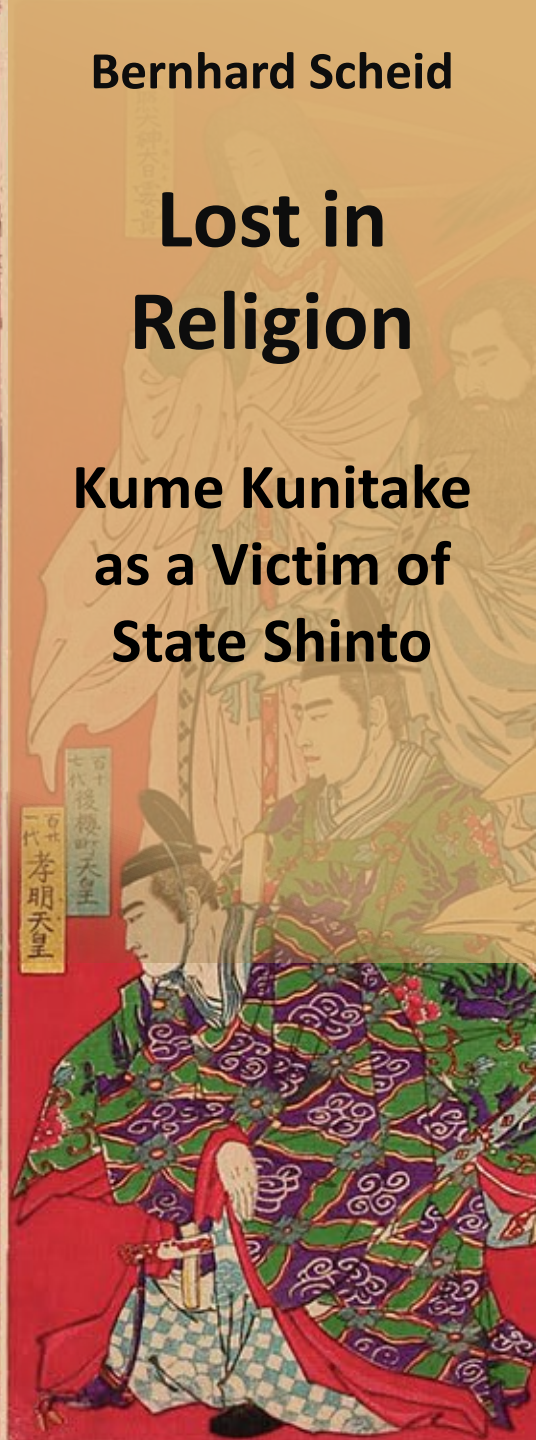
Bernhard Scheid

Lost in Religion

Kume Kunitake as a Victim of State Shinto

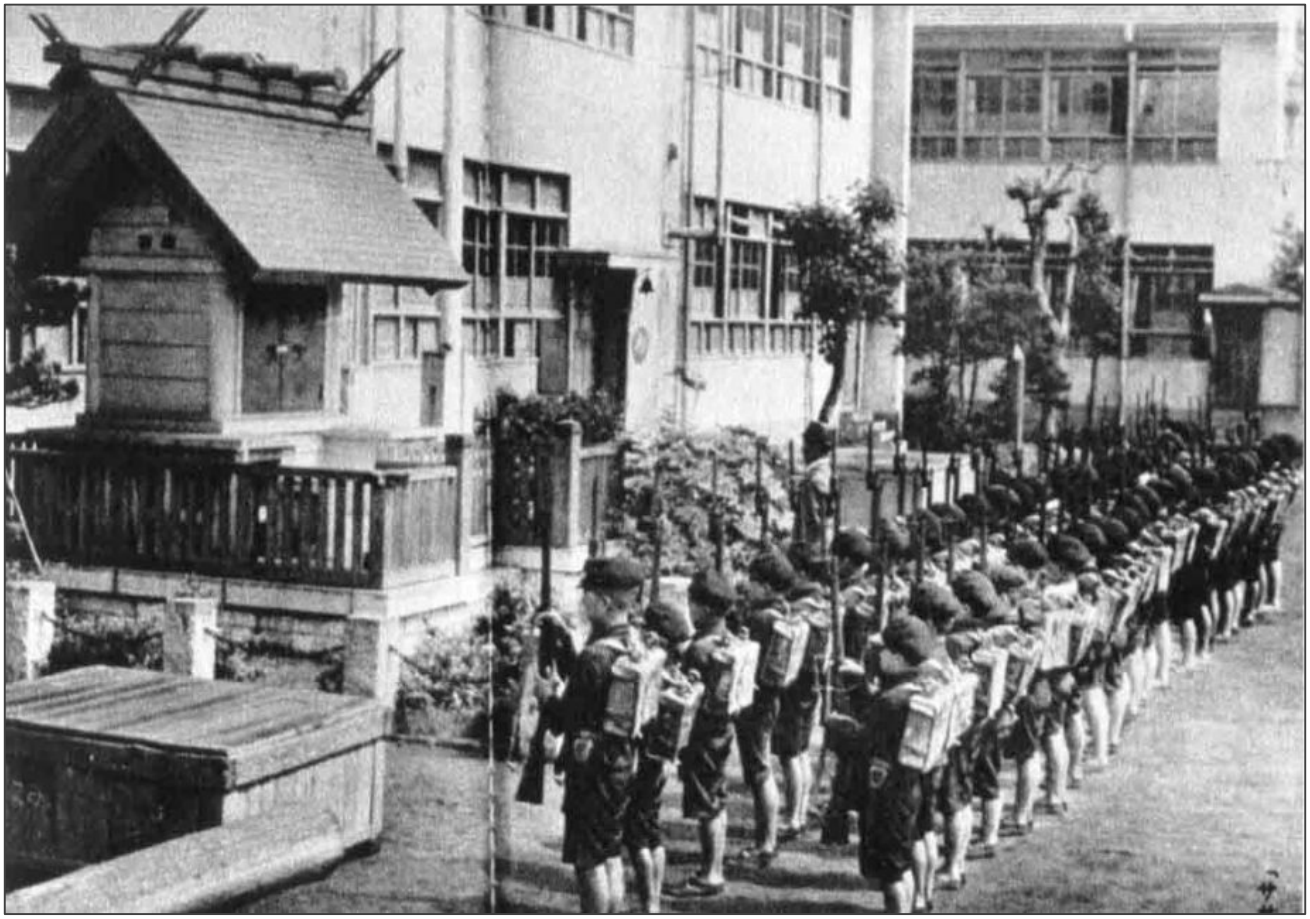


Vienna, 24. May 2019

State Shinto in a nutshell

Emperor Meiji and Empress Kōken surrounded by their ancestor deities (Toyohara Chikanobu, 1878)

Shintō shrines at school, 1940s



hōanden 奉安殿, 1943

Shinto shrine in early Meiji

Torii at Lake Haruna, taken by Kusakabe Kinmei, 1880

BUNMEI KAIKA

From Traditionalism to Modernity, 1870~90

Iwakura Mission (1871–1873)

- Headed by leading politicians
- More than 100 members
- May 1873 in Vienna, visit of Vienna World's Fair
- Detailed account (5 vols.) by Kume Kunitake 久米邦武 (1839–1931), in 1878

Leaders of the Iwakura Mission:
center: Iwakura Tomomi
left: Kidō Takayoshi and Yamaguchi Naoyoshi
right: Itō Hirobumi and Ōkubo Toshimichi

KUME KUNITAKE

Kume Kunitake

- Historian and intellectual of *bunmei kaika*
- Born 1839, Saga, Kyushu, middle-ranked samurai family
- studied Confucianism (*kangaku* 漢学, lit. “Chinese learning”) and Western learning (*rangaku* 蘭学, lit. “Dutch learning”)
- Personal secretary of Iwakura, shortly before the Mission
- Chronicler of the Mission

Kume‘s academic career

- 1878, Office of Historiography, 1888 → Imperial University in Tokyo
- Kume and colleagues cast doubts on traditional sources of historiography such as *Taiheiki*
- Cooperated with Ludwig Rieß (1861–1928), a disciple of the famous historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886)
- 1892, “Kume Incident”, demise from university
- Later professor at a private academy which eventually became Waseda University

The Kume Incident

- 1892/1/25, re-publication of “Shintō is an old custom of heaven worship” (*Shintō wa saiten no kozoku* 神道は祭天の古俗)
- Emphasis is not on “old” (outdated) but on “heaven” implying that all kinds of polytheistic nature spirits were not part of original Shinto.
- Amaterasu (sun goddess, deity of Ise, imperial ancestor) was a priestess of heaven, not a goddess.
- 1892/2/28, four students of Watanabe Ikarimaro 渡邊重石丸 (1837–1915), a scholar of National Learning (*kokugaku),* “question” Kume on his article and report in a newspaper that he “took back” his opinion. Demand Kume’s demise and threaten his life. This initiates a wave of protests against modernist intellectuals.
- 1892/3, Kume is forced to resign from his post as a professor
- 1893, Kume’s former institute is temporally closed

Context of the Kume Affair

- 1889, Meiji Constitution (including freedom of religious belief)
- 1890, Imperial Rescript of Education (*kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語) code of patriotic duties based on imperial authority beyond the law; reenforcement of traditioal hierarchy between ruler and ruled
- 1891, “disrespect incident” (*fukei jiken* 不敬事件) of Christian teacher Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930), who refused to bow
- 1892, “misled brush incident” (*hikka jiken* 筆禍事件) of university professor Kume Kunitake who wrote on Shintō
- 1893, “Japanese bride incident” (*Nihon no hanayome jiken* 日本の花嫁事件) by Christian member of the government, Tamura Naoomi 田村直臣 (1858–1934) who favored Christian marriage
- [1894 Dreyfus Affair in France. Public opinion influences politics; individual scapegoats]
- Ideological shift; end of *bunmei kaika* optimism

KUME‘S VIEWS ON SHINTO AND RELIGION

Religion in Kume's Iwakura Report

Religion important in the West:

- When Western people talk about a nation and its character, they always discuss religion. […] They tend to think that a person who does not have a religion will not respect the law. (Kume 2009, p. 98)
- **East Asia cannot imagine the influence which religion exerts**, but it is due to this that a European never fails to ascertain another man's religious beliefs. (p. 280)

Negative view of Christianity:

- Crucifixes everywhere → like „passing through a cemetery or **lodging at a place of execution**" (p. 98)

But:

- "[Christianity provides] the essential guidelines for governing a nation" (p. 98)
- "Since [Christian religion] already exists, to value it is wiser than to despise it" (p. 112)

Negative view of "superstition":

- "The more **backward** a country, the more powerful is the influence of religious superstition and the more likely are the people to **worship idols and animals**."

→ Machiavellian perspective on religion.

→ *leitdifferenz* between "barbarianism" (*yaban* 野蛮) and "civilization" (*bumei*)

Lit.: Kume K. (aut.), Tsuzuki C. et al. (ed., trl.), *Japan rising. The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe 1871–1873*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Kume‘s view of Shinto

- Ame no Minakanushi (August Lord of the Center of Heaven, mentioned briefly in *Kojiki*) is comparable to Chinese Heaven or the Christian god.
- [→ Primordial monotheism of all cultures; not specifically Japanese]
- Superstitious believes in human souls leads to (barbarian) polytheism
- No ancestor worship in ancient Shinto!
- [→ Reconstructing Shintō according to a Confucian version of monotheism]

Kume‘s opponent Watanabe Ikarimaro

- Born 2 years before Kume, 1837, also in Kyushu
- Studied *kangaku* and Mitgaku, later *kokugaku*
- Teacher at the short-lived Academy of Imperial Studies (Kōgakusho 皇学所) in Kyoto (1868–1869), lectured in traditional courtly attire (*eboshi hitatare*)
- Active in the religious bureaucracy but left after Satsuma rebellion (1877)
- Private academy
- Teacher of the four students who attacked Kume

Work:

- “Outline of a theory on the real Lord of Heaven” (*Shintenshu kyōsetsu ryaku* 真天主教説略) 1871
- “Reflections on the deity August Lord of the Center of Heaven” (*Ame no Minakanushi no Kami-kō* 天之御中主神孝) 1873
- Ame no Minakanushi corresponds to „goddo“ (the Christian god)
- Japanese Shinto is the root of Christianity

Intellectual undercurrents

- Ame no Minakanushi and a quest for monotheism already part of Hirata Atsutane‘s 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) views, inspired by Jesuit writings in Chinese
- Kume‘s opponent, Watanabe, in 1873: Ame no Minakanushi corresponds to „goddo“ (the Christian god)
- Kume inspired by *kokugaku* theories (intellectual theft?)
- Traditional rivalry between Confucianists (*kangaku*) and Nativists (*kokugaku*)

Conclusion

- Kume's essay on Shintō was in essence an attempt to reconcile the fundamental aims of State Shinto or the Tennō system with the new notion of civilizational progress (*bunmei kaika*).
- Thereby he tried to rationalize Shinto: Shinto must be stripped off "superstitious" beliefs
- Public opinion focused on Ise and Amaterasu
- The ensuing scandal revealed a taboo to draw the imperial deities—and by extension the divine status of the *tennō*—into any form of rational discourse.
- This led to the confusing fact that there was not much talk on Shintō in the period of State Shintō.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

Kume Kunitake in his later age