the atmosphere of defeat to protect their dead, remember, and keep the memory of the loved ones secure against the threats of the pain, forgetfulness, or worse, condemnation,” (Nelson 444).

Sadly, this condemnation did exist, which I fear catalyzed Japanese nationalist reduction. This occurred not because of the pressure from the US, but because of the alleged association to their emperor no longer existing post World War 2. With that being said, I feel in the light of the current miscalculation of Japanese sentiment, it is imperative to understand why the people were compelled to act to such levels as they did. Recall that at the time, for the Japanese it would have been the equivalent to fighting for Jesus Christ. I know the actions and scenarios do not match exactly, but I hope that the underlying understanding of how revered the emperor was to the Japanese is portrayed. I do not wish to insinuate that all Japanese people agree with the events led by the imperial government during the war, however, I do believe although many would not adhere to those actions if asked today by their government, an underlying respect for the deceased’s honor to their duty will be accepted. An individual apology was acceptable, but a nationwide apology was unthinkable and not respectful post- World War 2 (Nelson 457). This is true because empirical associations still remained faintly regardless of the US demands.

United States Post-War Intervention

Post World War 2, general animosity from the allies towards Japanese State- Shintô and nationalism existed. As a result on December 15, 1945, General MacArthur mandated the removal of Shintô as a state religion (History). In addition, the US expressed large disapproval of military, imperial, and government official visits of Yasukuni shrine. The US implemented this rule because the visits associated a reintegration of conservative nationalism rather than a reverence to those who passed away during war. Therefore, this section will not analyze active Shintô in Japan, but rather the reactionary measures the outside world took, specifically the United States, in order to destroy all things related. We see here how much Japanese State Shintô was seen as a threat and further to what measures outside states took in order to rid the world of it. In addition, I call the reader to recognize the generalizations made about Shintô as a result of a few superior actions during World War 2. Japanese identity was then unfortunately defined according to these global assumptions on Japanese aggression, which are still present today.

Japan is an interesting case and I feel seen as more of a threat from the United States and their allies because of a point Erik Grimmer-Solem made. He says, that [the movement] “was an imposition from above rather than as a movement from below as in Italy and Germany, which he accounted for as the result of Japan’s cultural backwardness, namely the failure to separate the private from the public sphere” (Grimmer-Solem 286). He also states that Japanese “aggressiveness” comes from “years of borrowing from China” (Grimmer-Solem 286). With that being said, resources show that it is a blend between Japanese history and their unique implementation of modernity with Japanese traditions, culture, and mentality. There is something, however, that is uniquely Japanese associated with the growth and changes of Shintô. Shintô is what blossomed Japan to the aggressive and fatal, yet beautiful nature similar to a poisonous flower like the Autumn Crocus or the Angel’s Trumpet.

The US exterminated Japan –the poison flower- in order to contain future threats, retaliation, and more importantly to suppress their own manifested fears of what Japan may become. With that being said, they tried to “purge” Japan from the “aggressive imperialist power” that existed during World War 2 (Grimmer-Solem 286). The United States strategy was in the form of a “General Strike of 1947” and the purge of Japanese communists in 1949 (Grimmer-Solem 286). The United States, especially, pose an interesting case by appearing to other nations as a global police, or in the words of governor Romney, “the hope of the Earth” by caging the aggressive beast of the East led by the Japanese imperialist government. The US accomplished this through their occupation, where they closely monitored the movements of the Japanese military. For that reason, the US poses to be no better than those imperial suppressors by mandating intensive transformations and removal of state a religion. Since the first Englishmen came to the eastern coast of the United States, the US has always erected ill feelings towards governments and state religions. I feel, although, the Japanese people majority may have felt suppressed at the time, removal of their religion was not a necessary measure. The religion in its entirety was not the enemy, and the United States’ and their allies’ inability to distinguish this posed a large threat towards Japanese identity forever as a competitively aggressive state. It was the leaders, not the religion.

Nevertheless, the United States masked their true actions by providing a reinterpretation of the Japanese people. Through their intervention, the US separated the majority from the “semi-feudal militarists and monopoly capitalists,” and as a result, victimized Japan as something to be saved from the subjugation of the government, which led to the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombing (Grimmer-Solem 286). Again, rather than the US apologizing for their actions, they pointed blame on the Japanese government and told the people that their actions were only as a result of their leaders, therefore, they are the ones to blame. The US failed to express in full detail their reason for their occupation and take responsibility for the bombing. I challenge that the US were led by a personal agenda and needed Japanese growth and ingenuity post World War 2 because of the ensuing threat of the Soviet Union to the US as a hegemon. The US needed Japan, and the only justification was through occupation post World War 2. Thus, in order for the US occupation to be successful, the US needed to create deeper factions and promote animosity between the public and the private state-government.

In addition, Japan failed to placate their actions post World War 2, in comparison to Germany, because Japan did not apologize publicly. The Japanese felt an apology under these measures would be blasphemy because it would accuse the people to disapprove and abandon their emperor, as well as towards their country and their *kamis.* Also, German reaction was strongly more apparent than Japan because of the publicity and attention Germany received post-war (Grimmer-Solem 287). According to Grimmer-Solem, a German mini-series, called *Holocaust,* appeared on television in 1979, which provided knowledge on current events to the public sector of Germany (Grimmer-Solem 287). Even today, in 2012, there are very few people in the developed states who are ignorant of German atrocities during World War 2, in comparison to the similar length of Japanese violence.

**Section III: Through the generations: What is the Shintô of the period?**

Up until this point, we have assessed an unclear history of Shintô filled with misconceptions and personal pursuits all in the name of nationalism. As a result, the actions of World War 2 promoted an evident US response, which has reverberated the ways in which social and political Japanese arenas of Japan are identified as today. Shintô survived, but as a variation to the historical form, which we will come to find in this section. But, first I will begin with the practice of Shintô in my life as a Japanese born American citizen.

Shintô to me

As long as I could remember, my mother’s family and I visited Shintô shrines. Every day Japan’s uniqueness was introduced through a new song, a new architecture form, and through every meticulously thought out action. I realize today, that these actions were not apparent to Buddhist traditions alone, but rather more deeply transcribed in Japanese traditions and cultures. Therefore, I find these to be more traditional and as a response to Shintô and the various climates of history. For example: Shintô and Chinese Buddhism, Shintô and the emperor, Shintô and the imperial government, Shintô and the Samurai, and even remnants of Shintô during World War 2. Nevertheless, each era produced a new Shintô.

Shintô in my family never seemed so varied until I sat down and reminisced. I remember visiting shrines as a child. I skipped around up and down the steep concrete stairs, threw 100¥ into the prayer boxes, and clasped my hands, bowed my head and said “namu namu” whenever my mother told me to. Even today, I am more distant from these traditions and look at the shrine as even a more remote museum than my mother would In comparison, my mother was obviously more reverent, but rather looked as if she was walking through a time capsule or a museum with her similar interests. She was still able to translate the symbols and appreciate them compared to me. She was in awe of the structures and natural beauty of the place, yet keeping an idea of where she was by praying in significant areas, which I believe she was conditioned to do by her mother and was now conditioning me to do**.** My *Baba* (grandma in Japanese), experienced yet another variation. Comparatively, she was even more reverent than my mother and taking considerable more time walking through the structure of the shrine. There was an obvious difference between our generations in accord to Shintô.

Another example of change resides in the home. Historically, every traditional Japanese home included a Shintô shrine, which called for a simple shelf with various symbols, certain figurines, and painted wooden sayings to a *kami.* Everyday, my family would offer the shrine tea and rice and prayed a simple prayer. However, now these shrines are rarely incorporated into modern homes and are not seen as a necessity. I do not believe the lessening of shrines and practices implicate a loss of interest or importance, but rather a change in the practice. I find the development quite interesting and slightly amusing to watch when I visit a Shintô Shrine today. I am more appreciative of the choices offered and believe each practiced form of Shintô to be just as important and highly ritualistic to a person as any other form. No degradation exists, in my opinion, regardless of modernization. Instead, I believe a reconfiguration exists.

Shintô in Modern Policy

In one specific arena Shintô is still highly implemented, in some cases transparently, and with no bias. Shintô I believe never left the political sector, but was something that could be hidden and implemented by those who celebrate Japaneseness. The idea of Japaneseness was especially prevalent during the March 11 three-fold disaster (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear). Rarely do you ever see a community come together so quickly other than disasters such as these or like those of 9/11 in the United States.

In these instances, we see a nationalistic sense of duty, once again, but this time through modern “kamikazes” as BBC notes (Buerk). Today, 200 pensioners all above the age of 60 volunteered to reenter the Fukushima Power plant in order to assess the damages and begin to clean up. These men, who call themselves the Skilled Veterans Corp, all are retired professional engineers and believed it was their duty to volunteer and sacrifice their lives rather than the youth of Japan (Buerk). When BBC asked Mr. Yamada in an interview if he was a modern kamikaze he chuckled and answered, “We are not kamikaze. The kamikaze was something strange, no risk management there. They were going to die. But we are going to come back. We have to work but never die” (Buerk). There is an underlying understanding of protection at hand, which survives from Shintô beliefs in Japanese sacredness. I feel this may be stronger than any Japanese nationalism in history.

In addition, every year the people, government, and monks collaborate and vote for a word to represent the year. In 2011, they chose *kizuna,* a word, which means bond. This was highly appropriate for the year because of the Japanese response to March 11. However, we do not always confront a state nationalism with such positive connotations today. This representation of Japan unfortunately is not what resonates in the world.

Thus, under more political and possibly a negative representation of state Shintô still exists. For example in education, teachers and students are forced to sing the anthem as loudly and respectfully as possible. In this regard, a nationalistic pursuit still may be ensuing. According to Fukase-Indergaard., “at a Tokyo school, officials take down the names of teachers who fail to stand and sing, in Fukuoka Prefecture” (Fukase-Indergaard 343). They also take note of the students who fail to sing the anthem, and are graded on a high to low scale (Fukase-Indergaard 343). Although, the strict nature of this particular prefecture is not implemented throughout the rest of Japan, “backers of the rule” pursue to expand the act nationwide in order to promote a “normal country that can have patriotic pride” (Fukase-Indergaard 343). However, from the time when World War 2 concluded, Japanese nationalistic sentiment in any form has raised question from other nations on whether there is a state-Shintô and World War 2-like resurgence occurring. Unfortunately, only the bad is remembered and all Japanese patriotism has been characterized and branded as a potential threat. And for what reason is Japan held so accountable even today? It is truly a mystery. The few “backers of the [education] rule” provide a valid point that Japan should be able to show patriotic pride without raising an eyebrow from the rest of the world.

With that being said, in spite of history, a possible revival of modern Shintô may be in its early stages. According to Nelson, in 2003 four points occurred providing evidence for the possible revival. They are as follows: (1) Emperor veneration, (2) recognition of rising sun flag, (3) nationalistic attempts to revise the history curriculum for middle school students, and (4) deployment of Japan’s ground self-defense forces overseas (Nelson 446). These four points are especially tied with the visitation to the Yasukuni Shrine where over 2.46 million war heroes are enshrined (Nelson 446). It was not until April 22 1975, a politician or government official visited the shrine, but since then visits have become more present by the emperor and prime ministers, which to the US, flaunts constitutional restrictions and evokes pre-war days and state sponsored institutions (Nelson 457). As late as the year 2001, the prime minister was sued for failing to “separate state and religion” because of his visit (Nelson 459). Prime Minister Koizumi in August 2001 said that despite what others think, he must pay respect to those forced to fight…he said, “Japan will never again wage war” insinuating why he could not have the respect by others without a challenge (Nelson 459). Thus, in order to subdue further allegations against official visits, the LDP introduced a bill to grant state support to classify the shrine as a “religious institution” to remember and thank the service of men to a nation, regardless of the extremist actions (Nelson 459). Therefore, permitting emperors, prime ministers, and other government officials to visit (Nelson 459).

Nevertheless skepticism exists and growing tensions infiltrate a 60 year ally between the US and Japan. This is true, specifically, in the business sector where the Japanese are seen to have a “strong sense of being Japanese with the subordination of individual interests” (Maher 41). Maher says a strong sense of Shintô still infiltrates the business sector through the idea of *joge*, which separate the superior and inferior, *On,* which refers to a sense of obligation, and *Haji,* which is the feeling the Japanese feel when responsibility and objectives are failed to be met (Maher 41). The ideas are seen to be inextricably Shintô and Japanese because nowhere else is the origin and development of a nation so interwoven to form a unique blend (Maher 42). A strong sense of “national perfection” permeates Japanese business sectors especially, which have been found to be taught already at a young age with stories of heroes like Izanagi and Izanami (Maher 43). This legend is taught to every school child, which intrinsically promotes the origin of the nation and the bind between Japan and their nation (Maher 43). Therefore, at an early age the Japanese are conditioned regardless of post-war renunciation of the emperor’s lineage. Japan still remains symbolic.

In another example, Japanese Shintô is accused of promoting aggression in global governance. We have seen in the news today of the maritime dispute between the Koreas, China, and Japan for the sovereign authority for a specific island said to be awarded to China and Japan in 2008 (Hirokawaet al.). An aggressive natured push for these islands exists because of the possibility for natural resources at and near the island’s perimeter. With that being said, as ties between Japan and Korea heightened in August 2012, the Prime Minister, Yoshihiko Noda, visited the Yasukuni Shrine. More interesting, as a result of US occupation in Japan since post World War 2, the US is being dragged into the dispute because of its proximity. China is accusing the US to have planted a “time bomb” for the territorial pursuits (Hirokawa et al.) Therefore, as a result of US intervention and the pursuit to overcome Japanese nationalism during World War 2 and help “promote development,” the US suffers to become the target of aggression in East Asian disputes today. As we come to understand Shintô is very prevalent in modern Japan either implemented strategically or as a result of post war endeavors, we see the outcome and responses still in existence today. We will now look at how Shintô infiltrated modern society and practice.

Shintô- a modern social phenomenon and practice

As opposed to Shintô in the political sector, Shintô adapted throughout modern Japan cohesively without proposing significant global threat. Today Shintô festivals are widely celebrated in contemporary society. A few examples: Obon, Sumo wrestling, neighborhood omatsuri (street festivals for a specific *kami)*, girl’s day, boy’s day, *Tanabata-matsuri* in July, and many more. I remember celebrating these holidays as a child. Through every holiday experience, a small lesson is to be taught and passed on from generation to generation. They are not presented as a lesson of Shintô, but instead as a part of Japan.

Today, Shinô is even incorporated through the younger generations in the form of mangas, Japanese cartoon strips, and videos. In manga, writers “reel the popularity of apparently religious themes in a society where many people exhibit antipathy or apathy towards religion, but also because they sometimes probe to be the origins of doctrinal and ritual innovation…” (Thomas 18). According to Thomas et al, “…There are observable behaviors in manga and anima culture that can be reasonable and accurately described as religious Clerics sometimes using stories to edify their audiences, and authors sometimes using religious concepts to captivate their readers” (Thomas 18). Therefore, Shintô can be seen portrayed in a plethora of mediums. Specifically, the film producer Miyazaki Hayao exemplifies Japan’s complex cultural identity by incorporating various images. It is said that these images like *Totoro, Ponyo,* etc are the modern symbols of kamis for children to stay connected with (Thomas 115). These historical stories and what has made Japan “uniquely Japan” is presented to children in ways they understand. But, I feel it is difficult for any other person to understand in its full context because we are not conditioned at an early age to associate Japanese uniqueness and identify the large koala-cat like animal, *Totoro*, to be a spirit inherent to Japan. Instead to others, the movie, *Totoro,* appears to be an odd *Alice in Wonderland,* where a young girl gets lost in a hole near a tree and begins a unique experience. *Ponyo*, in the US, is translated as an Asian version of *The Little Mermaid.* A disconnect exists between the Japanese and everyone else when concerned with children’s movies about the kami. But, it is apparent that Shintô survives adapted into a new modern culture of Japan. It is the multiplicity of interpretive Japanese framework and personal social actors that creates this new Shintô (Kawano). Therefore, Shintô is flexible and embodies what the Japanese wants it to embody and mean.

Next, we find Shintô embodied by an unaccepted brotherhood called the Yakuza, the Japanese Mafia. They have incorporated rituals of Shintô into their lives and in the ways they practice. Interestingly, according to Asahi Shinbun, we find 70% of the Sanja Matsuri in Tokyo to be controlled specifically by the Yakuza (Quirky Japan blog). Due to their involvement they are allowed to ride atop mikoshi carriages that are portable miniature replicas of the Asakusa Shintô shrine during the Sanja Matsuri. The Yakuza who ride on these are seen to be sacrilegious to the kami, and yet no one says anything. Instead, every year it is a large spectacle. Here we find how Shintô is yet again molded into something different for another cultural group within Japan. I do not want to present the idea that only very significant forms of Shintô exist today. But, rather express how much Shintô can be identified throughout everyday life. Shintô shrines are sprinkled throughout Japanese prefectures, woods, street corners, in rocks, and magically hidden in mountainsides. Shintô is truly everywhere. However, I believe the underlying understanding of Shintô can be expressed with Nelson’s quote stating that the “founding mothers and fathers of the nation are [still] ever present as guides and coercive examples for present day correct policy and behaviors” (Nelson 445). Therefore, Japan does not forget past Shintô beliefs and never fully disassociated from them contrary to post World War 2 threats. Instead, Japan remolds Shintô.

**Part IV: Conclusion**

From the beginning, Shintô emerged from an unclear history and was contaminated by specific sentiments as a result to particular historical events. Regardless of the long-lasting historical complexity in cultural, societal, and political roles Shintô exhibits, other nations have been left misguided to understand Japanese identarian narrowly by trying to make Shintô tangible. With that being said, Japan does deserve to have the nation’s un-proud moments remembered, but not to the extent that modern global politics reveals. Japanese nationalism, endemic during World War 2, no longer exists, but through constant global pressures and assumptions about the Japanese’s questionable actions may push Japan towards revolt, whether it be to ban American bases on their premises, retaliate against China boycotting all Japanese products, etc.

Shintô is not appreciated historically because of the presumed generalizations. But, I challenge the reader to take a step back and identify the places in history when Shintô transforms. It transforms from ancient Japan, Tokugawa, The Meiji Restoration, World War 2, modern social and cultural areas like children’s movies, and in the Yakuza. Evidence reveals Shintô, throughout history, as the ever-developing machine, changing even with the passing generations. Although some traditions are passed on, we will never be able to truly define Shintô, because as we see today, the people define Shintô and there is an ever-changing definition depending on whom you ask in Japan. According to Motoori Norinaga in the Edo period, he said any cultural element of any period is “broadly speaking, the Shintô of that period” (Kuroda 2). In literature and many resources, Shintô has always been defined by the government of the period and never by the people. This becomes our task –a reinterpretation, not only for Japan, but also for every preconceived identarian that is overlooked because of a particular historical event, which assumed a hierarchy over all other events.

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