

The Ethnographer, the Scholar, and the Missionary

French Studies on Shinto at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

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In late nineteenth-century France, Japanese studies in general and Shinto studies in particular were not yet part of a well-structured academic milieu as were, for instance, Chinese or Indian studies. Japanese studies in France reached a scientific level comparable to English and German studies on Japan only in the 1920s, when two members of the *Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, Noël Péri (1865–1922) and Claude Maître (1876–1925), published on Buddhism and *noh* (Péri) and on Buddhist art and historical literature (Maître).

Within the topical framework of this volume, I would like to start a little earlier and present three largely forgotten figures of French studies on Japan who, with somewhat qualified success, left their imprint on the “prehistory” of French research on Japanese religion, with special reference to Shinto. The three are George Bousquet (1846–1937), Michel Revon (1867–1943), and Jean-Marie Martin (1886–1975). Each represents an emblematic figure in French contacts with Japan during the Meiji era: the “travel-ethnographer,” the “scholar,” and the “missionary.” Another important intermediary of this sort is the learned “antiquarian” and connoisseur of aesthetics, art, and religion, typified by Emile Guimet (1836–1918), the founder of today’s *Musée national des arts asiatiques*.¹ In line with the focus of this volume, however, I will concentrate here on the other three figures.

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1. Frank 1986.

In a recent article on French opinions about Japan at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Patrick Beillevaire points out that Japan was commonly regarded as a “secular (*laïc*) empire” at the beginning of the twentieth century.² France, on the other hand, at the time was deeply immersed in the debate over the separation of Church and State. Although French accounts on Japan contain detailed information on Buddhist and Shinto places of worship, deities, and festivals, and on material manifestations of religious matters, the authors typically arrive at the conclusion that the Japanese are indifferent towards religion: “Buddhists, Shintoists, they do not know themselves what they are, or rather, they are one or the other, or even both, depending upon time or occasion,” writes André Bellesort, an essayist, traveler, and member of the Académie Française.³ In general, Bellesort regards Shinto more favorably than Buddhism. “One [Shintoism] breathes primitive innocence and the bountifulness of things (*la bonté des choses*); the other [Buddhism] exhales an infinite sadness and an odor of ashes.” Regarding the importance of Shinto in the life of the Japanese, Bellesort maintains:

Shintoism is not only the worship of the Imperial Majesty; it is also the religion of Japanese nationalism. [...] Young children are presented to the protecting Shinto deity when they visit the local sanctuary (*miya*). Whatever religion they choose—Confucianism, Buddhism, or even foreign religions—the Japanese soul will keep forever the vainglorious and naïve imprint of the former gods of the country.⁴

GEORGE BOUSQUET: OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS OF A TRAVEL-ETHNOGRAPHER

Bellesort’s statements on Japanese religion seem to reflect the perspective of George Bousquet (1846–1937) whose influence on French travelers to Japan has been profound. Apart from Gustave Boissonade de Fontarabie (1825–1910), who was charged with drafting the Japanese penal and civil code in the Meiji era, George Bousquet is probably the best-known French

2. Beillevaire 2000, p. 214.

3. Bellesort 1902, p. 189.

4. Bellesort 1902, p. 197.

legal scholar sent to Japan. As a legal adviser to the Japanese government, the young Bousquet—he was only twenty-seven years old when he arrived—stayed in Japan from 1872 to 1876. Together with Boissonade he taught French language and law at several Japanese law schools that had been established shortly before his arrival.

In spite of his juridical preoccupations, Bousquet was fond of long journeys and traveled widely in Japan. He could not access the remote provinces of the empire without Japanese guides but in contrast to “ordinary travelers” he commanded some elementary Japanese. *Le Japon de nos jours et les échelles de l'Extrême-Orient*,⁵ the book I would like to present briefly, is Bousquet’s best-known work and one of the most read reports on Japan at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶ In the foreword to this eyewitness account, he writes that he discovered “a civilization older, equally sophisticated, and not less mature than ours.” While not an ethnographer by academic training, Bousquet stresses the necessity of observing the country firsthand before trying to understand its political and social system: “If one wants to learn about the political and social conditions of Japan, it is first necessary to go across the land, visit temples, study the inhabitants and their customs, question its institutions, and gradually penetrate up to the very heart of the race.”⁷ Spending time among the common people is the prerequisite to discover “the secret of the primitive customs and the original civilization of Japan,” meaning the customs and manners as they were in ancient Japan. In the following narrative, however, Bousquet tends to emphasize the vices and shortcomings

5. “Today’s Japan and the Scales of the Far East.” Bousquet 1877, two volumes of 428 and 469 pages respectively. The chapter “Religion” first appeared in *Revue des deux Mondes* (Bousquet 1876, p. 297–341) under the title “La religion au Japon. La rivalité du shintô et du bouddhisme, le dogme chrétien devant les philosophes japonais.”

6. This wide readership is one reason why I take this author as a representative of the “informed travelers” to Japan of the time. Other examples include George Weulersse (1903), a historian and holder of a scholarship from the French government, active in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century, or the above-mentioned André Bellesort (1902), correspondent from Japan for *Revue des deux Mondes* in 1895. On French travelers to Japan, see the valuable anthology edited by Patrick Beillevaire (2001).

7. Bousquet 1877 (vol. 1), pp. 48–49.

of the Japanese rather than their good qualities.⁸ His ethnographic approach notwithstanding, he even looks at times with contempt on Japanese culture and society.

The structure of the book is quite unusual, since it combines descriptions of the country with personal reflections. While the first part of the first volume is entitled “Outside(s)” (*Les Dehors*) and the second part “Internal Life” (*La Vie interne*), in fact all kinds of ethnographic observations—based not only on Bousquet’s travel records, but also on moral, economic, political, artistic, and religious considerations, not free from value judgments—appear indiscriminately throughout the entire text. A kind of appendix added to the end of the book explains its subtitle, “Scales of the Far East”; it is the account of the author’s long return “from Yedo to Paris” by way of Hong Kong, Canton, Macao, Manila, Singapore, Java, Ceylon, and Aden.

In his general introduction to Shinto, Bousquet writes about the resurrection of “pure Shinto,” which he defines as “the cosmogonical and religious theory that attributes a divine origin to the ‘mikadonian race’ [sic].” He wonders “with many sinologists, whether the *kami* (or ‘spirits’) cult finds its historical root in primitive Chinese religion with which Shinto presents striking analogies.”⁹ On the other hand, he relates Shinto myths to classical Greek mythology, since both share a similar kind of pantheism. In spite of many oversimplifications, his observations are quite original since they consist of two kinds of discourse: a learned discourse based on published sources (which he sometimes forgets to mention) and a discourse drawn from his personal experiences. Based on his observations of Shinto ceremonies Bousquet maintains that Japan’s primitive cults are little more than elementary forms of ritualism. Noting the absence of pious ceremonies at regular intervals as in the monotheistic religions of Europe, he writes: “Every single *kami* has one or several days dedicated to its memory, during which the people are engaged in festivities around the *kami*’s temple or ‘*miya* 社’ (sic): they do not revere the *kami*, they honor him.”¹⁰ He adds that a great number of these *miya* are abandoned or closed, and that the others are run by simple laymen who are their caretakers.

8. For this peculiar point, see Siary 1990. On Bousquet’s work in general, see also the critical review by Thomas Baty in *Monumenta Nipponica* (Baty 1953, pp. 70–72), an important contribution on European sources of knowledge about Japan.

9. Bousquet 1877 (vol. 2), p. 68.

10. Bousquet 1877 (vol. 2), p. 71.

According to Bousquet, Shinto does not “move” the Japanese and does not count among their major preoccupations. “The *kami* way is filled with shortcomings”: it teaches nothing (apart from ancestor worship) and lacks a code of morality or rules of behavior because “according to the learned Shinto theologians, the inhabitants of the empire of the rising sun, having been created by the gods, naturally possess the knowledge of good and evil.” Bousquet, however, concludes from this lack of an explicit moral code that “One can see how the absence of a moral law leads to the theory of passive obedience.” He goes on to describe in great detail the concrete measures taken by the Meiji government in order to restore *kami* cults to the detriment of Buddhism. To give just one example, he deals quite extensively with a ceremony held July 17, 1873, at the Shiba temple (Zōjōji 増上寺) in Tokyo where Shinto emblems—a mirror and a sacred paper strip (*gohei* 御幣)—were installed “in place of the foreign idols,” i.e., Buddhist statues.

In line with his conviction that the visible manifestations of religion must be studied among the people, Bousquet traveled not only to regions open to foreigners but also remote areas, and reported on pilgrimage sites, Shinto and Buddhist funerals, ancestor cults, and annual events (*nenjū gyōji* 年中行事). These ethnographical notes are dotted with severe criticism of Japanese religiosity—the “primitive cult” (Shinto) is described as a kind of “obtuse paganism”—and its relatively weak influence on contemporary Japanese society in general.

As Bousquet saw it, “there is no possibility that Shinto will ever take the place of the ‘great religion’ [Buddhism],¹¹ as professed by a large majority of the Japanese, because to this end it would need a symbol, a dogma, a moral doctrine, everything that gives vitality to and facilitates the propagation of a religious faith” (p. 78). Concerning the place of the Japanese emperor within Shinto ideology, Bousquet, in line with most essays written in France at the time, maintains that it will hardly continue in the years to come, even if the emperor’s divinity is often mentioned. Instead, he notes that “in order to follow the ‘*kami* way’ it suffices to obey the Mikado’s will. This is how the absence of a moral law leads to the theory of a passive obedience” (p. 76). Although this “*politique* of Shinto,” to use Bousquet’s terminology, has not

11. This is not to say that Bousquet regards Buddhism as a better religion than Shinto. While recognizing its capacity to attract people, he denies its merit for the individual, Buddhism being a religion of “vanity,” “nothingness,” and “illusion.”

been respected by “men in high positions, who often deceived the imperial majesty,” he adds that this “dogma” has nevertheless remained, as it were, rooted in the popular consciousness.

Bousquet’s description of the religious situation less than ten years after the political revolution that, in principle at least, restored the emperor to power and established a kind of civic ideology around him, is again in congruence with other French travelers’ accounts of the time:

While Buddhism is Japan’s dominant religion, there is, strictly speaking, no state religion. According to variations in political circumstances, one kind of worship can be favored more than another; but none is the object of exclusive protection. [...] The government is laic and worries very little about the “state of consciousness.” From its point of view, there is one single dogma that replaces all religious dogmas, namely the infallibility of power.¹²

This interpretation presupposes the priority of the collective versus the individual. “Incapable of formulating a line of conduct for himself, the private individual is readily subjected to the line imposed on him” (p. 129). The close connection between religious indifference on the one hand and full devotion to authority on the other is indeed one of the commonplaces in the descriptions of Japanese manners of the time. It can be found, for instance, in Rudolf [Rodolphe] Lindau’s *Un Voyage autour du Japon* (published in Paris, 1864), which may have been one of Bousquet’s sources of information.

In addition, Bousquet mentions the difficulties Christianity encountered in Japan and predicts nothing good about its future. All in all he seems extremely pessimistic concerning the potential for Christianity’s success in Japan: “We should accept that there are peoples who do not worry about Christianity.”¹³ Bousquet seems to reach this conclusion not so much from

12. Bousquet 1877 (vol. 2), p. 126.

13. Bousquet 1877 (vol. 2), p. 132. Bousquet even provides a detailed review of the violently anti-Christian manifesto *Benmō* by the eminent late Edo Confucian scholar Yasui Chūhei (aka Sokken, 1799–1876), quoting an English translation by John Gubbins, which was published in Yokohama in 1875 as “*Bemmo*”, or an “*Exposition of Error*”: *Being a Treatise Directed against Christianity* (Bousquet, 1877 [vol. 2], pp. 120–25). Since there was also a German translation done at the same time, there must have been considerable interest in the work by the foreign community.

the Japanese adherence to Shinto or Buddhist cults, but rather from the absence of a moral system. This criticism may have been related to his work as a legal adviser to the Japanese government. According to Bousquet, the Japanese lack what only Christianity could bring them: a doctrine of good and evil. For want of this knowledge, they are “incapable of great virtues.”

MICHEL REVON: SHINTO MYTHS “IN THE LIGHT OF COMPARATIVE SCIENCE”

Michel Revon (1867–1943) left his mark on the history of Japanese studies in France as the first holder of chair of “Japanese civilization,” established in 1920, at the Faculté des Lettres of the University of Paris, where Revon taught Japanese literature and history.¹⁴ A brilliant jurist and a doctor in law, Revon had been invited by the Japanese government to come to Japan as a legal adviser to the Ministry of Justice, succeeding Georges Appert, another French jurist. During his stay 1893 to 1899, he also taught French law at Tokyo’s Imperial University (Teikoku Daigaku). At the same time, Revon became interested in Japanese culture and began to research Japanese literature, religion, and art history (in 1896, he even completed a doctoral thesis on the painter Hokusai, which he sent to the University of Paris). After his return to France in 1899, he became active in various academic circles. Besides a widely acclaimed anthology of Japanese literature (Revon 1910), he published several studies on *norito* (Revon 1908a, 1908b, 1913) and an imposing work on Shinto mythology (Revon 1904, 1907), which I take as the main source for my analysis of his views of Shinto.

Initially, Michel Revon envisioned his study of Shinto as the first volume, entitled *Primitive Japan*, of a comprehensive history of Japanese civilization. He changed his plans, however, since this would imply that Shinto was a primitive cult rather than a proper “religion” in the general understanding of the time. Revon was extremely critical of such a conception. He considered it inconceivable that a people as advanced as the Japanese should have existed entirely without religious dogmas, sacred books, or moral codes, as, for instance, Basil H. Chamberlain had maintained in his *Things Japanese*

14. A chair in Japanese language had been established already in 1863 at the École des Langues Orientales; the initial appointee was Léon de Rosny, 1837–1914.

(1890). Revon therefore decided to deepen his knowledge of Shinto based on the abundant research published by his predecessors and on recent findings in the field of history and ethnography of religion. In the end, however, he focused less on issues of dogma or morality than on an attempt to recover Shinto's original character as a "natural religion."

Revon's conception of Shinto started from the hypothesis that "its national side lets us penetrate the spirit of Japanese civilization, while its universal side could cast some light on the general history of religions, as soon as it is illuminated by scientific comparison."¹⁵ To these ends, he planned to restore primitive Shinto by separating it from "forgeries" and "sophistications" and then to compare its numerous myths and rituals with mythologies and religious practices from other cultures. This is the method Revon followed in his studies of *norito* rituals. One can perceive here the influence of Ernest Satow¹⁶ — the "first of the Japanists," as Revon calls him — whose ambition was to demonstrate that Shinto could have been the oldest of the "natural religions" of humanity.¹⁷

Revon's scientific project is therefore to "study Shinto in the light of comparative science." Writing about the sacred books of Japan and the rituals recorded in them, Revon notes: "These religious rites reveal today a meaning that neither indigenous commentators nor European translators have been able to grasp until now."¹⁸ His plan was to study first "the theoretical, then the practical side of this primitive religion, i.e., Shinto gods on the one hand, Shinto rituals on the other."¹⁹ In the end, however, he did not find the time to write the planned second volume on rituals and just gave an outline of his as-

15. Revon 1907, pp. 14–15.

16. Articles by Ernest Satow (1843–1929), such as "The Revival of Pure Shiñ-tau" (Satow 1875) or "Ancient Japanese Rituals" (Satow 1879–1981) published in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, were a profound source of influence on Revon's reflection about "real Shinto," or, in Satow's words, "the belief actually held and the rites practised by the Japanese people before the introduction of Buddhism and the Chinese Philosophy" (Satow 1879–1881 [part I], p. 95).

17. Revon's approach also shows parallels with that of W. G. Aston, whose own study of Shinto, *Shinto: The Way of the Gods*, was published in 1905, or with the approach of Karl Florenz (see Bernhard Scheid's chapter in this volume, pp. 237–39). Of course, Revon differs with Aston on the interpretation of specific points, as for instance the nature of *norito*.

18. Revon 1913, p. 23.

19. Revon 1913, pp. 16–17.

sumptions in his studies on *norito* published in 1908 and 1913. In the lineage of Frazer, Tylor, and Mauss, and faithful to the distinction drawn between magic and religion, Revon considered *norito* (“the central point of ancient worship”), not as “prayers”—the term by which they were rendered in English by the pioneers of Japanese studies—but as “magic formulas,” i.e., “an order, or an action forced on the gods, making it possible to tame them.”²⁰ Revon based this interpretation on examples drawn from different peoples and civilizations, especially ancient Greece and India.

For Revon, the supernatural world of the gods was a mirror of the natural world as the Japanese in the ancient past observed or imagined it. In this sense, study of the gods will naturally lead to a study of ancient Japan. Thus, Revon, who was actually a good philologist with a solid sociological and ethnographical background, embarked on a “systematic” investigation of Shinto deities, comprising their origins, types, nature, geographical environment, and history. The proposed method was as follows: First, one should study the old documents as raw materials without any influence from commentators; second, one should compare the religious ideas of the Japanese within time and space, thereby “casting light on the ancient documents with the use of contemporary beliefs [...]” However, “to avoid any confusion with Buddhist and Confucian concepts, one must observe these beliefs only among common people, preferably in remote villages that still preserve their old customs.”²¹

This stress on folklore studies appears to resemble the approach of Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 (1875–1962), but Revon’s and Yanagita’s aims were actually diametrically opposed to each other. Whereas Yanagita tried to rediscover specifically Japanese ancient beliefs (*koyū shinkō* 固有信仰) by studying the practices of the common people (*jōmin* 常民), Revon—in accordance with Satow—expected to find one of the “natural religions” of humanity in “ancient Shinto.” Thus, Revon’s Shinto gods are ultimately the gods “of all the primitive religions, sharing the same origin, the same evolution, and the same myths” (p. 17).

Confronted with an abundance of deities—“nature gods” and “spirit-gods,” “naturistic gods” and “animistic gods,” “precise gods related to some natural object” and “amorphous gods wandering in the invisible world”—Revon employs a highly sophisticated classificatory system consisting of two

20. Revon 1908b, p. 214.

21. Revon 1907, p. 16, note 1.

general categories: “well-identified gods with a name deriving from natural phenomena” and “animistic gods and indistinct or anonymous spirits.” These categories are further subdivided into more specific types defined by secondary characteristics. Some of these specific types seem related to his personal fondness of literature.²² For example “myths that do not aim to satisfy a desire for knowledge, but simply a pleasure to tell stories,” a pleasure that constitutes a “common heritage of humanity” according to Revon.

The critical apparatus that accompanies Revon’s text is impressive. In an abundant number of footnotes, sometimes covering up to 90 percent of the entire page, Revon not only compares Shinto cults and customs with examples from other civilizations, but also discusses different points of view advanced by other scholars. In one case, for instance, Revon devotes a footnote of three consecutive pages (pp. 27–29) to the description of a meeting of the Hikaku Shūkyō Gakkai 比較宗教学会 (the first Japanese society for the study of comparative religions, established in 1896), held in Tokyo in 1899. In this meeting, the etymology of the term *kami* was discussed with great vigor.

In his report of this meeting, Revon echoes ideas about the “feeble religious feelings” of the Japanese that we have already encountered above with Bousquet and others: “They have an easy but not very fervid piety. They venerate rather than revere. They are simply courteous towards the gods as they are towards everything *superior*.”²³ The difficulty of defining the term *kami* reflects this indifference, according to Revon. He goes on to comment on no less than ten explanations of *kami* based on the etymology of this word, including one by Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 and another by Takahashi Gorō 高橋五良, quoted from the latter’s work *Shintō shinron* 神道新論, published in 1880. Coming back to the 1899 meeting, Revon further reports that “the Japanese scholars parted without being able to find a conclusion” and summarizes their debate as follows: “All in all, these etymologies are of later invention, and the only acceptable etymology is the one based on the general meaning of the word *kami* in the Japanese language, which simply means by *kami* ‘superior’” (p.28).

22. Indeed, Revon is better known and praised in France for his *Anthologie de la littérature japonaise des origines au XXe siècle*, published in 1910, than for his work on Japanese religions and rituals.

23. Revon 1907, p. 27; emphasis in the original.

Such a conclusion follows Revon's motto: "Find the original element under the varnish of civilization." Thus, Revon tries to eliminate the Chinese elements. After arriving at a "pure Shinto" in this way, he connects its elements, such as the worship of the sun or the moon, to contemporary Japanese practices. By doing so, he hopes to be able to link Shinto texts and Shinto rituals with the cosmogonical myths of other peoples. Yet his ultimate aim to demonstrate the universalism of Japanese religious creeds and behaviors sometimes leads him to ungrounded generalizations. If, for instance, some foreign scholars maintain that a given myth is of Chinese origin while Japanese scholars insist on its native character, Revon takes this as evidence that the myth in question is "Chinese and Japanese at the same time" and therefore "universal." On the whole, Revon wants to remind us that Japanese myths contain too many universal characteristics to be able to determine independent origin or specific influence, for "the natural evolution of Shinto seems to us [...] similar to that of all the primitive religions."²⁴ For him, the life of the gods should be seen as a mirror of the material, moral, and social life of the first inhabitants of Japan.

Revon regards himself as a faithful chronicler of a lost world that died with the introduction of Buddhism, or rather, the introduction of elements from continental civilization. In the last chapter of his book, which is given the somewhat nostalgic title "The end of the gods," Revon maintains that Buddhist or Confucian doctrines should have been refuted from the very moment they entered Japan: "As soon as Buddhism appears, Shinto is lost, [...] as can be demonstrated by the fact that] from the middle of the sixth century, foreign influences affect the old pantheon and bring it to ruin."²⁵ In this short chapter, he summarizes all the "strange metamorphoses" of Shinto, from the invention of "riyôbou-shinntô" and the continental influence of "Yinn and the Yang" and the "Yih-king" to the awkward zeal of Motoori and Hirata who "bring close to them the opponent that they intend to overturn." Then, regarding the religious situation of the modern period, Revon concludes: "But quite to the contrary, the savage apostles of religious nationalism accepted everything from abroad that they seemed to want to exclude. They felt that the unpolished religion of their forefathers could not satisfy modern intelligence" (p. 388). Between the lines, one can feel that Revon hoped for a true

24. Revon 1907, p. 58.

25. Revon 1907, p. 383.

recovery of Shinto, but was frustrated in this by the continuous emergence of other religious currents—the revival of pure Shinto by the Wagakusha 和学者, the preachers of Shingaku 心学, and the first new religions (Tenri-kyō 天理教 and Renmon-kyō 連門教)—which, gradually, from the eighteenth century, bereaved Shinto of its authentic attributes, starting with its “antique divine figures.” “It is in vain that the Japanese government, after the Meiji Revolution of 1868, tried to build up again these fallen deities” (p. 389). The attempt to reconstruct original Shinto in order “to increase the glory of the dynasty was useless.”

All in all, Revon says little about the religious situation of Japan at his time. Although he took the opportunity to present his general view on modern Japan at a conference held in 1904 at the Sorbonne, he scarcely mentioned religious aspects. He simply pointed out the vanity of the efforts of “our missionaries” to preach Catholicism to a people that does not need a “new Church” in that the Meiji government had just enacted the full separation of Buddhism (Revon calls it the “official church”) from the state.²⁶ In the concluding remarks of *Le Shinntoïsme*, he notes sadly that the forced conversion to the “new worship” did not change a single thing in people’s attitudes: they continue to preserve their “Buddhist superstitions.” While the Meiji Restoration, “this daring attempt,” had been successful from a political point of view, it failed in its approach to religious matters, since the “official worship did not have any echo inside people’s heart.”²⁷ Nevertheless, Revon continues to believe that in spite of the abandonment of the former gods and “the death of the old Shinto for ever, the heart of the Japanese remains faithful to the spirit of this religion [Shinto]. [...] The two thousand year old sun always glitters on the mountains of the divine archipelago” (p. 391).

In conclusion, Revon differs from Bousquet and Martin, to be discussed below, in that his work exhibits strong personal feelings and great sympathies for Japan and its culture. Published in a period of intellectual effervescence in the social sciences, when several schools had already investigated a host of religious materials from ancient or non-Western cultures and begun to discuss problems of methodology—not to speak of the controversies surrounding totemism or the concept of magic—Revon’s writings on Shinto did not receive much praise. Marcel Mauss, for instance, wrote in a short but

26. Revon 1904, p. 26.

27. Revon 1907, p. 390.

extremely critical review of *Le Shinntoïsme* in *L'Année sociologique*: “Mr. Revon continues the publication of his general articles on Shintoism. They are mainly directed towards mythology and the identification of gods. This second-hand work is merely a collection of references, and its only originality lies in its—sometimes inaccurate—comparisons with other religions.”²⁸

JEAN-MARIE MARTIN: A STUDY OF SHINTO MYTHS BASED ON JAPANESE SOURCES

The missionary Jean-Marie Martin was born in 1886 in a small village belonging to the diocese of Tarbes, in the Pyrenees. In 1903, he entered the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, a Roman Catholic missionary order. Two months after his ordination to the priesthood in March 1910, he left France and went to Japan (Nagasaki). Apart from military service during the First World War, he remained in Japan until his death in 1975 in Fukuoka. Gifted with great linguistic and intellectual talents, he studied Japanese under Father Eugène Joly (1871–1966) in Miyazaki, but it was while working with Father Emile Raguet (1854–1929)—famous for his useful French-Japanese dictionary and his excellent translation of the New Testament into classical Japanese (*bungotai* 文語体)—that Martin decided to devote himself to the study of Shinto. During a long stay in Southern Kyushu (Kagoshima, Moji, Kumamoto), he frequently met Buddhist monks as well as Shinto priests and began to develop a specific interest in Shinto. After several years of textual research, he finally published his views on Shinto in two volumes that appeared in 1924 and 1927 respectively.²⁹ In 1938 he was called back to the Fukuoka Mission in order to prepare an enlarged edition of Father Raguet’s dictionary. To this work, which was to become his opus magnum, he dedicated fifteen years.

28. Mauss 1906, p. 295. In the same review, written after the first edition of *Le Shintoïsme*, Mauss is, by contrast, quite enthusiastic about a lengthy article on Japanese literature by Claude Maître (Maître 1903–1904): “The principal sociological results are interesting assumptions regarding the formation of the mythological and ritual tradition of Japan, and particularly about the importance of the myths and legends of the clans and the great noble families of these clans.”

29. *Le Shintoïsme, religion nationale. I. Les Origines. Essais d'histoire ancienne du Japon* (1924) and part 2, *Le Shintoïsme ancien* (1927).

As regards Shinto, Martin asked an apparently simple question: Is Shinto a religion? The question became complicated, however, since the official answer by the Japanese Ministry of Education was that “Shinto is not a religion; it is only the civil worship of the dynasty’s ancestors, the great men of Japan, and the known or unknown heroes who died for the protection of the country.”³⁰ Under this pretext, the government justified enforced visits of shrines and reverences to their *kami* (*jinja sanpai* 神社参拝) especially at schools and universities, in spite of the general freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution of 1889. Like most other Christians, Martin was especially concerned about the obligation to do *jinja sanpai* also at private Christian schools.³¹ He even notes in the foreword to his second volume on Shinto the courageous behavior of Professor Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 of the Imperial Tokyo University who “did not hesitate to support the Christian missionaries’ claims” against these visits.³²

Thus, the official doctrine of “nonreligious Shinto” became the very reason for Father Martin to take up the study of Shinto: “Since pagan Japanese are not qualified to decide whether Shinto is a religion or not, the only method likely to provide results is to question the texts.” To this end, the author compiles diverse elements from these ancient texts. In his view, this was the only successful route to comprehend Shinto beliefs and practices: “It is impossible to understand modern Shinto, if we do not know first the ancient Shinto which survives in it, and its understanding supposes already a certain introductory knowledge of the history of primitive Japan and of its civilization.”³³

As regards Martin’s sources, he notes that with the exception of a few works by Western scholars such as Chamberlain, Aston, and Revon, he relied primarily on Japanese texts and scholarship. He used the conventional Kōgakuin 皇学院 editions of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as his most important

30. Quoted from Martin 1927 (foreword), pp. 1–2. The citation sums up the central point of a draft sent to the Committee for the Study of Religious Administration (Shūkyō Seido Chōsakai), which was set up in May 1926 and included Sect Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian representatives, as well as administrative officials and other important figures.

31. On Christian reactions to *jinja sanpai*, see also Kate Wildman Nakai’s contribution to this volume.

32. Martin 1927, Foreword, p. i.

33. Martin 1924, p. 3.

primary sources and works by Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 (*Kojiki oyobi Nihon Shoki no shin-kenkyū* 古事記及び日本書紀の新研究) and Tsuda Keibu 津田敬武 (*Shintō no kigenron* 神道の起源論) for an analysis of history and mythology. For Japanese prehistory, he relied heavily on the work of the noted anthropologist and archaeologist Torii Ryūzō 鳥居龍藏 (1870–1953) who was also a Catholic (*Yūshi izen no Nippon* 有史以前乃日本). In addition, he dealt critically with the following authors and theories: Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725) and his euhemeristic theory according to which the “gods” of the myths were human rulers who had been apotheosized by later generations; Kume Kunitake 久米邦武 (1839–1931) and his reinterpretation of the “Divine Age” (*jindai* 神代); Ishikawa Sanshirō 石川三四郎 (1876–1956), a socialist historian for whom Japanese mythology is permeated by Semitic elements (*Kojiki shinwa no shin-kenkyū* 古事記神話の新研究); and Kimura Takatarō 木村鷹太郎 (1870–1931), a controversial historian and philosopher who situated the origins of the Japanese people in Western Asia and likened biblical characters to the *kami* and to Japanese legendary heroes (*Yasokyo no Nihon-teki kenkyū* 耶蘇教の日本的研究).

Based on these sources, Martin sketches a brief history of ancient Japan, commenting especially on the Chinese contributions to Japanese civilization. Shinto appears to him as a set of beliefs, superstitions, and customs that incorporated new Buddhist elements and were thus gradually modified. These “infiltrations of Buddhist thought”³⁴ are demonstrated, for example, in his analysis of *norito* dedicated to the emperors and to deified heroes. He also points out that Japanese modern historians tend to regard mythological legends, such as the descent of the divine grandchild (*tenson kōrin* 天孫降臨) or the conquests by Jinmu Tennō, not as “remains buried in old writings” but as narratives of real events. As an example, Martin quotes a passage from a primary school textbook (*kōtō shōgakkō* 高等小学校)—probably a simplified paraphrase of the Imperial Rescript on Education—according to which the divine commandment to rule the earth by Amaterasu to her grandson Ninigi is the fundament of the imperial bloodline’s destiny to rule the nation “as long as the sky and the earth exist.”

According to Martin, the profound contempt Japanese have always professed against foreigners (the *nanbanjin* 南蛮人 of the sixteenth century) is constituent of this civil morality inculcated in school children through his-

34. Martin 1924, p. 59.

tory and moral textbooks teaching that “Japan is a unique country in the world, outside and above the common law which governs the universe; Japanese school children are the sons of the gods.”³⁵ Already in ancient times, the Yamato court used religion “to maintain the allegiance of the conquered peoples.” The author deduces from *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that “all the myths manifestly intend to make people think with great conviction that the imperial dynasty has received the mission to govern the country from heaven” (p. 93). Considering the beginning of the “historical period” of Japan, Martin describes at length the introduction of Buddhism and the great reforms of Taika with the purpose to help the reader to get a better understanding of these politico-religious events, “insofar as they can shed light on Shinto history.” Thus, it is against Buddhism and Confucianism that he imagines Emperor Tenmu—who revered Buddha and his doctrine—giving Shinto its sacred books because, as he writes, “Shinto should not undergo any eclipse.” As a skillful man of faith (did not Buddhism spread thanks to its canonical writings?), but also as a fine connoisseur of politics, Father Martin describes Emperor Tenmu as a man of great vision. He regards the preface (*jobun* 序文) of the *Kojiki* as proof of that vision.

Martin does not deny the existence of a moral sense in Shinto (“It is highly improbable, at first glance, that the Japanese people, so gifted with feelings, lacked a moral sense”), but adds in the same vein how imperfect this moral sense was. Fortunately, Shinto morals benefited much from Buddhism and Confucianism, which “improved the general manners of the Japanese society exceptionally.”³⁶ In the course of this argument, he criticizes W. G. Aston’s derogatory view of Shinto ethics.³⁷ Finally, Martin tends to the opinion that the gods are not indifferent to individual moral behavior, for they remove sins (*tsumi* 罪) and pollutions (*kegare* 穢れ) from the faithful through purification rites such as *harae* 祓 and *misogi* 禊 ceremonies.

In contrast to continental Shamanism (Siberian and, to some extent, Korean), which consists in Martin’s view merely of exorcism and divina-

35. Martin 1924, p. 75.

36. Martin 1927, p. 100–102.

37. Martin disapproves especially of the following statement by Aston: “There is no stronger proof of the rudimentary character of Shinto than the exceedingly casual and imperfect sanction which extends to altruistic morality. It has scarcely anything in the nature of ethics” (Aston 1905, *Shinto, the Way of the Gods*, cited in English in Martin 1927, p. 104).

tion, Shinto fully justifies its appellation “way of the gods.”³⁸ Thus, Martin maintains that Shinto polytheism is superior to the polydemonism of North Asian people. This differentiation is based on the evolutionist theories of the time applied to the Japanese case. Even if Martin does not mention it, he must have been aware of Katō Genchi’s *A Study of Shinto, the Religion of the Japanese Nation* (Katō 1926). In this much praised work, Katō employs several dual categories of classification, drawing a picture of Shinto development through different phases, such as, among others, polydemonism and polytheism. Considering the wealth of materials at his disposal, Martin could have easily avoided the reproduction of such unfortunate judgments on the beliefs and cults of the various peoples that immigrated to the Japanese archipelago.³⁹

In a last passage on “the vicissitudes of Shinto through history,” Martin deals with the difficulties Shinto had to release itself from the pernicious influences of foreign systems of thought and forms of worship, such as, in Martin’s words, “the infiltrations of Chinese superstitions in the ritual,” or

38. Martin 1927, p. 278.

39. As mentioned, Martin notes from time to time, that he relies exclusively on Japanese sources, except for two or three Western scholars such as Aston, Chamberlain, or Revon. If we look at the further development of French studies on the Japanese religious worldview in relation to Shinto mythology during the twenties and thirties, we first encounter Charles Haguenauer (1896–1976), the “father” of French japonology. One can mention “L’adresse du dignitaire de la province d’Izumo” (Haguenauer, 1929) and more generally his *Selected Studies* on religion (Haguenauer 1977). In addition, we have to turn our gaze to two young Japanese scholars who studied in France during this period: Matsumoto Nobuhiro 松本信広, a former student of Marcel Mauss who published in French an important study on the analogies of Japanese mythology with Asia meridional countries (Matsumoto 1928), and Matsudaira Narimitsu 松平齊光, Doctor of Paris University, who studied myths and Japanese beliefs from the point of view of folklore, with publications referring mainly to *matsuri* festivals (Matsudaira 1955). In an article on the god Susanoo and the relations between mythology and folklore studies published in 1959, Cornelius Ouwehand writes about Matsumoto’s study that it “still offers the most reliable and intelligent survey of Japanese mythology now at our disposal in any Western language” (Ouwehand 1959, pp. 384–85). In the same article, he also praises at length the importance of Matsudaira’s research on Japanese festivals for a better understanding of the Japanese gods (*ibid.*, pp. 402–403). On Matsumoto, see also Hirafuji Kikuko’s chapter in this volume, pp. 82–85.

“the invasion of Buddhism,” or Chinese Confucianism, the particular influence of which is often pointed out. From such statements we can clearly infer that Martin analyzes the present situation (the 1920s) of Shinto through the lens of contemporary Japanese historians. This leads him to the conclusion that “the Kannushi and the Kangakusha are about to set free Shinto from Buddhistic influence,” and that “the Wa(gaku)sha 和(学)者 are completing the patriotic work of liberation by cutting the mooring ropes which have until today connected Shinto to Chinese philosophy.”⁴⁰ According to Martin, “when Meiji Tennō, playing the role of Jinmu, restores Shinto in its original purity, all the preliminary works of criticism and clearing had been fulfilled.”

HESITANT STEPS ON THE PATH TO SHINTO STUDIES

What can be inferred from these three contributions to the French “prehistory” of Shinto studies? Do they justify the optimistic judgment that Eustace Haydon (1880–1975), a pioneer in the study of world religions, expressed in 1926? In a useful summary of recent progress in the field of religious studies, he dedicates the following short passage to Japan:

The ancient religion of Japan, submerged for a millennium and a half by Buddhism, was revived as a national religion in the middle of last century. The task of scholarship has been to recover the primitive religion apart from the rationalization and secularization of it in the modern period. The criticism of the texts of the Kojiki and Nihonji [*Nihongi*] has begun. Revon has shown the nature of the Norito as spoken charms. [...] Several scholars have attempted to penetrate to the early religion by way of the mythologies.⁴¹

“Secularization” of Shinto would have been indeed an interesting topic to explore, but Revon and Martin, the only French scholars who could have given an account of it, did not pay due attention to the transformations of Shinto. Anglophone authors like Basil Hall Chamberlain (*The Invention of a New Religion*, 1912) or later D. C. Holtom (*The Political Philosophy of Modern Shinto*, 1922), on the other hand, did throw a new light on the complex

40. Martin 1927, p. 347.

41. Haydon 1926, p. 31, originally published in English.

relations between Shinto and the state that resulted in a new configuration of Shinto divided into two parts within which the “national deities”—well researched by Revon and Martin—saw their status strengthened. Martin, the missionary, and Revon, the scholar both studied early Shinto through the mythologies but their backgrounds and aims were different. As a missionary, Martin was concerned with the future of Christianity facing a new form of Shinto. However, he did not take the time to study this new Shinto thoroughly, even if he pointed out the fact that Shinto, as a religion, is based on numerous “temples” (*jinja* 神社) not dedicated to *kami* selected as most important by the government. Furthermore, he seemed aware of the fact that the establishment of State Shinto—i.e., the civil cult that Martin calls the “official religion” of Japan—may make it even more difficult for missionaries to continue “Christian propaganda.” Unfortunately, Martin ended his historical survey of Shinto myths at the threshold of the Meiji era, abandoning his promise to write a second book on modern Shinto.

While Michel Revon is still remembered as a pioneer of Japanese language teaching in France, his work on Shinto is largely ignored. Regarding the methodological tools at his disposal, Revon’s studies of ancient Shinto mythology and ritual (*norito* prayers) may be seen indeed as disappointing. On the other hand, if one considers the scope of his work, the mass of quotations from primary sources and the abundant number of elaborate footnotes, it is quite surprising that nothing of it is cited by Bernard Frank in his seminal overview of “Cinquante ans d’orientalisme en France (1922–1972). Les études japonaises.”⁴²

Bousquet’s contributions to Shinto Studies are certainly the least accurate in terms of scientific methodology and even contain some depreciatory remarks on Japanese culture and religion. However, his vivid ethnographic descriptions provide a keyhole for the understanding of popular religion (Shinto and Buddhist) in the Archipelago. Chronologically older, his work remains a vestige of a certain French curiosity and, at moments, compassion for Japan. Concerning Shinto and its relationship with nationalism, which is the main topic of this volume, Bousquet’s conclusions predict without ambiguity a somber future for Shinto. To be fair, we should add that these visions may be influenced by Bousquet’s difficult experience as a jurist who strove

42. Frank 1973.

with all his energy to change what he perceived as feudal customs and to transform Japanese law accordingly.

In contrast to many ethnographical studies, the emergent “religious studies”—especially in their philological approach—tended to privilege continuation over change. While Bousquet was an impatient intellectual who desired a faster and deeper transformation of Japanese society, Revon and Martin deplored that Japan was willing to strip off what they perceived as its true religious and cultural clothes. They regarded Shinto as the indigenous religion of Japan linked to an immemorial past and looked for the unchanging features of *kami* devotion in the course of history. They did not study Japanese myths to get a better understanding of the present religious situation but to shed light on “ancient Shinto,” which they regarded as the essence of eternal Japan or, to use Father Martin’s expression, as the “true (Shinto) religion.” Both were still considering Shinto as a religion when Shinto was about to transform itself into a national civil cult with the emperor at its apex, as the symbol of an everlasting state.

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