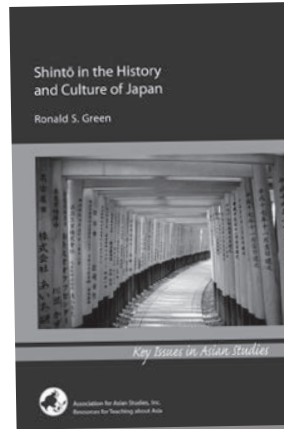


The Many Manifestations of Shintō

By Ronald S. Green, author of the new AAS *Key Issues in Asian Studies*
Volume: *Shintō in the History and Culture of Japan*

As a child, I would gaze at the sky through pine needles in the deep woods of East Tennessee, often overcome with a vague but intense feeling about nature around and inside me. As I grew up, I was attracted to expressions of one's connection to nature in Japanese poetry and cultural histories. I eventually came across Bashō's *Narrow Road to the Deep Interior* in graduate school at the University of Oregon. Bashō traveled around the largest Japanese island, Honshū, molding his impressions into a mesmerizing if fictitious poetic travel log. Looking into this more closely, I found that Bashō wore the robes of Buddhist priests, while his traveling companion, Kawai Sora, was a Shintō scholar interested in finding what old ways survived in small towns and far-off places. In his own diary documenting their self-styled pilgrimage to the deep interior of Japan and their hearts, Sora wrote that he and Bashō prayed at shrines between temple visits. Bashō includes some of Sora's poetry in his own work, such as "the limit of waves—there is a contract in place—with the osprey's nest." Such poems intimating divine instinct attracted me to the study of Shintō in the history and culture of Japan and guided me along the Shikoku Pilgrimage route where temples stand adjacent to shrines.

In the past, it was normal for a shrine and a temple to be together in the same precincts based on the idea of *shinbutsu-shūgō* (kami and



Shintō in the History and Culture of Japan

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Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2020.

108 pages, ISBN: 978-00924304910, Paperback.

www.asianstudies.org/publications

"Ron Green begins his volume with: 'What is Shintō?' A simple question with many possible answers. It's nature worship, a tool of the military, the catalyst for modest and magnificent shrines. It's a religion; it's not a religion. It's Japanese; it's universal. In seven succinct chapters, Professor Green answers his question, leaving the reader nodding with understanding and yearning to learn more."

— Gary DeCoker, Executive Director, ASIANetwork

buddhas syncretism). After the 1868 Meiji Restoration, the government promoted a policy of *shinbutsu bunri*, separation of Shintō kami from their identification with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This was in preparation for promoting Shintō nationalism and a modern example of what I learned was an inseparable connection between the religion and politics from the time it was labeled Shintō and probably before. With *shinbutsu bunri* came a persecution resulting in Buddhist temples being burned or abandoned in Shikoku and elsewhere, and Buddhist priests sometimes walking across the road, switching robes, and becoming Shintō priests at the once-affiliated shrine. All this speaks to the deep connections of Shintō, Buddhism, and Japanese culture in the past and present, as seen in monk Mongaku's Shintō-related austerities beneath a waterfall in the late Heian War epic, *Tales of the Heike* and abundant depictions of miko shrine maidens in anime series from *Ah, My Buddha* to *InuYasha*. If we are to approach the culture of the ephemeral mystery, Sora hints at in his poem of 1689, the enigmatic ceremonies for the sun *kami* Amaterasu during Naruhito's ascension to the Chrysanthemum Throne in 2019, the current unprecedented popularity of the New Year's first shrine visit in a country that ranks near the top of the list of the most nonreligious people in the world, or why Temple 79, Tennoji (Emperor Temple) along the Shikoku Pilgrimage route has no traditional Buddhist gateway but only a Shintō torii, we need to study Shintō. ■

RONALD S. GREEN is Associate Professor of Asian Religions at Coastal Carolina University. He is a specialist in Asian religions with a focus on the history and philosophy of Japanese Buddhism. His research interests and writings include Gomyo and early Japanese Yogacara (Hosso-shu), Kūjī's attempt to reconcile Buddha Nature with Gotra theory, Kūkai's *Ten Abodes of Mind*, *Yogacara*, and *Shingon* in comparative philosophy. He also studies how Buddhism and hagiography are presented along the Shikoku pilgrimage and in popular culture media including film, manga, and contemporary Japanese fiction.

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