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Lucky charms: The Fortune Sold

Spirituality and Marketing in the Selling of Religious Objects in Japan

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A Tokyo e a Venezia

... L'amor che move il Sole
e le altre stelle.

(Dante Alighieri, "La Divina Commedia", *Paradiso 34*)

要旨

日本の宗教の歴史の始まりが、日本の文脈の中で宗教を発展させた人物たちと結びついているように見えるとしても、とりわけ明治時代以降、仏教と神道がどのように実際の宗教の分野に移行していくのかがわかります。

実際、今日、仏教と神道の宗教的実践は、誕生から死、成功から失敗、保護、お金、幸運に至るまで、個人の人生と結びついています。おそらくこれが、日本の宗教がマーケティングや、商品の売買などの生活全般のより世俗的な側面と強力な関係を持っている理由なのかもしれません。

そして、日本における神道と仏教に関連した最も単純な行為、つまり、いくつかの宗教的対象に関連したマーケティングと定義できるものに集中します。関心はまさに、この論文は特にお守り、おみくじ、絵馬、そして御朱印と御朱印帳に焦点を当て、それぞれの歴史、日本の宗教における意味、マーケティングや大衆文化、観光や世俗的な習慣に関連した役割について議論します。

お守りを例にとると、お守りの進化の歴史が実際に人口とその変化にどのように結びついています。お守りは今日に至るまで、日本を訪れる観光客にも大変愛されており、観光客はお守りを通じて日本の宗教そのものを理解することができ、日本の宗教そのものとの仲介役となっています。さらに、それらは、単純な物体を通じてお互いを理解する文化間の架け橋でもあるようです。したがって、お守りという現象が依然として宗教的なものであるかどうか、私

たちは自問しなければなりません。 実際、それを分析すると、観光客がそれを記憶と結びつけ、その物体を通して物象化のプロセスを実行するが、日本人はそれをお守りそのものではなく、お守りをくれた人への愛情と結びつけているようです。

おみくじを考慮してみると、興味深いのは、今日では、オンラインでおみくじを入手できるという事実で、しかし、延暦寺などでは、この運勢を占うための伝統的なプロセスが今でも残っています。 繰り返しになりますが、オンラインおみくじも、一部の寺院で入手する伝統的な方法も、現地にいなくても日本を体験したいという国民の質問への答えを反映しているものであり、また観光客として日本を体験したいという国民の要望に対する答えでもあります。 その起源を理解するために、より深く根付いたおみくじの伝統を学びましょう。

絵馬については、実際に日本人の習慣なのか宗教的行為なのかという議論がすでにあり、この問題について二人の作家が二つの異なる見解を持っています。 以下の署名者の結論は、本人の意図に関わらず、また絵馬を購入した時点では販売行為であるにもかかわらず、絵馬を寺に置くことは宗教行為である。 これは、この実践においてマーケティングと宗教がどのように混ざり合っているかを示す完璧な例です。

寺社仏閣にある代表的な御朱印や御朱印帳は、神道におけるあの世へのパス

ポートであることを知らずに、単に集めたいという理由で購入する人が多くなります。また、木更津市の事例では、御朱印マップを通じて地域の観光客を増やすためのいくつかのアイデアが開発され、観光客が特定のマップを介して御朱印を授与する寺社を見つけることができます。

したがって、結論として、この論文は、お守り、おみくじ、絵馬、御朱印、そして御朱印帳などの日本の宗教的品物の売買において、それらがいかに本質的に宗教自体とマーケティングの両方に結びついているかを示し、私たちの時代は、消費主義とグローバリゼーションの現代からです。

これ自体が単に世俗主義を伴う宗教の発展の結果であることを強調したいと思います。世俗主義は、人々から距離を置くのではなく、より人々の生活と融合し、したがって宗教とその世俗的な側面を分離するのではなく、統合するものです。人々の個性と大衆文化と完全に統合された宗教に向かって進んでいます。

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Introduction and chapters breakdown

Since I came back from Japan one year ago, I think I felt a little bit nostalgic while I was writing this thesis, because one of my favorite things to do in Japan was to go at shrines and temples and have a little prayer or to buy something for me or for my dear ones to have as a souvenir. Maybe this is the most important reason why I decided to write this work, in order to remember and to deepen a little bit into what I left behind while I was in Japan.

In fact, one of the first thing that is highlighted here is what I call the “religiousness” of Japan, for which I mean that part of Japanese religion that everyone can do, without distinctions of nationality or language, which I found so different from other type of religions in which one has to understand the doctrine and the precepts in order to fulfill the comprehension of it.

In the first part of this thesis I wanted to underline the fragment of the Japanese religion that is more similar to a doctrine than to its own practices, that changes drastically getting closer to the Meiji period, and that it ends to be the Japanese Shinto and Buddhist “religiousness” of today, which draws near people and the practices of the everyday life. Moreover, since it is so similar and near the everyday life of Japanese people, it is pretty obvious that it mixes well with the laicity of the life itself, and so also with the marketing and selling.

I was pretty impressed to see this aspect of Japanese religiosity in Japan, because I saw an object to buy every step I took, so I started to wonder why it was like that and in this thesis we try to understand how religion and marketing are blended together in the buy and selling of some of the most famous objects of Japanese religion, also in order to try to understand if these kind of practices are still religious or they are changing into something more pragmatic and secular, instead of keeping just their religious aspects.

So, if one has to think about an object sold in places next to temples and shrines, for example like Asakusa, near Sensoji, the first thing that would come to mind would be the *omamori*, and so they are also the first thing that this thesis will take into consideration. As we will see in the first part of the second chapter, they have been existing since the era of *The Tale of Genji*, because we find some

traces of them even in this work, even though they were very different from the *omamori* we can buy and wear today.¹

Another important aspect this kind of item is that today not only are they appreciated by Japanese people, but also from foreigners and tourists. In fact, it seems that people from other countries buy *omamori* because they feel like they understand better Japanese religion in this way, even if it is said by Japanese people themselves that they do not keep *omamori* because of their religious aspect, but because they were often a gift of someone else for them. In addition, tourists seem to make a process of reification towards the object, because they buy them in order to have a good memory of their travel through the object itself, so we cannot say that a lot of people buy *omamori* because of their religious function or aspect, but also because of some different aspects related to the everyday life of the individual. Even when people buy an *omamori* as a gift, we cannot suppose that the intention is a religious one, since the *omamori* is nowadays a popular souvenir. This is an example of how atheistic and religious aspects of the objects can amalgamate together.²

Another important type of object we could cite is *omikuji*, which are fortune slips of the Japanese culture. When you go to a temple or shrine you can draw one of this little pieces of paper so that you can have advices for your life and future in various aspects of your everyday life. This is the aspect of the object which is more related to Shintoism and Buddhism, but if you ask Japanese people or by doing some researches, you will find out that some *omikuji* are different in variety, designs and styles, there are a lot of them that have the shape of an animal, for example, because that particular animal is the sacred animal of a particular shrine or temple, and so you can easily find out that there are a lot of people that draw *omikuji* just for habit or because they want to have a beautiful collection of them.

Moreover, nowadays technology is so advanced that there always is the “original” way to have *omikuji*, for example at temples like Enryakuji, but on the other hand there also is a way to have them

¹ Cfr. Eric MENDES, "Ancient Magic and Modern Accessories: A Re-Examination of the Omamori Phenomenon." *The Hilltop Review* 7.2 (2015), p. 153

² Cfr. YANYAN Zheng, Xiaoxiao Fu, Mimi Li, "Reification in tourism: An investigation of visitors' interpretation of omamori", *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2022

completely online, thanks to the sites of some temples and shrines, so that people that are not in Japan or do not want to go on a sacred site just to have an *omikuji* can simply draw them at home. Again, this is an example of how religion can blend together with a more atheistic and the everyday life of people, also with technology and the desire to sell them is easily visible when we take into consideration the idea of a collection and of the different designs and styles of the *omikuji* themselves and the idea of the habit of drawing them, instead of the religious significance related to them.³

The third objects taken into consideration is the *ema*, the Japanese votive tablets that people use to express gratitude towards a deity in temples and shrines.

There already is a debate about this object, if it is considered as an habit or a religious activity and the thesis will take this debate into consideration, trying to analyze the ideas of both parts, so that readers can make their own idea in their minds. In fact, what Reader states is that what should be taken into consideration is the fact that the Japanese people themselves state that *ema* are an habit for them, and that the intention behind it is not religious at all, so the conclusion of Reader is that *ema* are not to be taken into consideration as a religious act, but as an habit of Japanese people.

There are other reasons why Reader think that people should not consider *ema* as a religious activity, which is because there are a lot of scenarios in which the “religiosity” of the activity is pretty ambiguous, for example when a friend of his sell *ema* as a gift for his restaurant and it is clear that is not a religious activity in this case, but a simple gift. Another case see another friend of Reader who sells *ema* for living, so he makes *ema* himself and sell them and again, this cannot be seen as a religious act, so Reader concludes that since the intentions of people who buy an *ema* are so often not religious, *ema* should not be considered a religious activity neither. The counterpart, on the contrary,

³ Tiziano TOSOLINI, “Dizionario di Shintoismo”, Monumenta Missionalia, Asian Study Centre, Sergio Targa, 2014; <https://thegate12.com/ip/article/421>; MARUYAMA, S. Omikuji. Sapporo tanoshii jugyō・kenkyū sākuru-yō repōto: Kashutsu jikken jugyō kenkyūkai・Hokkaidō, おみくじ。札幌たのしい授業・研究サークル用レポート 仮説実験授業研究会・北海道, [Omikuji. Sapporo Fun Lessons and Research Circle Report: Hypothetical Experimental Teaching Research Association, Hokkaido], 2010; Japan Wonder Travel Blog, “What is Omikuji?: Complete Guide to Japanese Fortune Slip”, Written 2021.11.10, Update 2022.11.17, Accessed February 06, 2024

says that these examples do not take into consideration the fact that after buying the *ema* people often do a prayer at a temple or a shrine, so that this particular act is in fact religious, if it is taken into consideration as it is and that it is just the act of buying the *ema* that it is not religious.

While the reader can think as they please about this, my idea is that we are again in front of a mix of the two: the action of buying an *ema* is not religious and the intentions of the people might not be religious either, but the act of praying at a temple or a shrine after buying the tables is in fact a religious act.⁴

Last but not least, I thought I would have been important to talk about *goshuin* and *goshuinchō*. The first ones are red seals that you can get at temples and shrines, while the second term refers to the little book where you can collect all your *goshuin*.

If we take them into consideration from a religious point of view, they are a passport of the afterlife in the Buddhist and Shinto religion, but if we talk about the mere aspect of the object, we have to see them as a simple souvenir. I had a *goshuinchō* myself when I was in Japan and I was fascinated by the seals, but I absolutely did not know how they worked from a religious point of view, and like me a lot of my foreigner colleagues at my guest university who had a *goshuinchō* as well. So we may conclude that a lot of people and tourists buy one of this book just to have a collection of *goshuin*, and not because they believe they will have a good afterlife thanks to this collection itself. Also, we can think that people want to make a process of reification out of this, like with *omamori*, and so to link the memory of the travel with the object, in order to have a more vivid memory of it. If it is like this, we have to believe that there is a mix of religion and everyday life here, also because there is the specific case of Kisarazu, in which the idea of a *goshuin* map has been developed in order to make tourists know where they can find temples and shrines that have *goshuin* thanks to a specific *goshuin* map. In this way, we have this concept related directly to tourism.⁵

⁴ Ian READER, "What Constitutes Religious Activity? (II)." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 4 (1991)

⁵ NUNLEY, E. "Goshuinchō: Book of Memories", *Discover Kyoto*, Accessed February 06, 2024; *Live Japan Perfect Guide*, "What is a Goshuin? All About Traditional Japanese Shrine Seals (and why you'll

Analyzing these objects, we can clearly see how religion and everyday life of people are completely blended together, and I think it is good if we want to have a religion which is “of the people”, and not so far from them as a more rigid doctrine could be. I believe in fact it is not a bad thing if religion and life and also marketing and action like buy and selling to mix together, because it means that the religion is coming near people, culture and society, instead of staying far and caring just for doctrines and strict rules.

be addicted to collecting them!)”, Last updated: 26 June 2020, Accessed February 06, 2024; UEMURA Shigeki, “Goshuin MAP ni yoru Kisarazueki Minatoguchi Kankō Shinkō Sakusen”, Tourism promotion by GOSHUIN MAP around Minato-exist of Kisarazu station, Department of Civil Engineering, 2021

Chapter 1- Japanese religiousness and spirituality

Introduction

Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze the religiousness in Japan from the point of view of both marketing and spirituality, I think that the first thing one shall do is to take into consideration the different religions of Japan. In particular, it is crucial to understand both Shintoism and Buddhism, especially through their history, which is so particular.

So, first of all, the first part of this chapter is going to be dedicated to the history of Shintoism, beginning with the connotation of the term, because there are different opinion on it, going through the roots of it and so starting with its mythology in the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀, to go on with some of the most important *kami* 神, like the goddess Amaterasu 天照, and proceeding with the encounter of Buddhism and Shinto. We will continue exploring this religion with Ashikaga period, to pass to the Shinto of the Edo and the Meiji periods, which is particularly important for its own transformation, to end with the Shintoism of the modern times.

In the second part of the chapter, we will analyze Buddhism instead which, differing from Shinto, seems to have a more precise connotation in time. We know that it entered in Japan from Asia, more specifically from China and Korea, and then spread in the country with the Six Schools of Nara, finding its own way into Japanese religion. We will consider Buddhism in the Heian period the Schools of Tendai 天台宗 and Shingon 真言神道 and then the School of the Kamakura period, based on the idea of the Pure Land, which is to say Jōdo 浄土宗 and Jōdoshinshū 浄土真宗, and others like Nichiren 日蓮宗, Rinzai 臨濟宗 and Sōtō 曹洞宗. Going on, we will take into consideration the Muromachi and the Edo periods, ending with the Enlighten of the Meiji period and arriving to today.

The chapter will end with a part that talk about the various practices and religious activities of both Buddhism and Shintoism, so that one can understand both religions into the society of today and how they are related to modern time aspects, like globalization and marketing.

Moreover, the reader will notice how both Buddhism and Shintoism are made in fact of practices

and of people who perform them, especially from the Meiji period on.

1.1- Japanese Religiousness in Shintoism from the Mythology till Today

Introduction

There are different interpretations regarding the role of Shinto through history and culture when one have to speak about the history of Shinto in Japan, so it becomes very difficult to date it through time and history. There is in fact a category of scholars which states that Shinto has always been existing throughout history, living together and even more deeper within Japan population and blending always very well with Buddhism and Confucianism. At the same time, there is a second group that think that whether Shinto existed as a religiousness is irrelevant, because it is believed to go even more in depth in Japanese society, forming an ensemble of beliefs and practices similar to Shinto and called *shinkō* 信仰.¹

In fact, one could say that Shinto could be seen as the main religion of Japan and it is not *wrong* to say so, but the second group abovementioned would state against this view that Shinto has an even more profound significance for Japanese society and that it would go to take into consideration a more particular and peculiar role in Japanese people history, beliefs and even secularity. This category think that Shinto is essentially related to “the will Japanese culture”, a level of “subconscious” in Japanese people, that makes them take their own point of view on things and to blend it with the unique Japanese one. In this sense, Shinto is related to every single cultural moment of every single period, that being the Shinto of that particular moment in time, installed into Japanese point of view on things. Even when coming into contact with Buddhism and Confucianism, Japan would have maintained its own position, blending it with the new religions coming from abroad. Moreover, going on explaining this concept, even further, it would reside even in other aspect of the life of Japanese

¹ Toshio KURODA, James C. DOBBINS, and Suzanne GAY. “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (1981), pp. 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/132163>.

people, in conversation, energy, in the secular aspects of their life and it would come from the State Shinto of the Meiji period and the promulgation of the Constitution. Given that, we will find a miscellaneous nature of this religion, since one can easily understand that a person can be both Buddhist and believe in Shinto at the same time, together with a sense of irrationality, and this could be considered a central characteristic of this kind of religiousness.²

Now, personally I believe that the two views are part of the same thing, reinforce one another, sharing the premise that Shinto existed all throughout history in a way or another. So, following Kuroda, we are going to analyze and talk about Shinto as a series of examples from the mythology and going on with the various period and what is typical of Shinto in every one of them, but as already mentioned above, the important thing to comprehend is that Buddhism and Shintoism have histories that go further than Schools, because they are intrinsically related with human history and how humans *performed* and “did the practice” of that kind of *religiousness*. That is also the reason why I prefer this term instead of “religion”. The history is here reported especially in relation with the people famous in that period for their idea of religion and how this was related to authority, just to show how the religion then declined into a more “practice” religion, especially from the Meiji period, a religion which is more related to people who perform it and the practices involved.³

The mythology of Shinto and the arrival of Buddhism

First of all, in order to understand Shinto, we should first take into consideration the word, which indicates all the indigenous practices and religions of Japan before the arriving of Buddhism from Korea, even if it is extremely difficult to trace back the origin of the term in the ancient autochthonous writings of Japan mythology. For doing so, one should take into consideration the two first and most

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.



Figure 1: Amaterasu no kami⁵

important works that speak about this kind of topic, which is to say *Kojiki* (National Histories, 712) and *Nihon shoki* (720), that both put together ancient myths, legends, and rituals of Japan's “native” religion, principally related to animism and nature and the cultivation of rice.⁴

Talking about mythology, the most famous deity of the Shinto pantheon is Amaterasu, goddess of the Sun, ruler of Heaven and ancestor of the Imperial Family of Japan. So, in the myth, the Heavenly Grandchild came on hearth with three important objects and continue with the first Emperor of Earth, Jinmu Tennō 神武天皇, the descendent of Amaterasu herself. It is interesting also how this mythology is related to objects, as we will see deeper in chapter two, because the three objects of the descent are

jewels, a mirror as a bond and way to exchange and communicate between humans and the goddess, and a sword found in a snake that was threatening the country.⁵

Other works hold mythology about the first emperors, their reigns, their deeds and they are all

⁴ Barbara, ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ PRACTICES UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF CONSUMERISM IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY: THE PERCEPTION OF OMAMORI (TALISMANS) AMONG JAPANESE AND FOREIGNERS. Diss. Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 2015, p. 10; Esmā Büşra, ANKAY, Shintoism and the Japanese State Culture, Marmara University, Istanbul, 2017, p. 2

⁵ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. p. 10; George A. COBBOLD, RELIGION IN JAPAN: SHINTOISM-BUDDHISM-CHRISTIANITY, Kessinger Publishing, Penbrook College, Oxford, 1905, p. 19; This image was first published on Flickr. Original image by Timothy Takemato. Uploaded by Mark Cartwright, published on 11 December 2012.

collected in the “Imperial Records” (*Teiki* 帝紀), which follows the Son of Heaven who tries to explain the activities of everyday life and their origin.⁶

Shintoism could not stand as a religion of its own when Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism first arrived from Korea in Japan in 552, since it easily melted with them, and instead of refusing different gods and spirits came from abroad, Shintoism simply thought that they were all *kami* came from overseas. They were not refused, so the two religions blended together without problems, also because rituals and prayers of Buddhism were seen as fascinating and exotic by Japanese population.⁷

In the seventh century, people in Japan court and upper classes started to adopt Buddhism not only as a way of religion, but also as a manner to merge the power of the state and in the same period, some new figures like itinerate ascetics (*hijiri* 聖) and ascetics of the mountains (*ubasoku* 優婆塞) started to combine Shintoism not only with Buddhism, but also with the Taoist ideas.⁸

In the eighth century Shinto traditions were even more integrated with Buddhist ones, so from the point of view of officiality, it was especially important when the temple-shrines (*jinguuji* 神宮寺) were built in the Nara period. The two doctrines were so integrated with one another that also the places of worship had just become one and were not two different separated places anymore, since the political idea wanted to protect more the Imperial family and the noble people, by putting them under the protection of more *kami* and deities (*chingokokka* 鎮護国家).⁹

During the Kamakura period, some groups tried to emphasize the role of Shinto and Buddhism as different religions, because in their opinion *kami* were not incarnations of Buddhas, but mere manifestations of them, while during the Muromachi shogunate some shrines (which amounted to twenty-two in the eleventh century and were located next to the capital) continued to have the favor

⁶ Ibid, p. 11

⁷ Ibid; Massimo, RAVERI, *Il pensiero giapponese classico*, Torino, Einaudi editore, 2014, pp. 61-63

⁸ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, *THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ...*, cit. p. 11; RAVERI, *Il pensiero giapponese...*, cit. p. 63

⁹ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, *THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ...*, cit. p. 11; RAVERI, *Il pensiero giapponese...*, cit. p. 63

of the Imperial Family and the court, who went on to give them offerings to them, since they believed that these shrines and temples controlled rainfalls. A part from the Ise Shrine, they were all already part of a temple-shrine complex mentioned above.¹⁰

However, in the twelfth and thirteenth century, the Heian court lost its political power and so also the shrines followed the same destiny. They lost all the power and privileges they had in the previous years, as well as the offerings of the palace that, by the fifteenth century, ceased completely. Just some taxes exemptions remained and just for some of these shrine-temple complexes.¹¹

The fourteenth century was also that one in which shrines and temples wanted to maintain their lands and so it was a period of struggle for them, since they were unable to preserve their possessions and to resist the pressure of the military who wanted to seize their land. In the attempt to safeguard their local wealth and take care of communal assets, the religious complexes became independent villages, seen as property of the *kami*.¹²

Going on in time after the ‘Ōnin’ wars (1467- 77) in the Ashikaga shogunate era, the *shōgun* 將軍 and the military ended up losing their political power and among the chaos, the figure of Kanetomo 兼俱 emerged and played an important role. He was the leader of the Yoshida 吉田 family and a priest who was employed at the Jingikan 神祇官, the Council of Kami Affairs, as a diviner at the Saijoshodaigengu Shrine 齋場所大元宮. His role is particular because he started the so-called “one and only ritual” (*yuiitsu* 唯一) or Sogen Shintō 遡源神道. This name means “Origin of the source” and essentially stated that Shinto has existed before and beyond Buddhism and even if he was important with his personal practice of Shinto in that period, in the modern times some historians and critics say that its beliefs were frauds.¹³

When the Edo period started, the system of laws of the Buke Shohatto 武家諸法度 was revived.

¹⁰ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. pp. 11-12

¹¹ Ibid. p. 12

¹² J BREEN, & M. TEEUWEEN, A new history of Shintō. Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 41

¹³ Ibid. pp. 47- 48;

This rules were related to the military families and included some ideas about avoiding alcohol during parties and in groups with other people, and it is interesting to notice, again, even here how the ritualistic aspect is intrinsically related to Japanese society, even in secular aspect of it. This kind of rules persisted and it was added to it an edict that prohibited Christianity; this one ordered the provinces to provide the so-called “inquisition into sectarian membership”, to guarantee that the worshippers were not Christian. It also promoted the distinction between *kami* and Buddhas.¹⁴

What also changed was the registration system at the temples through the Magistrate of Temples and Shrines, even if it was a strict policy of the *shogun*. The practices that were allowed were simply the funerals and the priest had to had a license from the Yoshida family in order to make the funeral itself. Moreover, the temple had to agree to the funeral, so the people who profited the most from the situation were Buddhist priests, who tried to strengthen their authority using the system, which became more and more rigid and inflexible during time, becoming also more powerful during the years.¹⁵

Shinto as State culture during the Meiji period

The Meiji period began in 1868, when the *shogun* was deposed and Japan finished its period of reclusion from the rest of the World. So, when the Emperor Meiji 明治天皇 came to throne, Buddhism and Shintoism, which were blended together, changed forever and the two religion were finally separated. Shinto became known as “State Shinto”; established by Shinto Ministry, the idea of it was to purify the religion from Buddhism. On the contrary, Buddhism had to face a persecution, since its temples were closed, the properties taken away from priests and a lot of monks were expelled from the country. The separation of this two kind of religiousness caused a deep trauma into Japanese people, who were so used to mix together Buddhism and Shinto.¹⁶

¹⁴ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. p. 13

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ ANKAY, Shintoism..., cit., pp. 6-7

Since the aim was for Shinto to have a certain control over the life of the individual, but also to be controlled by the State in its actions, the vast majority of Shinto shrines and priests were brought under state control. Shintoism of this period was seen as the rival of Christianity came from the West, so the antagonist of the influence of the Western culture came with the introduction of that particular political and economic system, started with the opening of Japan of the Meiji period.¹⁷

Shinto shrines maintained their role for the religious activities, but also began to be the protagonists of another important role, since were they used for Japanese ceremonies of the State itself. With this combination of religion and secularity in themselves, Shinto shrines started a new and completely different part of their existence, because the State Shinto was born and it would have been supported by Japanese people till World War II.

The benefit of this kind of religion would have come also from its “national” aspect and every single part of Shinto that could have been used to increase the popularity of the Emperor was used for this specific purpose. Shintoism also tried to deify the Emperor and to highlight the importance of Shintoism combined with Japanese state traditions.¹⁸ The political power of the Emperor was very weak at the beginning of this period, because of the previous Tokugawa period, where the political control was under the shogunate; so, the principal aim was especially to revive that power, so that the Emperor could come back to the feast and glorious time of the Jinmu Emperor, the first mythological Emperor of Japan. The Meiji revival was the revival of the Imperial family itself, together with the revival of Shinto.

Buddhism had a greater influential power in this period and it became easy to understand, because it was especially supported by the political power of the precedent times and it was used to control Christian people as well, so Buddhist temples had a greater influence on the decision-making than Shintoism. It also had a total different social and financial status, and it was because of that that people

¹⁷ Ibid; Fujiyo S., HAMABE, *The Concept of Kami in Shintoism and its Influence on Japanese Ethics and Aesthetics*, Assumption University, 2015, p. 30

¹⁸ ANKAY, *Shintoism...*, cit., p. 7

started to think that the Meiji period should have been the period in which Shintoism, “the native religion of Japan”, had to have all the power and influence in its hands. People pushed for a “come back to the origin” of the country, since the situation of Buddhism showed an harsh conflict with Japan tradition and history. This idea stimulated the rise of a lot of Japanese tradition and ideas, like the Jingikan (the Office of Divine Affairs), which was revived by the Emperor, who wanted to coordinate better Imperial Shinto rituals and Shinto shrines, which came to be divided into official and other shrines.¹⁹

In order to prevent the spread of Christianity, the Meiji Emperor and the government tried to make Shinto prevail as spiritual basis in all of the nation. At the end, the government was finally obliged to give Christianity and Buddhism freedom of worship.

The Shinto missionaries were to be understood, so the government make an ordinance in 1871 called Taikyo senpu (Proclamation of Great Teaching 大教宣布), in order for people to understand Shinto priests, who were relegated in their status. In fact, Shinto priests began to be controlled in their roles by the state, who limited it to rituals and festivals. Their status continued to rise thanks to the government. People started to understand Shinto in its practices, but not in its precepts, so they thought about the world of the *kami*, but they had a completely different reality of religion respect to the West and to Christianity. Japanese people understood *kami*, but were not engaged in debates about them, they simply got the religion as their indigenous one, without unnecessary dogmatic explanations.²⁰ Shrines were so declared “sites for the performance of state ritual” (*kokka no soshi* 国家の宗祀) in the Shinbutsu hanzen rei 神仏判然令, formed in this period, which were clarification on *kami* and Buddhas.

The system of maintenance funds was abolished in 1906 and always in this year was created a new organization of shrines at a prefectural level. However, this did not last long, because as soon as it

¹⁹ HAMABE, The Concept of Kami..., cit., p. 30-31

²⁰ Ibid.

was created, this system was changed by the government, who combined some shrines together, closing half of them, almost 100.000. The Shrine System Investigation Committee (Jinja Seido Chōsakai 神社制度調査会, 1929) was also created with the purpose of discussing the role of shrines as spots for glorifying fallen soldier. No agreement was found and going on in time, in 1939 a petition was made to change the role of shrines from memorial of the death to national protection sites. The Jingiin (神祇院 Institute of Divinities) was instituted in 1940, in order to accomplish the new system reformed of the shrines. It did not serve to its function, though, due to the start of the war.²¹

Talking about practices, I think that also the building of the temples is a practice of religion and in this time, a lot of temples were built, following the descriptions in the ancient writings, in order to have different Emperors and Empress of the past enshrined. An example is the Kashihara Jingu 橿原神宮 shrine in the Nara prefecture (1890), to enshrine the Emperor Jinmu. The most important one nowadays is the Yasukuni Jinja shrine (1869), built in Tokyo and wanted from the Emperor Meiji himself, for enshrining the fallen soldiers of the Boshin War that established the Emperor and the new Meiji government in 1868. Going on in time, this shrine was also dedicated to other soldiers who died in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), then the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), World War I and World War II, and others till today, in which it has enshrined more than 2.4 million souls of people, even if nowadays some mistakenly believe that it honors just the dead of World War II.²² Shrines were also built in



Figure 2: Yasukuni jinja ²¹

²¹ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. p. 14-15; This picture was taken from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santuario_Yasukuni; <https://www.yasukuni.or.jp/>

²² HAMABE, The Concept of Kami..., cit., p. 30-31

Japanese colonies, like China, Korea and Taiwan.²³

Now, following Murakami's point of view, we shall divide the development of State Shinto from the beginning to the 1945. So, in his idea, we have a first phase, which is the "the formative period", then the "the period of the completion of doctrine" comes, "the period of completion of the system" is the third, to end with "the period the fascist state religion".

The first period (1868-80), says Murakami, tends to "remain fluid" and its characteristics were that shrines were treated as national institution and had no role in the religion realm, the institution of the palace rituals and the Ise Jingu 伊勢神宮 as the main shrines around which every other was organized. The second period lasted from 1889, when the Imperial Constitution was promulgated till the Russo-Japanese War (1905). In this period, Shinto was a system of national rituals and its religion role was considered "supra-religious" and under the control of the State and the Constitution. In fact, the Constitution dominated in detail, but in a subtle way, staying very similar to a tolerant and freedom-oriented state and government, both Buddhism and Shintoism. A more defined State Shinto came to life with the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education (Kyoiku chokugo 教育勅語), which had State Shinto as its basis for ideology. In the third period, from the 1900 to the 1930, the beginning of the Showa period, the shrines were supported even more by the State who gave them more economic support, reinforcing their position. Moreover, the tension between religions were increasing, since shrines were seen as an ideological base. From the Manchurian Incident in 1931 till the end of World War II in 1945, in the fourth period, shrines and religions were mobilized for war purposes, so the control of the State over them was even more tight, but this also means they had a secure role as state religion.²⁴

²³ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. p. 14

²⁴ Shimazono, SUSUMU, 島菫進, and Regan E. MURPHY. "State Shinto in the Lives of the People: The Establishment of Emperor Worship, Modern Nationalism, and Shrine Shinto in Late Meiji." Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 36, no. 1 (2009): p. 95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30233855>

Shinto of postwar Japan till today (1945- 2023)

On 15th August 1945 the Shinto Directive was issued by General Douglas MacArthur and the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ). It was an official order entitled "Abolition Governmental Sponsorship, Perpetuation, Control, and Dissemination of State Shinto"²⁵. This implies that the system of modern shrine of Shinto changed again, since the policy decided that Shinto and State Shinto had to be relegated, as all the other religions, to the same level, politically and legally. They were put under the Religious Juridical Persons Edict (*shūkyō hōjinrei* 宗教法人令).

The new Constitution (1947) changed also the role of the Emperor, who was degraded and stopped his position of God on Earth, and simply became a symbol of the State and of unity among the Japanese people. It is in fact declared by the new Constitution of Japan, that the Emperor could not be a God anymore, but just a "symbol of the state and of the unity of the people".²⁶

The new system was called the *beppyō jinja* 別表神社 system. It represented a new order of the postwar period, which declared that Shinto could continue to be the religion of the Imperial family and so it continue to guest some of the traditional ceremonies, made at the Palace of the Emperor; however, it could not be linked to the activities of the government anymore.²⁷

During the 70s, people in Japan began to observe new religions: it was known as "religious boom" or "spiritual rise", or also as the "third religion", so today for many Japanese Shinto and Buddhism include supplications, prayers, and supplications for good business, home protection, academic success, and entrance exams, easy childbirth, etc.²⁸

The reality of urbanization during a period of strong economic growth made the decline of some

²⁵ SUSUMU Shimazono. "State Shinto and the Religious Structure of Modern Japan (ال شينتو الرسمي (واهيكلية الدينية لليابان الحديث (国家神道和现代日本的宗教体制) (国家神道和现代日本的宗教体制) (Государс Вен Ный Шинт Озм и Религиозная Структурасо Временной Япони) (El Estado Shinto y La Estructura Religiosa Del Japón Moderno)." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 73, no. 4 (2005): p. 1079. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4139766>.

²⁶ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. p. 16

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ian, READER; George J. Jr., TANABE, Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, p. 44

shrines, while others benefited from that same situation. While in sparsely populated rural areas shrines faced the problems of the decline number of believers (*ujiko* 氏子) and the need for new and younger priests and monks, the urban areas had completely different situations. For stance, they had the problem of the gestion of a large number of people and crowds and also that of maintaining the areas surrounding the temples.²⁹

1.2- Japanese Religiousness in Buddhism till today

The arrival of Buddhism

Buddhism first arrived in Japan in 538 A.D., with the ruler of Korea, Kudara, who had a statue of Buddha for the Emperor and also gifted him with several volumes of Sutras and several of the instruments of Buddhist rituals. When this happened, Shintoism was the main animist religion spread in all of Japan (it has been already discussed the ambiguity of the term), which believed to have a god in every single aspect of the nature and, more in general, in everything, so when a new god came from abroad, it was simply regarded as new one that came from overseas.

In this period, however, there was a dispute between the imperial power and the most powerful clans of Japan, since the power of the Emperor was not absolute. The two most important families of the time were the Mononobe family 物部 and the Soga family 蘇我, which all had a tutelary deity. For this reason, many of the exponent of this household were against the introduction of Buddhism in the country. However, the Soga family had a good relationship with Korea, so they were the only in favor of Buddhist practice. Because of that, the Emperor Kinmei gave that statue to the Soga allowing them to profess Buddhism only in private, but did not convert into Buddhism, even if he was very fascinated by the gift of the Korean king.

Because the Soga family had this Buddhist statue, the Buddhism started to spread in the court next to this clan, so a lot of monks arrived from Korea and some of the Soga clan also began to take

²⁹ J BREEN, & M. TEEUWEEN, A new history..., cit., p. 219



Figure 3: A statue of Prince Shotoku, the legendary Japanese ruler and founder of Japanese Buddhism (594-622). (Musee Guimet, Paris) ³⁰

monastic ordination. However, when an epidemic broke out, the Mononobe family said that it was Buddha's and Buddhism's fault, so the statue was burn and monks were whipped. The fight between the two families ended in 587 when the leader of the clan Mononobe no Moriya 物部守屋 was murdered by Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子, who allied with some princes.³⁰

When in 593 Empress Suiko 推古天皇 ascended the throne, supported by Soga no Umako and Prince Umayado 厩戸皇子, allied with the Soga and with a deep faith in Buddhism and who then will be Prince Regent at the age of twenty. He sculpted statues of Shi Tennō (four of the protectors of Buddhism) trying to have help for victory during the battle against the Mononobe.

He had a great role in the faith in Buddhism in Japan. He promulgated the so-called "Seventeen Article Constitution", (Jūshichijō kenpō 十七条憲法) in 604, where we find written the sequent about the Buddhist religion: "Honor the Three Treasures, that is, the Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha", where Buddhism became an instrument to protect the state. As thanks to Buddha for his protection during the battle against the Mononobe family, the Emperor also built the Shi Tennō Temple in Osaka. He wrote Sangyōgisho 三經義疏, commentaries on three Sutras of Mahayānā Buddhism (Buddhism of the Great Vehicle): Hokkekyō 法華經, Shomankyō 勝鬘經 and Yuimakyō 維摩經.

³⁰ Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, La storia del Buddhismo in Giappone, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2018, <https://zenfirenze.it/2018/05/31/la-storia-del-buddhismo-in-giappone/> ; R. CAROLI, F. GATTI, Storia del Giappone, Bari, Editori Laterza, 2017, pp. 15-18. The picture is an original image by PHGCOM. Uploaded by Mark Cartwright, published on 08 March 2017. <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/6409/prince-shotoku-statue/>

He lived in Ikaruga, in the Nara prefectures. In 607 he built Hōryū Temple, destroyed in 670 and rebuilt in 711. A statue of Buddha Shakyamuni with two bodhisattvas next to him were carved in 623, after the death of the Prince and his wife, and they were put inside the main pavilion of the temple. During the Nara period, where the Prince house was, a pavilion of octagonal form was created. It was called the Dream Pavilion and inside was put a statue of the Bodhisattva Kannon, who was believed to be the portrayal of the Prince himself.³¹

Buddhism in the Nara period (710 – 794)

With the full support of Emperor Tenmu 天武天皇 (672-686) and Empress Jito 持統天皇 (686-697), who built a lot of temples, made a lot of copies of sutras and used the monasteries as archive



Figure 4: The huge bronze Buddha in the Daibutsuden or Great Buddha Hall at the Todaiji temple complex, Nara, Japan. c. 752 CE, Nara Period. Height: 15 metres ³²

for documents and record of demography, the spread of Buddhism continued in all country.³²

In the Nara period Buddhism was under the control of the state, and Hossō 法相宗, Kusha 俱舍宗, Sanron 三論宗, Jōjitsu 成実宗, Kegon 華嚴宗 and Ritsu 律宗 were the Six School of Nara, which were active in the capital

³¹Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, La storia del Buddhismo in Giappone, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2018, <https://zenfirenze.it/2018/05/31/la-storia-del-buddhismo-in-giappone/> ; Matsuo, KENJI, A HISTORY OF JAPANESE BUDDHISM, Folkestone, Kent, Global oriental, 2007, pp. 18-19

³² Mark, CARTWRIGHT, Buddhism in Ancient Japan, 2017, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1080/buddhism-in-ancient-japan/> . Original image by James Blake Wiener. Uploaded by James Blake Wiener, published on 20 April 2017. <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/6532/buddha-todaiji-temple/>

and unlike later schools of thought, monks studied the doctrine using Chinese texts.³³

When Emperor Shōmu 聖武天皇 came to throne, there were a lot of natural disaster and social problems, so he ordered with an imperial edict of the 741 to have two different temples, one for monks and one for nuns, built in each provinces. He was known as "a Servant of the Three Treasures", since his faith in Buddha was very profound.³⁴ He raised the taxes a lot because of this plan.

The capital of the period, Nara, was also one of the city that gained most temples. The most important of this era is Todaiji 東大寺 (consecrated in 752). The project was supervised by Gyōki 行基, a celebrated monk of the period. Moreover, it was with the Emperor Shōmu that the strategy of the emperor abdicating and joining a monastery began. In fact, the Emperor abdicated and joined a monastery, but he continued to pull the political strings behind the scenes. It was the so-called “cloistered government” method.³⁵

Now, even if it is necessary to have the ordination from a Buddhist master in order to become a monk, in Japan this rule seemed to be not followed until the Nara period and the ordination with the intermediacy of a master was not recognized. It was during the Nara period that the importance of this practice was recognized, together with the need to establish a ritual for this practice. In order to do so, two monks visited Master Ganjin 鑑真 (Jianzhen) in China, so that they could understand how to do it and comprehend how to perform the ritual of ordination in Japan. The Master decided to go to Japan, he tried and failed five times, but he finally arrived in Japan in 744. He visited the capital, where he ordered for the first time in in the country four hundred monks at Tōdaiji, among them there was Emperor Shōmu too. In 759, the Chinese Master built the Tōshōdaiji Temple 唐招提寺 and died at the age of seventy-six in that same place.

At the same time Buddhism was sanctioned and even more; Japanese elite understood well how

³³ Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.; If the reader wants to deepen more their knowledge about the Six Schools of Nara, cfr. Massimo, RAVERI, *Il pensiero giapponese classico*, Torino, Einaudi editore, 2014, pp. 78-100.

³⁴ Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.

³⁵ Mark, CARTWRIGHT, *Buddhism...*, cit.

much power Buddhism had in the period, so they created a body of laws in order to have this religion under the state control, since they were worried that an influence figure would have stolen the power by using their following of population and so menacing the stability of Japan itself. For avoiding this, the Taiho ritsuryo 大宝律令 in 702 and Yoro ritsuryo 養老律令 in 757 were promulgated, so that the force that resided into Buddhist religion could be under the control of the state. The state could monitor the actions and the rules of the monks like this, putting them under the will of the Imperial family. This does not mean that there were not any monks that tried and in facts abused of their power and their position, so there are many examples of this kind, monks who, despite the ban, were active without the official permission. However, one might also say that the spread of Buddhism among the Japanese common people would have not been possible without their existence.³⁶

Buddhism in the Heian period (794 – 1192)

The Heian period started when the Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 wanted to change the capital from Heijō-kyō 平城宮 to Heian-kyō 平安京 (Kyōto). He also ordered for the temples to stay in the old capital, Nara, so that their influence would have been weakened, since the Buddhist temples had become very powerful during the end of the previous history period. They also meddled in political life, so Emperor tried to contained this power, even if he did not ban the religion, on the contrary some monks were again sent to China in order to bring new Buddhist idea in Japan. Thanks to this move, Buddhism especially flourished in this period with a lot of new schools of thought.³⁷

The first schools to pop up were Tendai and the Shingon schools, led by Saichō 最澄 and Kūkai 空海. The two monks travelled to China in 804, so that they could better comprehend the doctrines, part of the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) current of Buddhism.

Saichō went to China and followed the doctrine of Tendai, especially the Hokke-kyō 法華經, the Lotus Sutra, but he also studied Mikkyō 密教 (esoteric Buddhism) and Zen 禪, so that he came back

³⁶ Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.; Mark, CARTWRIGHT, *Buddhism...*, cit.

³⁷ Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.

to Japan in 805 with a lot old copies of Sutras with him. At his return, he founded the Tendai school, with the precise aim to attain Buddhahood for all human beings. He refused his own ordination received at Tōdaiji and ordered that his disciples would have had ordination called Daijōkai 大乘戒, which was also the ordination for lay people. He then devoted to the ascetic practices in the mountains at Enryakuji 延暦寺, where he died in 822, when the establishment of his own ordination at that same temple was authorized.

Saichō had the purpose to develop a doctrine of mixed Buddhism between Hokke-kyō Sutra and Mikkyō. However, he firmly believed that he had studied enough of this doctrine in China, so he asked Kūkai to teach him. They did not agree on a lot of things regarded Buddhism, so the two finally separated from each other. Some of his disciples studied the Mikkyō in China as their Master did, in order to establish one of the Mikkyō school in Japan, the Tendai one. With this move, the school became an official Buddhist one at Enryakuji, which became an important site for the study of the doctrine and practice Buddhism. A lot of the new masters of Buddhism started from this temple, among them there was Dōgen 道元 of the Sōtō School 曹洞宗.³⁸

Kūkai was born in 774 in Shikoku. He was devoted to the ascetic practice in the mountains since he was nineteen, in ordered to be ordered at Tōdaiji at the age of 31, where he became a monk shortly before leaving for China, the next year, in 804. He left and he studied Mikkyō there, receiving the Dharma Transmission and becoming a Master. He returned in Japan after two years, with a lot of volumes of Sutra with him. In 816 he was given by the Emperor the Mount Kōya, in the Kii (Wakayama) province as a gift for his ascetic practices, where he founded the Shingon school. Another present was the Tōji Temple 東寺 in Kyōto, gifted in 823. In 835 he died on mount Koya.

He was the person who brought the practice of the esoteric Buddhism, the Mikkyō, to Japan. The Shingon school was based on the Sutras of Dainichi-kyō 大日經 and Kongōchō-kyō 金剛頂經, with Dainichi 大日, the Great Sun, as its Buddha. The most important values were compassion and wisdom,

³⁸ Ibid; If the reader wants to deepen more their knowledge about the Tendai School, cfr. Massimo, RAVERI, *Il pensiero giapponese classico*, Torino, Einaudi editore, 2014, pp. 142-176.

in order to receive the Sokushin Jōbutsu 即身仏, the Buddhahood in one's own living body. In the middle of the Heian period, people began to use his ritual to ask Buddha for protection and this took both the Imperial family and the elite, and also common population. Kūkai became worshiped after his death on mount Kōya, where his mausoleum is, and where it is believed that he still dwell in a state of total enlightenment. Today a lot of pilgrims make the pilgrimage of the eighty-eight sacred sites on the Shikoku Island.

In the Heian period there was also the cult of Jōdo that spread to Japan, which is the cult of the paradise of Amida Buddha 阿弥陀. In fact, this cult believed that one could reborn after death in the Pure Land (Jōdo)³⁹. The practice of this cult spread thanks to the Saichō's disciples, who brought the practice of the Kansō Nenbutsu 觀想念仏 from China. It consisted in evoking the name of the Buddha and in imagining his figure. Thanks to the practice of some monks among the common people, this practice was spread also among them towards the middle of the Heian period, even if at the beginning it was spread mainly among the nobles of the capital.

The concept was the one found in the book Ōjōyōshū 往生要集 that Genshin 源信 preached, which is to say Onri edo, gongu jōdo 厭離穢土・欣求淨土, i.e. “Loathe the filthy earth and turn away from it, ardently desire the pure earth”. It was spread among both nobles and common people and it was believed that after two thousand years from Buddha Shakyamuni's death, the End of the Law period would have come, the Mappō 末法 period. In this time, his teaching would have lost their efficacy, nobody would have not believed anymore, so it would have been impossible to archive Nirvana. Japanese people, in particular, thought that this period was begun in 1052, which would have been the first year of the Mappō, because a lot of natural disasters and struggle occurred in those years. That is why the cult of Amida Buddha's paradise was prolific among Japanese in this period, since people wanted to join the paradise after their death. As many examples made already, the practice was that of building a lot of temples in this period. Aristocrats first built them and then placed a statue

³⁹ Ibid; If the reader wants to deepen more their knowledge about the Shingon School, cfr. Massimo, RAVERI, *Il pensiero giapponese classico*, Torino, Einaudi editore, 2014, pp. 176-220.

of Buddha inside it and invoked him as the cult wanted, in order to try to attend the Pure Land after death. Moreover, mount Kōya was considered the Jōdo of this world and many aristocrats went on pilgrimage there, trying to attend Nirvana.⁴⁰

Buddhism during the Kamakura, Muromachi and Edo period (1192-1867)

Buddhism changed a lot especially during the Kamakura period, when it became a popular religion for the first time and a lot of changes took place in the religious sphere. These changes were due to the times, which were very full of trouble and chaos; this situation led to a sort of disillusionment and a call for a renewal of faith. It was during this difficult period that Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212), Shinran 親鸞(1173-1262), Eisai 明菴(1141-1215), Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253), Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-1282) and other Buddhist leaders appeared with all their doctrines. They were not satisfied, since they saw the Buddhism as a doctrine reserved to the noble and the elite, while they wanted to spread it among the common people, so in order to do such a thing, they re-elaborated the religion through their own personal painful experiences and the result wanted the Buddhahood to be receivable for everyone, if one has a deep faith in Buddha, since in the doctrine of this time every person has a potentiality of Buddha in one's own nature. The schools of this time are all slightly different from one another, but also they all come from the teaching of the Tendai school.⁴¹

Hōnen (1133-1212) studied Tendai doctrine on Mount Hiei, but he was not satisfied, since he was seeking for a way to relieve other people's suffering and to have salvation. So when he came across the Genshin's *Ojōyōshi* (The essentials of rebirth) and read the doctrine in which one could gain salvation just believing in Buddha and reciting the *nenbutsu* "Namu Amida Butsu" 南無阿弥陀仏 on one passage of the monk Shan-dao, he was finally satisfied in his own ideas, and also thought that this kind of teaching was perfect and simple enough to be taught to people in such a period of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kodo, MATSUNAMI, a cura di. A guide to Japanese Buddhism. Japan Buddhist Federation, 2004, p. 10

difficulties, since it did not require difficult philosophy or technic. So, he taught this kind of doctrine, but did not by any means denied other more elaborate teachings and methods.

His ideas were especially popular among common people and the samurai class, while they were strongly criticized by the elite, the court and the Schools of Nara and Tendai, to the point that the Senshū Nenbutsu was officially banned in 1207 and the Master and his disciples were condemned to confinement in the Shikoku Island. However, he did not abandoned his propaganda and continued to spread his doctrine since 1211, when he was pardoned and could return to Kyoto, where he died the next year.⁴²

The Jōdoshinshū of the monk Shinran is another important school of the period. The master of this school was a disciple of Hōnen, who studied on the mount Hiei. However, at the end, he descended from the mountain, since he wanted to identify with Japanese people and because of that he got married and had children. With the *nembutsu* “Namu Amida Butsu” being the most important thing of his doctrine, he believed that this “event” was not an object of worship as Amida could have been and so that the *nembutsu* could not been objectified. The Tariki Hongan 他力本願 was his mainly predication and he firmly predicted that thanks to it almost everyone could achieve the Pure Land.

He continued to predicate also when he was in exile in Kanto region and wrote over there his own book where he predicated his doctrine, the *Kyōgyō Shinshō* 教行信証. It was after his death in Kyoto that his disciple found the doctrine of Jōdoshin and started to collect his teaching a very appreciated work called *Tannishō* 歎異抄, a text that was well known and esteemed both by the general public and the religious one. The mausoleum of Shinran was built ten years after his death by his disciples. It is the temple now called the Honganji 本願寺, which split into two different schools of thought, Nishihongan-ji 西本願寺 and Higashihongan-ji 東本願寺, when the disciples of Shinran also separated.⁴³

The Nichiren is the third school we could examine of this period. Even if he was ordered at Enryakui,

⁴² Ibid, pp. 10-11; Hiroo, NAKAJIMA, La storia del Buddhismo..., cit.

⁴³ Ibid p. 12; ibid.

Nichiren founded his own school following the doctrine of Buddha Shakyamuni and the *nenbutsu* “*Namu myōhō-reenge-kyō*” 南無妙法蓮華經. In his opinion, people did not believe enough in the Sutra Hokkekyō and so in his own school and he also stated that was the reason why a period so full of chaos as the Kamakura period was in course. He was criticized for this point of view, but his doctrine spread however among samurai class, the merchant and the artisans. He continued following his own idea about the Buddhist religion and he also predicted an invasion; one can just imagine when this one became true, because the Yuan Dynasty of China attacked the country in 1268. The shogun regent was a Zen practitioner, so the master asked him to convert to Nichiren to have help against the Chinese, but he was accused to have criticized the government, so he was confined on the Sado Island. When he was pardoned, he built his own temple on Mount Minobu, given to him by the Kai governor. His temple was the Kuonji, where he died at the age of sixty.⁴⁴

To end the Kamakura period, we will talk about the two schools of Eisai and Dōgen.

The first one was born in a Shinto family in 1141, but eventually became Buddhist and also a monk at Enryakuji. He stayed in China two times and during his second time, he studied at the Rinzai School the doctrine of Zen, so that when he came back to Japan he founded his own Rinzai school, because in his opinion this was the right doctrine to follow in the Mappō period, but in 1197 this was banned by the Emperor. In fact, the Tendai school considered the doctrine to be incorrect, while Eisai tried to clarify the misunderstanding in a book entitled *Kōzen-gokoku-ron* 興禪護國論 i.e. "Protecting the State by Bringing Zen to Prosperity".

He moved to Kamakura in order to spread the doctrine among monks, giving them difficult questions (*kōan* 公案) to solve, so that they could attain enlightenment. The Kennin Temple 建仁寺 was built some years later to propagate the Zen of Rinzai in Kyoto. The Rinzai School continued to be prevalent among the *samurai* even after Eisai's death (1215), and many temples were built in Kamakura, since they were well protected by the Hōjō family 北条氏.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid p. 13; *ibid*.

⁴⁵ Ibid pp. 12-13; *ibid*.

Sōtō School is the last school we are going to talk about in the Kamakura period. First of all, for example, is interesting to say that the monk who inspired the school ideas, had no intention of creating a school. We are talking about one of the most famous monk of the time, Dōgen and “his school”, the Sōtō School was founded just after his death by his disciples.

He studied on Mount Hiei the Tendai School and the Zen at the Kenninji by a disciple of Eisai. He went to China in 1223, when he discovered the Zen of the Sōtō School. He is said to have attained enlightenment through meditation.

He returned to Japan and began practicing Zen at Kennin-ji in 1227, since he thought that this was the right doctrine to be thought to people, the Zen of the Buddha Shakyamuni. He was persecuted for this reason by the Enryakuji monks and so he had to move to the Echizen province, where he went to stay to the Eihei Temple. He built his own temple, the Kōshō Temple 興聖寺 in 1234, so that they could have a center for Zen practicing. He died in Kyoto at the age of fifty-three.

Shōbōgenzō 正法眼藏 is the essence of Dōgen's thought, while the Shikantaza 只管打坐, i.e. *zazen* 座禪 (meditation) without thinking about anything is the main practice of his school of thought. The *Shōbō Genzō Zuimon-ki* 正法眼藏隨聞記 collects the master's idea and it was written by his successor, Koun Ejō 孤雲懷奘, while the person who funded a temple in his honor was Taiso Jōsai Daishi 瑩山紹瑾禪師, who founded the Sōji Temple 總持寺. He was considered the second founder of the school even if he wanted to spread the religion among the common people, while Dōgen never wanted such a thing. Taiso Jōsai Daishi 瑩山紹瑾禪師 used some simpler and easier way to understand the doctrine and, like that, people continued to follow it and the ideas of this school continued to spread all over the country, developing during the following centuries as well.⁴⁶

It was during the Muromachi period that a lot of Buddhist priests and monk left their temples when they were official monks in order to establish their own school, so a lot of new ones established in society. The Ashikaga family, when come to power, favored the Shingon and the Tendai schools over the others, so that the other schools became jealous of them and started to have a strong military

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 14; *ibid.*

power.

Many temples were built thanks to the fact that the Ashikaga protected the Rinzai school, while a culture which was a mix of aristocratic, samurai, and Zen culture began to flourish in the country. Thanks to the activities of Rennyō 蓮如 (1415-1499), a direct descendant of Shinran, what also continued to augment were the practitioners of the Jōdoshinshū School, who increased especially in the Kantō and Hokuriku region.

It was the fifteenth century when the power of the Ashikaga became weaker and the lords of the country started to fight to establish their control over the land. It was in this occasion that a lot of temples took arms and started to fight against the feudal lords, one of these temples being Enryakuji itself.⁴⁷ The wars continued until 1603, when Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 founded the shogunate in the city of Edo.

During the previous century, a missionary called Francis Xavier arrived in Japan and gained a lot of power thanks to Oda Nobunaga 織田信長, one of the most prominent figures of the time. The missionary made a lot of proselytes, but when the Tokugawa regime closed the country to the West, it also wanted to be sure that Christianity would have been excluded from Japan. For this reason, Christianity was banned and to be more sure about the ban, the shogunate instituted the registration system, with which people had to belong to a Buddhist temple. It was in this way that the shogunate incorporated Buddhism within itself, still maintaining the religious role of this religion.⁴⁸

Buddhism of the Meiji period till today (1868-2023)

Japan open again to the world after the period of closure during the Edo era during the Meiji period. With this period of opening, it came in contact with the Western culture and its technology, so it decided to modernize and give a new glory to the Imperial House. The Emperor became the centre of the political life and Edo was chosen as the capital; its name was changed into “Tokyo”.

⁴⁷ NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.; Matsuo, KENJI, *A HISTORY OF JAPANESE BUDDHISM*, Folkestone, Kent, Global oriental, 2007, p. 191

⁴⁸ NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.; MATSUNAMI, a cura di. *A guide...*, cit., pp. 17-18

This was the period in which the Emperor was again the object of worship, since he was considered a living god of Shinto; on the other hand, Buddhism had no role in the formula, so Shinto and Buddhism separated from each other. By order of the Meiji government, Buddhist beliefs and worship were banned in 1868. A lot of valuable Buddhist temples and works of art were destroyed or sold. Even though this ban was later removed, priests and monks were forced to return to secular life instead of staying at their temples. The rest of Buddhism was classified into thirteen sects and fifty-six sub-sects, while other new ones were strictly forbidden.

Since Buddhism was accepted as a part of Japanese culture and history, it had spread among the lowest social classes as well so it was not avoided from all the population, even if only a few monks and priests persevered in their precepts and practices. They were those who tried to reexamine this kind of religiousness based on modern researches. However, a lot of temples were destroyed or abolished, their land were taken back by the state, they completely lost the privileges they had had in the Edo period. Buddhism was taken and its purpose was changed during the two big wars. Even the studies made by monks and priests were often abolished or interrupted by nationalist military governments.⁴⁹

The Meiji period also meant that the Western countries wanted Christianity to be recognized in Japan, and so the country had to stop persecuting it. This religion was the antagonist and rival of Buddhism, and this meant that the religion landscape changed completely and became subjugated to marketing, opportunism and competition.

Even though one could not think so, since Buddhism was used to incorporate elements in itself, technology maybe represented a menace for Buddhism, so this situation represented a crises for Buddhism. Many monks and priests tried to understand it in other ways. Some examples of this kind of scholars and priests are Inoue Enryo 井上円了(1858–1919) and Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之(1863–1903) who initiated Buddhist ‘awakening’ movements, Murakami Sensho 村上専精(1851–1929) and Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), engaged in modern

⁴⁹ MATSUNAMI, a cura di. *A guide...*, cit., p. 19; NAKAJIMA, *La storia del Buddhismo...*, cit.

Buddhist studies; and Suzuki Daisetu 鈴木大拙(1870–1966) who set about spreading Japanese Buddhism overseas.⁵⁰

The Buddhism had never been an institution reserved for Buddhist institutions, the elite or a particular privileged class or the government. In fact, the militaristic Imperial government submitted to the Allied powers in 1945. The study of Buddhism were so increased by monks, nuns, and academics at temples, institutions, and universities. Temples and museums became the house of a lot of artifacts which dated back to thousands of years. Some temples were restored and, from abandoned ones, they became places of study and prayer. Many initiatives for the sharing of information and people started when Japan hosted some important international Buddhist conferences.⁵¹

1.3- Japanese religiousness and spirituality: an overview of Shinto and Buddhist practices between tradition and new marketing strategies

Shinto practices and their changes during the modern era

Shintō practices are based on four major pillars:

- Purification rites, in order to have physical cleanliness;
- festivals, ceremonies, and individual worship that are devoted to honoring the *kami* that need participation;
- since the *kami* are an integral part of nature, the third point is the respect of nature and natural places;
- participation as one's identity and as a member of the community of one's tradition and family.⁵²

Rites of passages during life are some of the most important practices of Shintoism. After the birth of a newborn, it passes from thirty to one hundred days, and then the little one encounters their tutelary *kami*, with the purpose to present the child as a new devotee. The Shichi go san (七五三 Seven-Five-

⁵⁰ KENJI, A HISTORY..., cit., pp. 227-228; MATSUNAMI, a cura di. A guide..., cit., pp. 20-21

⁵¹ MATSUNAMI, a cura di. A guide..., cit., p. 20

⁵² ELLWOOD, R., Japanese religion: The ebook. Online. Pp 74-103. (2004), Retrieved October 19th 2023, pp. 90-95

Three) festival takes place on the 15 November. It is the day in which girls of three and seven and boys of five present offerings to the *kami* and pray for their protection during their growing, for which they show their gratitude. On the other hands, Adult's Day is the 15 January. It was the traditional day in which young men joined the local Young Men's Association of their village. Today, it is the day in which people who turn twenty show their remembrance as Japanese individuals. Shinto-style wedding ceremonies are the days in which couples exchange vows, while the Shinto funerals are not so much widespread, since a lot of people believe in both Buddhism and Shintoism at the same time, so they often conduct Buddhist funerals, instead of Shinto ones, except for pure Shintō households, that will always prefer funerals of the Shinto tradition. Some other typical Shintō *matsuri* 祭り ceremonies include: a ceremony for the conclusion of a construction project, a ceremony for a new ship to be launched, one for firing or purifying the boilers in a new factory, or for setting up the framework for a new building, and other ceremonies associated to occupations or daily life.⁵³

Divine Procession (Shinkō-sai 神幸祭), the Annual Festival (Reisai 例祭), the Autumn Festival (Aki Matsuri 秋祭り, Harvest Festival), and the Spring Festival (Haru Matsuri 春祭り) are some of the most important Shinto shrines celebration and major festivals during the years.⁵⁴

Another important one is the Devine Procession in which a *mikoshi* 神輿, a small shrine, is carried on the shoulders of the devotees. This normally takes place on the day of the Annual Festival. In the past, the tradition wanted the *naorai* なおらい to be included, which means that people started a communion with the *kami*, by eating the same meal as them. The tradition is occasionally followed by the Imperial Family at some of the most ancient shrines, today it is more common to have communion with the *kami* by drinking the *sake* 酒. Since World War II, it is become habitual to make a little lecture or a discourse before the festival begins.⁵⁵

Ujigami 氏神 belief is the most common kind of Shinto in Japan. It was originally the term with

⁵³ HIRAI, N.. "Shintō." Encyclopedia Britannica, October 13, 2023

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

which one referred to the *kami* of an ancient clan. This changed in the thirteenth century, when the term changed his significance and became known as the tutelary *kami* of a particular community, the members of which were considered all the *kami* believers (*ujiko*); so the *ujiko* are made by the people who live in a certain community, even if a Shintoist person is able to believe in other shrines, different from their own one. It was not until Second World War that some shrines began to form believers' associations.⁵⁶

Shinto practices also comprise the aspect of participation (*omairi* お参り), which often means the observance of numerous ceremonies is required when visiting a shrine. First of all, one is expected to bow politely before entering, and then to wash one's hands and mouth (*temizu* 手水) with water after one is arrived in front of a shrine. The *kami* will be advised of the arrival of a guest by ringing a bell next to the shrine. Today, the most known offering is to put some money inside the offering box, but the offering could also be some food or water. After that, one must bow with sincerity and clap the hands twice. In this moment, one is speaking with the *kami* and in order to end the practice, one must bow again in front of the shrine.⁵⁷

Shinto has also some goods used to defend people, which are *omikuji* お御籤, *omamori* お守り, and *ema* 絵馬, of which we will talk about later in this thesis. *Ema* are tablets of wood that will keep the desires and wishes of people inscribed by people. They are placed on a designated area next to the shrine. Fortune teller written on little pieces of paper for individuals sold next to shrines and temples are called *omikuji*. To end the list, *omamori* are lucky charms wore as accessories that are meant to encourage good fortune and luck, so that bad luck in life would have been sent away from the person. What one can also find at a shrine are *goshuin* 御朱印 and *goshuinchō* 御朱印帳. As already mentioned above, we will talk about these items in details later, but I thought it was important to introduce them as Shinto practices in this chapter.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ESCUDERO ALVAREZ, THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SHINTŌ..., cit. p. 19

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 20-21

Now, the economic polarization in practices is evident in both urban and rural areas, speaking about the changes of the practices. Local communities are being disintegrated and this brought to a migration and a loss of worshippers (*sūkeisha* 崇敬者) and believers. In fact, the trend is not to reside next to shrines anymore and so not to be of help for them. The numbers of parishioners and the worship groups seems to be more and more declining in all of the nation, following the research of the Jinja Honchō 神社本庁. In depopulated regions, the shrink of the trend seems to be of the 50%, which would be twice respect to the shrines of the urban areas. The shrines that recorded this kind of decrease on worshippers are the 90% of those in scarcely populated areas.

Moreover, the frequency of visiting shrines changed as well: 50% of the respondent say that they do not visit their *ujigami* 氏神 shrine and some of them do not even know where it is; the percentage is 10% fewer than in the previous ten years. Those who owned a *kamidana* 神凵, a kami altar put in one's house, has declined quicker respect to the Buddhist ones; in particular, talking about the 2009 the proportion would have been reduced by up to 10% from the 50% of the 1996. Also the usage of shrines in everyday life would have been declining, even if we do not know the exact numbers.⁵⁹

In contrast with the tendencies of rural areas shrines, which had witnessed a decreased of visitors, urban and city areas had a countertendency and visitors increased, especially in well-known shrines. The reason could be that people in particular tend to visit shrines during the yearly events like the first visit of the new year (*hatsumōde* 初詣) or the first visit of newborns to the shrine (*hatsumiyamairi* 燼宮参り), or again the visit of children of three, five and seven years (*shichigosan* 若焠涉). On the other hand, they avoid coming during unfavorable months of the years (*yaku yoke* 叁除け). This behavior is very common in the cities and among the younger ones.

The study of Taguchi Yuko on infant trips to shrines state that majority of the mothers said that it is not from their parents that they take the knowledge of temples and shrines, but from books and

⁵⁹ Hiroshi, YAMANAKA, "Religious Change in Modern Japanese Society: Established Religions and Spirituality." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 48, no. 2 (2021), p. 371

magazines. From this, we understand that is not a question of passing the custom from parents to children, but that the product is marketed. Moreover, mothers are expected to respect the standard of “mothers’ *miyamairi* 宮参り” established by the media when they visit shrines.

In an attempt to increase the number of visitors, some shrines have created some new different items like *omamori*, good luck charms, and *omikuji*, the fortune teller, in order to attract the young female public with the romantic-theme ideas. For example, the Tokyo Daijingu 大神宮, which is referred to as a “love power spot”, one can find a list of fifty different kind of *omamori*, which can be related to “flower charm” and a “four-season charm”.

Since there had been a major changes in metropolitan areas, shrines attendance has raised as a reaction of the power spot boom. Some of the shrines are not a power centre, but others declare to be the greatest of this kind of places, so that they can attract tourists. This is one of the biggest rivalry in commerce and marketing among temples and shrines.⁶⁰

Buddhists practices and their changes during the modern period

When one speak about Japanese Buddhist practice, the first thing that comes to mind is that devotees place an altar for the whole family in the living room and there they place different objects to venerate the *kami*, for example flower, water or food. This should be a little imitation of the temple of heaven inherited by the oldest son, while others sons and daughters will have their own little altars when their parents die. During the funeral rites, people will host a celebration for the dead person asking a monk of their own temple, where the family graves are, to recite some scriptures, while they will also ask to the family and friends to come in visit of the ceremony, so that the social bonds with those who surrounded the deceased person will be fortified.

It is normal to ask a priest to offer some prayers for one’s person safety, or because one is living either a spiritual, financial or physical problem related to life or death, in order to relief the pain of the situation. On these occasions, people go to the so-called *fudasho* 札所 on pilgrimage, which are

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 371-373

some temples. The hope is that they will have their desires granted in this way. On the other hand it is more rare that people want to enter a temple and become priests, so that they will undertake religious studies at a monastery, because this means to leave behind their secular and familiar life for a certain amount of time or for a longer loss of time.

Today, both members and guests are offered a lot of services by temples, since they open their doors to all of people and offer different services to accommodate them in their different needs. Services include funerals and weddings, and services related to Sunday, family, sunrise and memorials. Moreover, temples also host a lot of different activities similar to club ones, for example calligraphy, *judo* 柔道, *kendo* 剣道, *karate* 空手, dance, singing hymns, meditation, tea ceremonies, flower arranging, and boy and girl scouting. This is because they need to draw the attention of the guests, visitors and devotees to make them understand Buddhist teachings.⁶¹

Buddhist programs are exposed nationwide on radio and television every Sunday morning; in addition, public lectures about Buddhism are provided by Buddhist organizations and temples in the sphere of popular media. There are also a lot of ways to make people aware about temples activities, like newsletters, booklets, and leaflets, all published so that people can be drawn to temples. A lot of books about Buddhist activities can be given away by the organization themselves in order to attend this same purpose.

Similarly to Shinto, also Buddhism is related to rites of passage in various moment of one's life, i.e. birth, adulthood, marriage, death. Instead of going to Shinto shrines with the newborn baby, some of the most devotee Buddhists go to the temple and present the baby over there, or on the grave of an ancestor, in order to promise to follow the guide of the Buddha and their predecessors' religious thought and guidance. Usually, when they then turn twenty, on their confirmation ceremony, participants are given a white piece of cloth with the name of Buddha sewn on it for the ceremony that takes place at the Buddhist temple during a special anniversary or in the presence of a chief of the temple himself.

⁶¹ MATSUNAMI, a cura di. A guide..., cit., pp. 24-26

For what concerns the marriage, a person first is introduced to a solemn promise to the Buddha at the beginning of the ceremony, followed by a procession with the bride. The couple will then offer incense to the Buddha, in order for them to receive some water purified in a ceremony by the monk who is celebrating the rite. They will be offered some rice wine, which has been offered to the Buddha, in order for them to drink three times from three different cups, so that they can pay respect to the three sacred treasures of the Buddha. This is also the moment in which the couple exchanges rings, following by the reception by them of the *juzu* 数珠, the Buddhist rosary. Following this, usually the ceremony is over: the priest officialize the wedding and everyone can finally leave the temple. It has to be said that the Buddhist marriage is rare and that the Shinto one is more common, but I wanted to write about this kind of marriage anyway, in order to understand the Buddhist practice better.

All the people that are desired by the family, are also invited to the funeral, together with the officiating priest. The service if this kind can take place at home or at a temple, because this serve to pay the final respect to the deceased. The departed is then brought to the crematory, where the cremation takes from one hour to one and a half hour. After that, the family takes the ashes of the death and put them into a container to be engraved near a temple, in the repository, or beneath a grave. Since the departed person was Buddhist, the family will also receive a wooden tablet (*ihai*位牌) with the posthumous Buddhist name of the death written on it.⁶²

Now we are going to focus on the changes of the practices of Buddhism due to modernization and marketing starting with the practice of visiting the cemetery (*hakamairi* 墓参り). Since the 70% of the people respondent to the most recent NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo poll of 2020 answered positively, we could state that family burial visit is still a popular activity among the Japanese. Even if one can say so and although a lot of young people still visit graves, there are many of these same graves that are not visited nor maintained. The reason could be the changing of the families in society. In fact, if in 1986 three-generation families made up the 44,8% of the households, in 2019, this percentage diminished to 9.4%. It is the percentage of the single people and the childless couples that

⁶² Ibid. pp. 33-34

increased from 31.3% to 61.1%. Comparing it to the 11.1% in 1986, in 2019 is the 20.2% of people that who have sons or daughters who are not married. If we see the figures of the population like this, it is easy to understand how challenging it will be to maintain the custom of children who host services in memorial of the death, of their parents and grandparents. So this figure show how the organization of funerals shifts from the collective to the individual.⁶³

Following this, we will talk about the temples that are trying more and more to establish a link between itself and the followers, by making advertisement of the funeral rites and visits to graves, since their exclusive right to do funerals and this kind of rituals are going lost. We can clearly see that some members of the scarcely populated areas are relocating in temples of more metropolitan areas, maintaining the cemetery as justifications for staying with the Buddhist community and demonstrating a strong dedication to holding funeral services. The projection is that there will be a general decline in all of the country in 2020, for what that regards the traditional burial customs, without a lot of variances in the regions. One could expect that in this way funerals will increase hereditary membership, but it is not like this; funeral for members are rather expected to fall.⁶⁴

The results of the changing in family structure resulted also in the changes of the the individualization of death rites, the inherited temple-parishioner ties, and the ancestral rites ingrained in established religious systems. As a result of this change, also the number of the customers, which is those who choose to have a funeral from a marketplace or gravestone, have changed as well and because of the fact that Japanese culture and population has got older, an increase of the market activity is also coincident with the change of the interaction among temples and believers. It is augmented also the number of people that do not want to be cared for or to be a burden for others when they get old, and so that they want to die by themselves.

As a reaction, in 2010 a lot of publication like books and periodicals have been released in order for people to have interest again in funeral customs and habits, and with the publication of this works,

⁶³ YAMANAKA, "Religious Change...", cit., p. 368

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 369

the marketing has been developed as well. They include a lot of different kind of funerals, as the "natural funerals" (*shizensō* 自然葬) and "family funerals" (*kazokusō* 家族葬) and they are comprehensive of prices and information about the kind of funeral one would like to receive.

For this reason, the commercialization of this type of rites is augmenting and the market is also joined by services that have nothing to do with temples. An example is AEON, which has absolutely no bonds with temples, but simply sells a "priest introduction service", which establishes a contact with some monks, paid for them to perform different kind of ceremonies, like reading sutras. The person who buy the service do not pay anything else if not the chosen plan, while the rates for service for death people or sutra-singing type are specified in advance.

Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai 全日本仏教会, the Japan Buddhist Federation is worried about the decline of the monopoly of the market of funeral and posthumous rites of the Buddhist institution, as well as for the loss of the relationship between parishioner and temples, because this means that the picture delineates a lot of competition in this kind of market. However, a lot of temples are aware of this situation and tried to adapt themselves to the laws of this new market, giving the public what they want and desire as goods, for stance some goods typical of the temple itself.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 369-370

Chapter 2- Shintoism, Buddhism and marketing: between objects and lucky charms

Between objects and lucky charms: the fortune sold

We have seen in the previous chapter how the religious in Japan has declined from its own institution to a religiousness more linked to the practices and the life of people, and so the marketization.

As it has already been introduced from the previous chapter, this part of the thesis will be dedicated to the examination of various objects and talisman which are very popular in Japan, so that one can understand how much the religiousness in Japanese culture is linked with business and the marketization of the most various and different “lucky charms”.

Usually, these items are intrinsically related to fortune and luck, more than with religion and it is very curious, because a “Western” person could think that this kind of attitude from Japanese people is similar to superstition, more than being associated with religion or religious practices, and it is even more curious if one think that also Japanese people do not identify this practices and the purchase of “sacred” items as religious, but rather as *shūkan* 習慣 (custom, habit), more than as religious practice or habit (*shinkō* or *shūkyō* 宗教).¹ That is also the reason why we could talk more about Japanese “religiousness” instead of Japanese “religion”, since there is a sense of secularity and sociality, together with an idea of the “activity” that one is doing, instead of simply believe in the sacred object one is buying. That is also the reason why I find it so interesting to understand the sense of this objects in both their “marketing” and “religious” sense.

Omamori are one of the most well-known items of this kind and one of the most widespread object that Japanese people hold and wear. These are amulets which are composed by a little colorful bag with two strings to close them, on which are written the purpose for which one purchased them and the name of the shrine where one has bought them.² We are going to speak briefly about the history

¹ R. W. ANDERSON, What Constitutes Religious Activity? (I). Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, 18(4), (1991) p. 369. If the reader wants to know more about the “sense” of what constitute religious practice in Japan, cfr. R. W. ANDERSON, What Constitutes Religious Activity? (I). Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, 18(4), (1991) p. 369-372

² Tiziano TOSOLINI, “Dizionario di Shintoismo”, Monumenta Missionalia, Asian Study Centre, Sergio Targa, 2014, P. 126

of these kind of objects and phenomenon, the various types of this amulet, also the reason for which Japanese people hold them and the changes they have encounter during their life into Japanese culture, together with their relationship with the buyer and the different cultures that have an encounter with them.

Another important item that are sold by shrines are called *omikuji*, which are little pieces of paper on which the fortune of the individual is written, together with some advices about the future and about moral conduct and everyday life practices.³ In this case, we are going to take into consideration the various kind of *omikuji*, together with their history, and how they are differently sold by different temples and shrines, since I believe that is especially for a marketing reason that there is such a variety of *omikuji*, because one would like to have a collection of them. I was tempted to do one myself while I was in Japan and again, I might not be “religious”, but it is irrelevant for this kind of practice, since we are talking about an habit for many Japanese, not a belief or a superstition.

We will then take into consideration another practice very common in Japanese society, which is the practice of the votive tablets, the *ema*. These are wooden tables on which a person writes a message for the *kami* or a desire, asking them to have it become true, or simply a message for them in order to thank those *kami* for a favor they have received.⁴ We will analyze them and talk about their history and their artistical values, but we will go further, since it is important to take into consideration the debate that treat them as a religious or non-religious practice, and also what anime have to do with them.

The fourth and last thing we are going to talk about are *goshuin* and *goshuinchō*, that are, respectively, red seals written in ink that are given to temples and shrines as a form of protection and the booklet in which to contain them. After the usual talk about their history, we will see how the fact that one can collect them is improving tourism at a national level.

³ Ibid. p. 126

⁴ Ibid. pp. 26-27

2.1- Omamori

A brief history of *omamori*

The word *omamori*, come from the Japanese verb “*mamoru*” 守る, “to protect”, because they are meant to be amulets or lucky charms used to protect the person who wears them. This term is normally translated as “amulet” or “talisman” and they have evolved during Japanese history, so they presented in different kind and forms during different times. Today, they are small colorful bags of cloth with a little cord to close them, that contain a little piece of wood or paper with written words of protection for the person that hold them. Also, they have written the name of the temple and the name of the person on them.⁵

Documented tales of supernatural forces turned into objects can be found in the *Kojiki* of the Nara period, so people tend to date the history of *omamori* to this era. There are a lot of debate of deities that use various beneficial objects for mysterious purposes and in different shapes and size, like for example: scarfs that can send away insects and snakes, peaches that can draw demons away, bow and arrow that can give life to things, object with the shape of a hammer that can make wish come true. These kind of items worked when they were in the control of a human person or of a supernatural creature and every single one of them granted the purpose for which it was done. So, one could say this items had similar functions to that of the *omamori* today and also gave similar advantages.⁶

In order to produce their own kind of *omamori*, Japanese temples and shrines adopted and used this customs and habits, so that every single temple and shrine creates and sell its own kind of amulets. The themes of the *omamori* are primary three: a story or tale (*engi* 縁起), the good auspicious of the temple or the shrine and the power of the Shinto *kami* (*goshintai* 御神体) or the Buddha (*gohonzon* 御本尊) put inside of them, that together make the kind of power that the *omamori* itself hold inside

⁵ Eric, TEIXEIRA MENDES. «Ancient Magic and Modern Accessories: Developments in the Omamori Phenomenon.» Western Michigan University, 2015, p. 1; Tiziano TOSOLINI, “Dizionario di Shintoismo”, Monumenta Missionalia, Asian Study Centre, Sergio Targa, 2014, P. 126

⁶ Eric MENDES, "Ancient Magic and Modern Accessories: A Re-Examination of the Omamori Phenomenon." The Hilltop Review 7.2 (2015), p. 153

and that the shrine or the temple guarantee, and that is expressed by the writing or the printing on that particular piece of cloth; this serves as an item of protection for the person who hold that particular item, as well as for the other people, for stance friends and family, to which the *omamori* is often gifted.

Omamori during the Heian and the Tokugawa periods were used especially for moment prayers, which means they had to be thrown away once their purpose was accomplished. They have evolved a lot during time, in terms of kinds, aims, forms and also the production has changed as a consequence of the changes in the society.⁷

During the Heian period, we can see a documented use of the *omamori* in different forms and from both gods and human being in the *The Tale of Genji* 源氏物語, where we have a clear demonstration of some “rudimental” *omamori* of the Heian popular culture. The episode is referred to when Genji himself suffered of a severe illness and fever. He went to see a hermit in order to get some remedy for his sickness, and the man created an amulet for him. It is very different from our idea of *omamori*, since Genji had to swallow it, but the effect was that he soon recovered with the aid the talisman.⁸

There still are some places where this kind of *omamori* are produced and that are used to say they cure illnesses and diseases when consumed, like for example at Koganji 高岩寺 in the Tokyo area, even if they are becoming pretty rare to find. The episode of *The Tale of Genji* gives us a first impression of how modern *omamori* are made today. Even if they are not meant to be swallowed anymore, there is something in which they are pretty similar to the one of the Genji example, and that is the Sanskrit name of a *kami* or a god written on a little slip of paper, so we can conclude that

⁷ YANYAN Zheng, Xiaoxiao Fu, Mimi Li, “Reification in tourism: An investigation of visitors’ interpretation of *omamori*”, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2022, p. 3. A little curiosity: the earliest extant *omamori* (懸守 *kakemamori*) are conserved at Shitennōji (四天王寺), one of the oldest Buddhist temples in the nation, located near Osaka. The Heian period’s elite used these little, 3.3 cm Buddha statues as pendants, which were covered in silk. Cfr. Claudia MARRA, “*Omamori-Shintō* and Buddhist Lucky Charms: How to turn the profane into the sacred.” 長崎外大論叢 *The Journal of Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies* 23 (2019): 33-42.

⁸ Eric MENDES, “Ancient Magic and Modern Accessories: A Re-Examination of the *Omamori* Phenomenon.” *The Hilltop Review* 7.2 (2015), p. 153

omamori were already been used in the Heian period, since we find an example in *The Tale of Genji*.⁹ During the Tokugawa period, people started to wear *omamori* in a similar way they are used to do today: they bought a lucky charm at a temple or a shrine and then they wore them as necklaces, they carried them in their pockets or they hung them to the *obi* 帯 of their *kimono*. Maybe they were not like *omamori* we have today, but they were a more basic form of them, since they were basically a simple piece of wood or paper with an inscription. Their aesthetic value was not so taken into consideration as it may be today, while what was in fact more important was the quality of the material, since it had to be of good paper or wood. However, the most important thing was the supernatural power that it hold in itself, and it is so true that the purpose of *omamori* was merely that of grant a desire or to do something for the owner; once this aim was completed, the item was abandoned, while today a lot of people own *omamori* and “renew” them every now and then.¹⁰

Before 1950, the material used to make *omamori* were usually paper, wood or sometimes metal, while today it is plastic that is particularly used to construct them.¹¹

Omamori of today are very different: even though they have not lost their religious significance, they are also worn as accessories, since the practice of the little piece put inside a small bag of clothe gained a lot of popularity and maybe it is the reason why *omamori* gained that same popularity as well. One may ask why *omamori* are made like this, and the answer is that the Shinto tradition believes that *kami* dwell in an obscure and little places, that could be of course natural, like a stone, an hollow of a tree or a mountain, but also a little bag. That is the reason why *omamori* are little bags closed by laces, so that they would not let the essence of the deity escape. Moreover, to maintain that same essence, one should keep the item away from strong lights and in a dark place, so that the deity will not escape from its little dwelt. However, since now the *omamori* is made of cloth and the little piece of paper is closed inside a small fabric pouch, this practice seems to be unnecessary now, even though

⁹ Ibid. pp. 153-154

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 154

¹¹ E. R. SWANGER, & TAKAYAMA, K. P. A Preliminary Examination of the “Omamori” Phenomenon. *Asian Folklore Studies*, (1981), 40(2), p. 240

it was in use till 1893, and also it was not widespread until the fifties and the sixties.¹²

As already mentioned, *omamori* gained a lot of popularity and its innovation changed, since *omamori* can now being visible and also help the owner in a variety of ways, they promote the temples and shrines that produce them, since they are worn as accessories, even if they are also used as they had already been used before, for example being held in a purse, pocket or bag. However, there had been some invention about *omamori* that changed the market, for example the strap *omamori* to use on the mobile phone or on electric object, the bumper stickers and the *omamori* for cars, which are probably what make them even more popular and made their metamorphosis.¹³

Going on in time, *omamori* have been changing continuously, especially during the contemporary era. The first change is that the production of religious items like *omamori* is now given to specific companies of secular goods, which means *omamori* are not made for the masses by temples or shrines anymore, but by some factories. They take into consideration the market of this types of goods and this kind of industries produce the change of *omamori* themselves, together with their production.

The industry of *omamori* take also into consideration the so-called popular culture, which in Japan often translate into *kawaii* culture 可愛い文化. In fact, it is this kind of culture that influences the market, also the religious one; in fact, the continuing changes on the *omamori* forms and factures suggests that the temples and shrines are trying to maximize their income by drawing as many guests and tourists as possible with the market of this kind of objects. Moreover, tourists are also drawn by the myth of the god living in the *omamori* itself, so also the “traditional” part of it is bend in order to have as much gained as possible. This bolster marketing campaign and make *omamori* a great way to gain from their purchase-buying act. *Omamori* are especially used by religious sites to draw the attention and the desire of people of holding them, so they are used as a merch and commodity to make money for the temples themselves, so they also change in order to meet the demand of Japanese people. Contemporary speaking however, it is also very curious how they could be a way to preserve

¹² TEIXEIRA MENDES. «Ancient Magic and Modern Accessories...» cit., p. 23

¹³ Ibid. p. 24

a Japanese tradition that is capable to evolve with time, instead of succumbing to it, and also to spread worldwide precisely because they are progressing and changing, not staying always the same.¹⁴

Now, to understand *omamori*, we also have to think about the process of turning an experience into something one can touch, for example an object. We call this process reification. In fact, if we understand *omamori* in this sense, one can easily comprehend why so many Japanese people and also tourist buy *omamori*: a souvenir is nothing if it is not reified, but in the moment one put inside a little object something of their own experiences, the souvenir as an *omamori* could be, becomes rich in memories and also can shifts into different cultures, stories and contexts. Tourists buy a souvenir because of its intrinsic value and because they recollect with that simple object a moment in time they had in particular place, and for what concerns religious ones, one can also link the memory to that particular religious site in which one could have possibly felt a significant spiritual moment. Talking about *omamori* as an example of this kind, one can understand reification as a foundation for investigating people's interactions with material items of the world and the context of religious tourism.¹⁵

Different kind of *omamori* and their functions

Omamori can be divided into two different categories, the most common ones being the rectangular shaped *omamori*, the most classic talisman type, which strength is brought by the words written on the piece of wood or paper put inside the little purse of cloth, that might be some *sutras*, some powerful sentences or even the shrine name.

¹⁴ HARTORO, A., & Lawanda, I. I. Omamori transformation: The influence of kawaii culture in omamori commodification. In , 24–26. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Strategic and Global Studies, (2019), p. 10

¹⁵ YANYAN Zheng, Xiaoxiao Fu, Mimi Li, “Reification in tourism...”, cit., p. 2-3

The second kind of *omamori* are the morphic kind, that indicates that they are not rectangularly shaped, but that they have the shape of something else, like the bell, the bottle gourd and the mallet, each of them being in connection with Shinto artifacts. The oldest might be the bottle gourd type, being itself a symbol of health, life and immortality in a lot of tales. Some of this kind of *omamori* are very famous, for example the *omamori* with the form of a fox at the Inari shrine, cause animals are typical of this kind of *omamori* and zodiac signs are often used to make morphic *omamori*.¹⁶

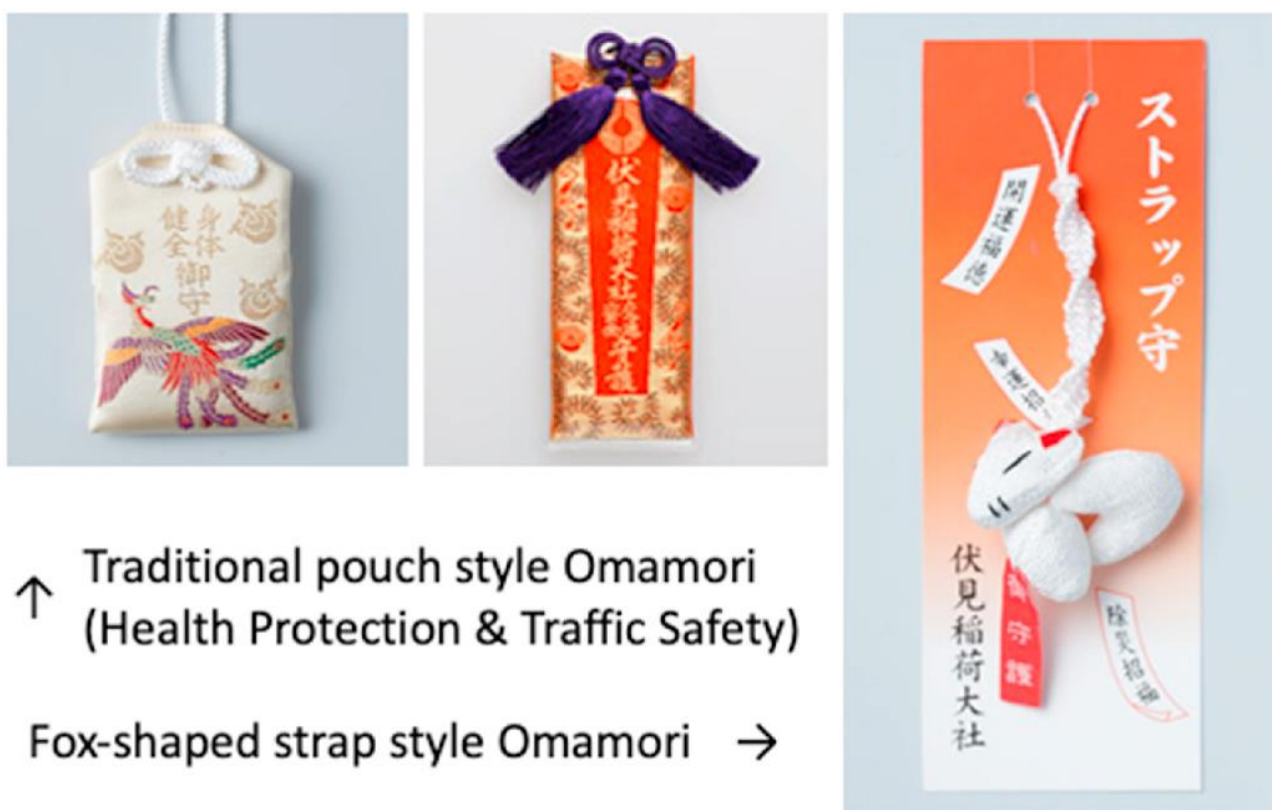


Figure 1: different types of *omamori* ¹⁶

Normally, an omamori comprehend all the life of an individual, from birth or even from conception to death, since they are objects usually made for the protection of the person, and so a different kind of item is needed depending on the cycle of life one is living. For example the *anzanmamori* 安産守

¹⁶ Lane, Verity. *Omamori : Protecting Yourself in Little Ways*, 2014, <https://www.tofugu.com/japan/omamori-japanese-charms/>. Picture from YANYAN Zheng, Xiaoxiao Fu, Mimi Li, "Reification in tourism: An investigation of visitors' interpretation of omamori", *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2022, p. 3

り is used when a woman is pregnant with the baby, so when the newborn is still in her womb, to pray the kami for a good pregnancy, to ensure the health of the little one.

After that, people would lean their hopes on the so-called *gakugyoujojumamori* (学業成就守り) for their *kami* and gods to help the individual during their beginning in education, at school, while the *shoubaihanjomamori* (商売繫盛守り) would try to help them during the beginning in business, at work, for gods to assist people in their management in enterprises. An *enmusubimamori* (縁結び守り) is said to assist the person in finding their soulmate or a spouse in terms of the strength of the *omamori* and advice from the *kami*.

In order to help the person who wears *omamori* in every kind of difficult situation in life or every type of harmful influences, there are for stances the *yakuyokemamori* (厄除守り), which is said will aid the person and will shield them from demonic interference, or the *kotsūanzenmamori* (交通安全守り), that will help the owner during their travels.¹⁷

The importance of having a good lucky charm that suits the person for their objective, such as the prayer for success or a ward for bad luck, or again in order to find them a partner is very important for them in order to make them think positively about the future, which can be difficult to do without this kind of help.

Especially after the New Year, it is likely to see a lot of students with some *omamori* hanging from their bags and rucksack, since it is said that prayers for success in exams and business will help those who will work hard for examination and work. Some of them, especially those coming from Kitano Tenmangu Shrine 天満宮 in Kyoto and Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine 太宰府天満宮 in Fukuoka Prefecture are very popular when it comes to speak about exams success. It is said that you should

¹⁷ RAHMAH, Yuliani. "Omamori: Harmonization of Humans and Their Environment in Cultural Symbols." E3S Web of Conferences. Vol. 202. EDP Sciences, 2020, pp. 2-3

wear your favorite based on your own intuition, because one have a huge variety of colors and designs. They are believed to help you realize your ambitions in terms of your studies and educational goals and they are similar to a prayer related to success in school and ambition which, it is said, also works for any educational aspect, so it will also be valid for the person personal goals, like grades and any kind of texts.¹⁸

When you will take an *omamori* for money-raising, the benefit will be in the aspect of money and you will have an increased income, your savings will increase or one will have a successful asset management, or maybe could be your jewelry or artwork to increase their values.

The amulet for the well-going of business is said to bring a lot of customers to your activity, so they are especially designed for newborn managers or entrepreneurs, since like this their business will grow with the help of the *omamori*. This kind of charms also take into consideration the success with the customers and the success of one's business prosperity. One of the most famous shrine for business prosperities is Ootori Shrine 鳳神社 in Asakusa,. Worshippers come from all over the country in order to pray for it at this shrine, which is full of colors and could be very little, so that one can place the *omamori* next to their desk at work, but could also be of one meter each, since the idea is to replace them every year with a larger one, in order to make the business grow as a consequence.¹⁹

Last but not least, we can have a love *omamori*, which fulfil all the desires related to love, for example it is said to connect you with someone you have met already and that you are destined to develop a love relationship with. One example is the *enmusubi suzuran mamori* 縁結びスズラン守り, sold by the Tokyo Daijingu Shrine 大神宮, which is a cute amulet with two white *suzuran* orchids スズラン, with two little bells inside of them. Marriage amulets wish the continued happiness for the couple and the hope for them to continue to be together, for stance the *meotomamori*

¹⁸ <https://thegate12.com/jp/article/458#content-5>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

夫婦守 (couple talismans), which can be bought on different religious sites through all of Japan, and they are presented as two amulets with motifs of wedding dress or the twelve-layered *kimono* (*junihitoe* 十二単), each of them worn for good luck.²⁰

***Omamori* in relation to the buyer**

Since religious convictions are weakening during these years of industrialization, the situation of the business of temples and Shinto shrines is getting worse; especially for little Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, the business is not getting better by any means, while the situation is different for larger and well-known temples, since they are being capable to draw tourists and customers attention with their merchandizing. There are numerous example where one can see that temples and shrines have drawn the attention of a lot of tourists and worshippers by giving them some presents and merch, like *omamori* and *goshuin*, in order to make it clear how unique the site is. Since in this new era everything is easily accessible online, the value of a unique merch will only rise just because it is typical of a certain place. Amulets are very different from one another and also from other products, so we need to how much of the design is involved in buying them, and why people do so.²¹

We can see that, including people who do not usually wear *omamori*, there are four different kind of behavior respect to the *omamori* phenomenon. We are going to rate them from type 0, to type 3.

- Type 0 are worshipers who do not usually buy/ take/ wear/ receive amulets
- Type 1 are worshipers who take amulets based on their appearance
- Type 2 are worshipers who think about amulets not so much
- Type 3 are worshipers who choose amulets based on the benefit they wish to receive

If we analyze the behavior of the buyer, we can see that male buyer usually tend to place emphasis on the amulets that make them feel special and sacred, so they usually choose an *omamori* which has

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ MATSUBAYASHI Satsuki, TANAKA Kyoka, KITANI Yoji, "Jishasanpaisha ga omamori wo ukeru dōki ni oyobosu dezain no eikyō", Influence of Design of Omamori on Motives for Acquisition, Kyoto Institute of Technology, 2020, p. 278

a simple design. On the other hand, if we take into consideration a female buyer, we can see that a woman will put more emphasis on the “harmony” factor, which means that they choose an *omamori* which is pleasing to the eye. Also, they will also accept them if they want to hold them, even if maybe they do not understand their meaning perfectly.

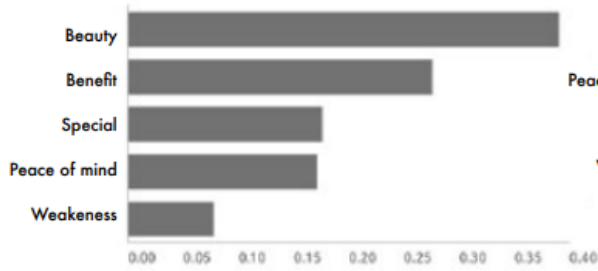


Table 1: Type 0 preference index

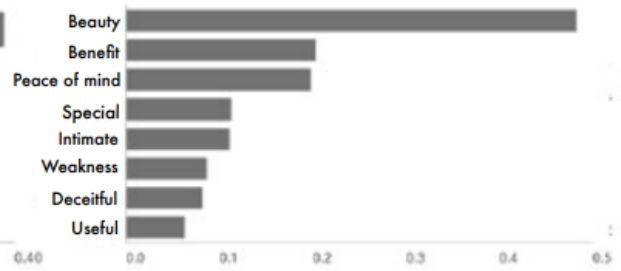


Table 2: Type 1 preference index

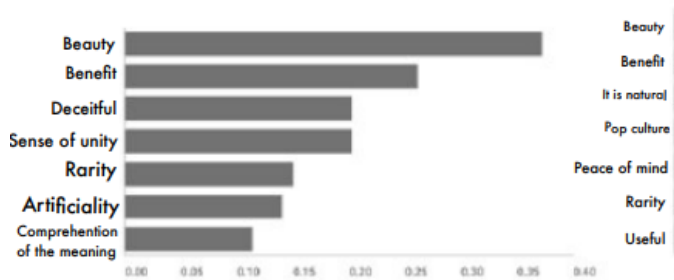


Table 3: Type 2 preference index

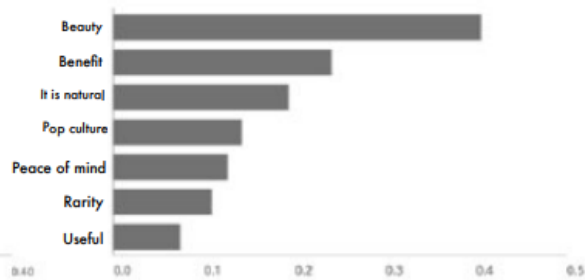


Table 4: Type 3 preference index

Tables from 1 to 4 of the preference indexes ²²

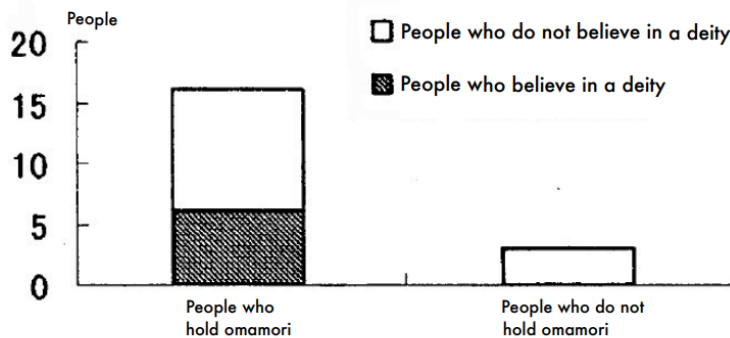
Worshippers of type 0 usually do not like *omamori* and so will be not attracted to them, unless the amulet has a strong appeal, but, they say, they would prefer an object that is special and that would bring them good luck (Table 1). Going on with the preferences, worshippers of type 1 said they would prefer something that is beautiful, they also would like something that will bring them good luck and on the same level, they put a lot of importance on the “period factor” (Table 2). The worshipper of type 2 will like things based on harmony, but also “exotic”, so things that are rare and that you can find in rare places, since they like to take amulets that express the individuality of a shrine or a temple (Table 3). Last but not least, type 3 want to buy something that they understand in their meaning and

they would like to receive a benefit from it (Table 4).²²

Why do people hold *omamori*?

Another important thing one may ask is if holding and buying *omamori* is just a religious act, or if there are other reasons for people to hold and buy this kind of objects.

Table 5: people who own *omamori* and percentage of people who believe in the existence of transcendent deity²³



We can see in Table 5, the number and percentage of people who have an amulet and that contemporary believe in the existence of a transcendental being or deity. 85% of the respondent

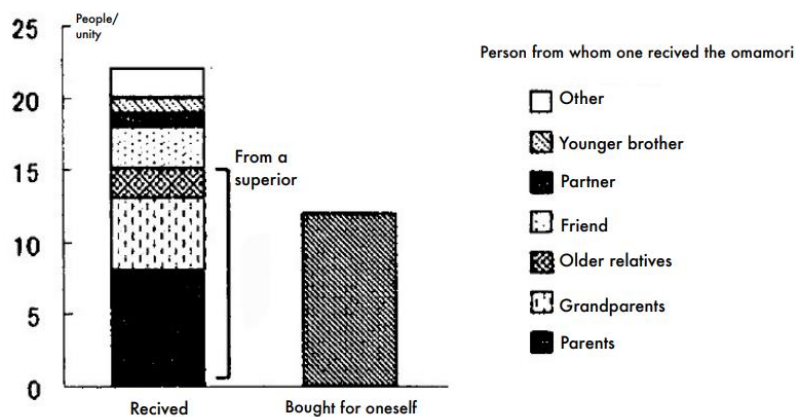


Table 6: percentage of people who bought their *omamori* themselves and who received it²³

(seventeen) had an amulet of some kind with them, but even among the people who hold an *omamori*, the majority did not believe in a *kami* or a deity or even a God-like creature. This can suggest that the act of holding

an *omamori* is not a mere religious act for obtaining the protection of a *kami*, but there are other reasons because people hold, buy or receive an *omamori*. Let us see what these reasons could be.²³

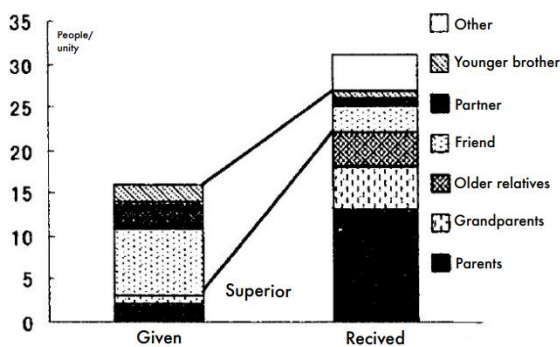
²² Ibid; Tables from 1 to 4 are taken from MATSUBAYASHI Satsuki 松林さつき, TANAKA Kyoka 田中杏佳, KITANI Yoji 木谷庸二, "Jishasanpaisha ga omamori wo ukeru dōki ni oyobosu dezain no eikyō" 寺社参拝者がお守りを受ける動機に及ぼすデザインの影響 Influence of Design of Omamori on Motives for Acquisition, 京都工芸繊維大学 Kyoto Institute of Technology, 2020

²³ ARAKAWA Ayumi 荒川歩, "Hito wa omamori wo naze motsu no ka? Alternative option toshite no omamori 人はお守りをなぜ持つのか? Alternative option としてのお守り", Ritsumeikan

Table 6 show the number of the amulets people bought for themselves and the number of those *omamori* they have received from someone else, and in this table we can clearly see that the number of *omamori* received by other people is significant and higher respect to the number of *omamori* the respondents buy for themselves. Also, it is particularly high the number of *omamori* received from parents, grandparents and others, respect to the number of *omamori* bought by the same respondent for themselves.

45% of people who answered the survey, nine people, stated that they had given *omamori* to other people for a total of sixteen talismans given. On the other hand, 90% of the respondent (eighteen

Table 7: percentage of people who gave and received *omamori* ²⁴



people) said they had received amulets, including those they currently have, for a total of thirty-one talismans given. We can see the relationship between people who give *omamori* and people who receive them in Table 7. The table shows how the number of *omamori* received by university students is higher than the number of amulets they gift. We can also see that they usually receive the *omamori* they have from elder people, like parents, grandparents and superior people respect to their own position. On the contrary, the people to whom they usually gift an *omamori* are usually younger than them or the same age. Speaking about the nature of the

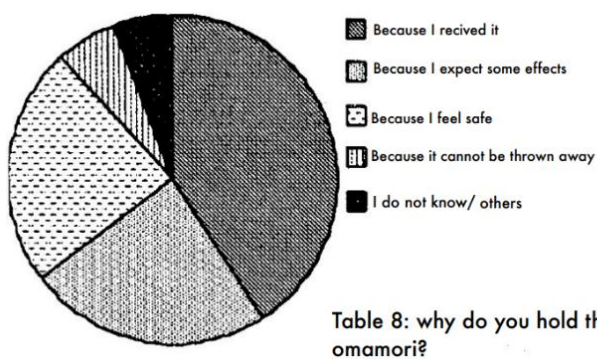


Table 8: why do people hold the *omamori* ²⁴

Daigaku Ningen Kagaku. Tables 5 and 6 are from ARAKAWA Ayumi 荒川歩, "Hito wa omamori wo naze motsu no ka? Alternative option toshite no omamori 人はお守りをなぜ持つのか? Alternative option としてのお守り", Ritsumeikan Daigaku Ningen Kagaku Kenkyujo 立命館大学人間科学研究所, pp. 52-53

talisman gifted, of the thirty-one received so far, nineteen talismans are for help with academic success, given of course on the time of examination. In addition, it was observed that people usually received *omamori* when they bought a car or a motorbike.²⁴

Table 8 shows the tabulation of the responses to the question “Why do you hold an *omamori*?”, so it categorizes the reasons why people hold them. one of the most common response is that, simply, the person has received it from someone else, so there is a communication of feelings between the two that goes beyond the simple benefit of the object or the belief. Also, a considerably high number of people responded that they felt a sense of security in holding them.

With these results, one can clearly see that holding an amulet is not just simply a question of belief, as one could point out, but also a communication of feelings between two different people, which is the main reason why people hold the *omamori*. For the person who gift the *omamori*, it could be an expression of the support for the other person and for showing them they wish happiness, or to show a sense of protection for them: when they are in a situation where the person cannot be of immediate help (e.g. for exams, for road safety, etc.), this could be a significative alternative option. On the other hand, the receiver would decontextualize their context of anxiety with the help of the *omamori*, and focus on the other person and their relationship, so that they will feel a little of relief.²⁵

Visitors’ vision of *omamori*, between secularity and religion

Even though we saw what Japanese people think about *omamori*, it is undeniable that they are also taken into consideration because of their religious power, especially by tourists, even though they have changed a lot over time. First of all, in fact, *omamori* conveys a message that materializes a sort of invisible power; second, for a lot of tourists, *omamori* are part of the Japanese customs and so they are prepared to accept them as a part of the Japanese habits and to adhere to them; third, even if we

²⁴ Ibid. Tables 7 and 8 are from ARAKAWA Ayumi 荒川歩, "Hito wa omamori wo naze motsu no ka? Alternative option toshite no omamori 人はお守りをなぜ持つのか? Alternative option としてのお守り", Ritsumeikan Daigaku Ningen Kagaku Kenkyujo 立命館大学 人間科学研究所, pp. 52-53

²⁵ Ibid.

have seen that sometimes it is not for a religious purpose that *omamori* are bought, for some other time it is, for the good health of a person or for the smooth delivery of a child, but they also create bonds among people if a person gift them, as we have already seen. So, we can state that this kind of practice encompass the culture of Japan in both religious and non-religious connotations.

If we follow the Japanese religiosity, we can clearly see what is the “power” that reside in *omamori*. We can see that visitors of the shrines and temples continue to take and collect *omamori*, even if they do not belief in their effectiveness or even if they are not strongly convicted about it, since maybe they can turn that specific object to an important and subjective experience through which they turn to a different and spiritual realm. As already stated above, people could for example turn the object into a spiritual one, since they feel a sense of security in them, and so they are given a particular sense of identity to the object itself. This kind of spirituality, for example, explains how Western tourist interpret this kind of Japanese culture and their own experience at a Japanese sacred site.

That is the reason why this kind of ideas of the religious and spiritual connotation creates a completely different meaning of the religious power of an *omamori*. People go to a shrine and buy *omamori* because, also trough a different culture, they are able to feel religiousness through an object, regardless of one spiritual belief, one is able to understand a sort of “universal” spirituality through this object, encountering an *omamori* people are able to comprehend the spirituality of people who can also be of a different culture and, like this, take part to a religious activity that is not one of their own religion.²⁶

The second idea is, on the contrary and that is the reason why it is particularly interesting to notice, the secular value of these objects. In fact, if we take *omamori* into consideration, the word that is most used to describe them is “decoration” or “decorativeness”, so they are taken into consideration as ornaments and aesthetic items, bought for their practical values and qualities, maybe also for their designs, shapes and forms, as already seen: people are particularly impressed by the range of different

²⁶ YANYAN Zheng, Xiaoxiao Fu, Mimi Li, “Reification in tourism: An investigation of visitors’ interpretation of *omamori*”, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2022, p. 5

designs and kind of the *omamori* at a particular shrine or temple that are presented and that have contributed to the popularity of the *omamori* phenomenon itself, like for example bracelets, cards, and straps for bags and phones. Moreover, *omamori* are seen as a symbol of the so-called *kawaii* culture, so they have gained a lot of popularity among the younger generations because of this particular reason and also because of popular activities. Last but not least, *omamori* are seen as the memories of a particular travel, so buying an *omamori* is a unique way for tourists to have a good memory of their trips and show this particular voyage through an object.

Discussing the secular meaning of the *omamori*, a lot of tourists have brought up also the *kawaii* or “cute” culture, since the demand has increased because of this reason and so *omamori* have changed in order to accomplish the demand of the people for different designs requested especially by the Chinese, who seem to prefer the aesthetic of the *kawaii* culture.

As already seen above, the previous function of the *omamori* was simply that of a religious object and so they had extremely simple and plain designs, since they originally were made for just their primary religious purpose. Then, their original meaning has changed, because of the modern times, and now they have different meaning and significance, respect to the only religious one. Now people can view *omamori* as an accessory, and they do not see them as a simple religious item anymore, since it is presented in such a variety of ways that it simply is considered in different ways. The alteration in their appearance has changed also the perception that people have on them.²⁷

Finally, we can see how people understand and comprehend *omamori* both from a religious and a non-religious and secular prospective. An instance could be as people, visitors of temples and shrines and tourists understand the role of an animal like the foxes, for example the white fox is said to be the messenger of the Fushimi Inari Taisha 伏見稲荷大社 fox, so as a symbol, the fox come to be the idea of prosperity and good fortune. Now, we have the idea that the *omamori* in the shape of a fox bring within itself. Its original significance is “good luck” and it is also said to bring money, but

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 5-6

people added how cute and adorable this kind of *omamori* was, together with the simple fact that it would be in the shape of a fox. It seems that non-Japanese tourists that seems to be so detached from any religion, discover the link between the spiritual site and the *omamori* it is sold there and simply wanted to share the information.

So, we may conclude that *omamori* are really different for other typical religious object, since they have in themselves both a religious and a secular significance. For the Western tourists, for example, they hold a great religious meaning, while for Japanese people seems to be more the object that deepen a relationship with a person. *Omamori* have changed a lot for both religious and non-religious reasons, since they had to meet the demand of both worshippers and tourist at temples and shrines and because of their gain in popularity for religious and secular aspects; in fact, they are seen as artifacts of religion, but also a memory of one's travel and a symbol of the Japanese culture. That is the reason why they changed so much, to encounter the tendencies of any kind of costumer and for the influence of the Japanese *kawaii* culture.²⁸

Reification in relation to the tourism and the intercultural experience

Talking about everything stated above, we can say that *omamori* are more than a simple religious item, but they allow us to see how tourists make interactions with other cultures, especially the Japanese one and go even further than a simply religious interpretation of the object, since there is a reinterpretation of some values that are not religious, but go beyond this aspect and also more deeper than their artistical value. People perceptions of the *omamori* phenomenon easily reveals how they make a deeper relationship with them, that is not just a religious one, but go also to the secular plan, since we are talking about the relation with other people and the recollection of one's memories of a travel, for example, making them more than just simple items bought as souvenirs, but it is a phenomenon that reach a contact between two different cultures.

Moreover, we have already seen how they are perceived as a custom of this particular culture from

²⁸ Ibid. p. 6

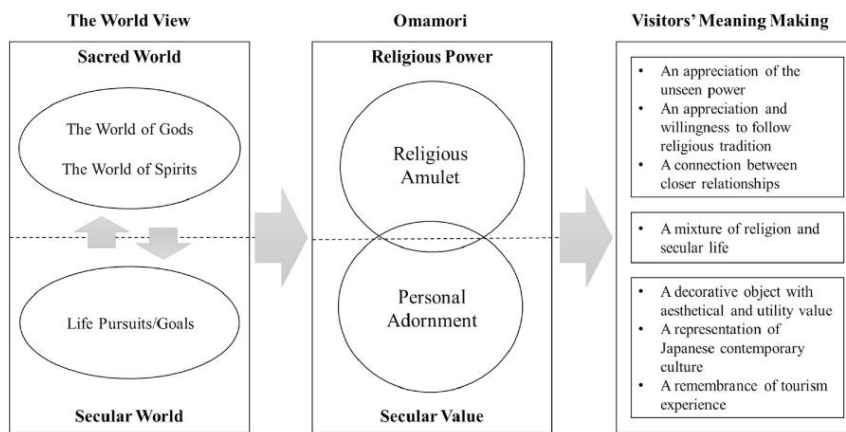


Figure 2: the reification process of *omamori* ²⁹

the tourists that, through the *omamori* themselves, reach a contact with the habits of the Japanese. It is interesting to note how the fact that the *omamori* is not a simple good or souvenir make a contact

between two different cultures, and pass from one to the other with its simple existence and through the memory made by the person. This explains why such an ancient object can be so popular in historical periods different from its own, even if its birth dates back to thousands of year: because of the reification process. In addition, we could state that the line separating the religious and the secular realm in this item is so thin, that it becomes easy to understand why such an object is not only so popular, but also satisfies the demands of such a different variety of people from such different religious and non-religious backgrounds.²⁹

Omamori are perceived as a particular item that is part of Japanese temple and shrine tourism, with some connotations that go beyond the religious realm and that meet the cultural one. For stance, since some visitors to temples and shrines believe that buying *omamori* is part of the Japanese religious activity, some of them genuinely think that their commitment to the shrine or the temple will be stronger if they buy an *omamori*, because they are applying to a Japanese custom. When visitors make the experience of taking an *omamori* – for themselves or others, it is irrelevant – they understand this as an involvement into another culture, and they feel the authenticity of this kind of experience as an intercultural experience would be, since it gains meaning as an experience of Japanese culture itself.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 6. Figure 2 is taken from YANYAN Zheng, Xiaoxiao Fu, Mimi Li, “Reification in tourism: An investigation of visitors’ interpretation of *omamori*”, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2022, p. 7

So, the discourse goes even further and deeper, since because this meaningful experience is accepted by tourists as a Japanese tradition that is typical of the Japanese culture, this becomes a mean of communication between the two cultures and a way the two have to understand one another. Interacting in such a way with omamori, tourists come to understand part of the Japanese culture, they comprehend and appreciate something different and distant from their own culture and this becomes a way for different cultures to meet and interact. In conclusion, the omamori phenomenon make a difference in the cross-cultural activity of both Japan and the rest of the world, since they are a way of contact between cultures, which become ready to understand each other thanks to an object that is not a simply religious one, but also touches secularity and the more universal realm of tourism and aesthetic, giving them a secular interpretation as an adorable item to have as merchandise.³⁰

2.2- Omikuji

A brief history

Omikuji are a way of divination typical of the Japanese culture that is used in shrines and temples. One of the most basic form of this kind of divination consists in asking the kami for a desire and writing it in a small piece of paper, which is offered to the deity in order for them to understand the courses of the life of the person. Another form, consisted in pre-written pieces of paper where one can find written some advices on various aspects of the life. One can pull out an *omikuji* to have some advices for various aspect of the life. They are put in a wooden box next to the temple or a shrine, where the spot is composed from different drawers, that come with their own number. The guests of the sanctuary make a little donation to the sacred spot and then shake a particular box with some wooden sticks in it, in order to extract one of them. They are all numbered, so that the person has to take the number of the little stick and take out an *omikuji* from the same number of the drawer. One can have a good or a bad luck *omikuji*, and if they drew one of bad luck, they can put it on a tree or a

³⁰ Ibid. p. 7-8

particular spot around the temple to turn the bad luck into a better one.³¹

Omikuji is a word that comes from “*kuji*”, with a prefix of respect, since the individual is asking their own fate to the deity or the Buddha themselves, so it is mandatory to pay respect even in the name.

The history dates back to the Nanbokuchō 南北朝時代 period and goes on till the Muromachi period, when it was imported from China a Chinese lottery, the *tenjikureisen* 天竺靈籤, from which a Japanese man, Ganzandashi 元三大師, took inspiration to give life to its own one, a lottery called *ganzandashihyakusen* 元三大師百籤. This seems to be the beginning of the Japanese today *omikuji*. From that moment on, the the Ganzan Daishi Hyakusoku lottery became very popular and used by all the sort of temples and shrines, together with the book that talked about the lottery itself that appeared in this years, the so-called *Mikujihon* みくじ本. In the hope to have good omens for their fights, *omikuji* were drawn by warriors of this time, together with all the common people of the period, that left the decision on their lives to the Buddhas or the *kami*.

Someone says that Gensandaishi is the monk Ryogen of the Heian period. In this visions of the facts, when the priest prayed Kannon, the Kannon lottery was given to him by the Buddha, and from this lottery the divination of reading the future on some pieces of paper was created. As we will see later in detail, so that we can take better into consideration this practice, at the Gensandaishi Hall at Enryakuji, one can still read the *omikuji* in the “traditional” way: they write on a piece of paper the thing they need to ask to the *kami*, that is Gensandaishi in this particular case, and after a monk asked about the content to the person, he interpret the divination by drawing an *omikuji* and the person receives some advices regard the thing they asked about.³²

³¹ Tiziano TOSOLINI, “Dizionario di Shintoismo”, Monumenta Missionalia, Asian Study Centre, Sergio Targa, 2014, P. 126

³² <https://thegate12.com/jp/article/421>; MARUYAMA, S. Omikuji. Sapporo tanoshii jugyō · kenkyū sākuru-yō repōto: Kashutsu jikken jugyō kenkyūkai · Hokkaidō, おみくじ。札幌たのしい授業・研究サークル用レポート 仮説実験授業研究会・北海道, [Omikuji. Sapporo Fun Lessons and Research Circle Report: Hypothetical Experimental Teaching Research Association, Hokkaido], 2010

How to draw and read an *omikuji*

The first thing to do if one wants to draw an *omikuji* is to pay respect to the *kami* or Buddha of the sacred spot one is visiting by praying, where there will be for sure a place that is selling *omikuji* and other lucky charms and souvenirs. After praying, you can go there and select the *omikuji* which is the favorite, since, as we will see in the next part of the chapter, there are different *omikuji* for different sacred spots. Once you have selected the desired type, you should pay a little money to have them, which usually amounts to one hundred or two hundred yen, you can always ask for help if you are not sure about it. After that, you can draw your *omikuji* from the boxes they are in; in fact, some of them have to be thrown directly out of a large box where they are put in, so you have to put your arm in the box and throw out one of them. Some others require you to take an hexagonal box: once you have paid, the girl paying service will give you this box, from which you will have to take a stick out. These sticks are numbered, so you will have to read the number of the stick and to associate it to the one you will see on a designated spot with drawers, or give the little stick to the girl of the temple. She will give you a little piece of paper with your fortune written on it, or you will have to take one yourself from the drawer with the same number.³³

Table 9: categories of luck you can find in *omikuji*³³

Kanji	How to read	Meaning
大吉	Daikichi	Great blessing
中吉	Chūkichi	Middle blessing
小吉	Shōkichi	Small blessing
吉	Kichi	Blessing
未吉	Suekichi	Future blessing
凶	Kyou	Bad fortune
大凶	Daikyou	Great bad fortune

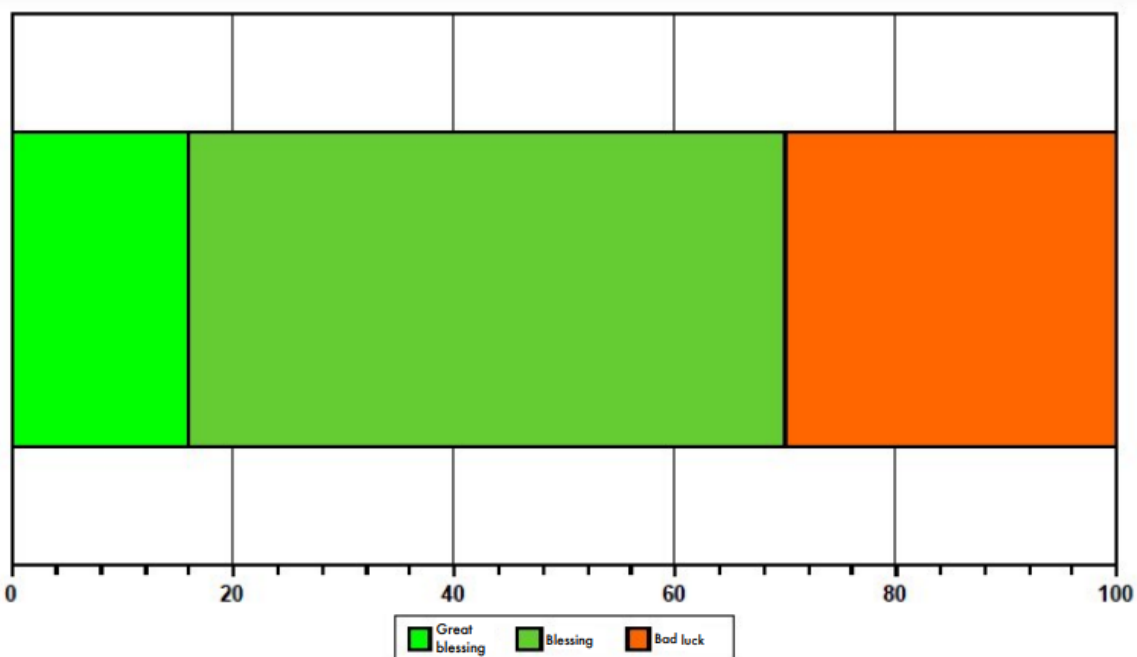
On the little piece of paper there will be a specific word that will tell you your general luck, while if you read deeper the text, you will discover your luck of different kind of aspects of your life, for example love, health, business. They are usually written in Japanese, but now there are a lot of *omikuji* which are written in both

³³ <https://blog.japanwondertravel.com/what-is-omikuji-29421#toc16>. Table 9 is taken from <https://blog.japanwondertravel.com/what-is-omikuji-29421>

Japanese and English, especially in the most well-known temples and shrines, that draw a lot of foreign tourists. You can find a lot of different *kanji* that explains your general luck, that can go from a “great blessing”, to a “great bad fortune”, so it will be very difficult to explain all of them in this thesis, but in general, you could find the symbol that explains your general luck as you can see in the Table 9.

c It is not known if it is for a marketing reason, so because a customer could be more drawn to have an *omikuji* because they know they could have a more favorable luck, but for example at Sensoji 浅草寺, which uses the Gensandaishi lottery, one can find that the *omikuji* of “Great blessing” are the 16% of the total, the “Blessing” one are the 54% and the “Bad fortune” are just the 30%, as Table 10 can show below.

Table 10: categories of blessings at Sensoji ³⁴



This could be because of marketing reasons, since the general “good fortune” at Sensoji come to be at the 70%, while “bad luck” is just at the 30% of the possibilities, so one could be more drawn to take an *omikuji*, because the possibility of taking the “good fortune” is so high.

Once you have drawn the *omikuji*, even though we have seen that the probabilities to draw a fortunate one could possibly be high as at the Sensoji example show, you could also be dissatisfied with the

one you took and you could also notice that there are a lot of *omikuji* that are left at the temple in a specific spot, often a tree or a wooden structure, where *omikuji* are often tied, instead of being thrown away or taken home. The reason is that by doing so, one can hang the “wish to the life force of the tree”, which will take the force of the tree itself and the sacred spot force to fulfill the wish of all the people that asked for it.

Sometimes, in order not to disrupt or damage all the *omikuji* left at the temple, some of them offer a fence instead of a tree where you can put your unlucky *omikuji*, since like this you can gather your *omikuji* to a safer place. Once you have tied your fortune slip to this place because you had an *omikuji* of bad luck, it is habit sometimes to burn them, in order to turn them into good luck. This is the habit, but sometimes people just want to have an *omikuji* as a souvenir, so there is nothing bad if you take the little piece of paper home.³⁴

Different design of *omikuji* at different sacred spots and *omikuji* online

While a normal *omikuji* is just a little piece of paper presented to the buyer, there are a variety of different *omikuji* that are differentiated thanks to the location and the temple or shrine we could find them at. We can clearly see how the choice to have different kind of design for different *omikuji* could be dictated from the market, since there are a lot of people that make the collection of *omikuji* just because of this reason. Let us see some examples.

³⁴ Ibid; MARUYAMA, S. *Omikuji. Sapporo tanoshii jugyō · kenkyū sākuru-yō repōto: Kashutsu jikken jugyō kenkyūkai · Hokkaidō, おみくじ. 札幌たのしい授業・研究サークル用レポート 仮説実験授業研究会・北海道*, [Omikuji. Sapporo Fun Lessons and Research Circle Report: Hypothetical Experimental Teaching Research Association, Hokkaido], 2010, p. 7. Table 10 was taken from MARUYAMA, S. *Omikuji. Sapporo tanoshii jugyō · kenkyū sākuru-yō repōto: Kashutsu jikken jugyō kenkyūkai · Hokkaidō, おみくじ. 札幌たのしい授業・研究サークル用レポート 仮説実験授業研究会・北海道*, [Omikuji. Sapporo Fun Lessons and Research Circle Report: Hypothetical Experimental Teaching Research Association, Hokkaido], 2010, p. 7

Figure 3: deer made of wood, that holds an *omikuj* in its mouth ³⁵



Figure 4: *omikuj* of a white deer ³⁵

Kasuga Taisha 春日大社 is a red temple located in Nara prefecture, that has some *omikuj* that are clearly different from any other. It is one of the sites of World Heritage, so people come to see it from all around the world and, of course, from all of Japan. Since the deer is the animal sacred to Nara and a lot of these animals have home in Nara, you can find two different deer-shaped *omikuj*. The deer of the Nara prefecture are believed to be messengers of the gods, so they are treated as sacred animals, so there are a lot of souvenirs shaped like deer, including *omikuj*. The first one you can find costs five hundred yen and it is a deer made of

wood, that holds an *omikuj* in its mouth (Figure 3). The second one is the *omikuj* of a white deer and it costs six hundred yen (Figure 4).

Many people visit some shrines just because of their *omikuj*, since they come in a particular shape or design, and it is the case of the Hokkaido's Obihiro Shrine 帯広神社, which is well-known for its *omikuj* in the shape of a white little bird called *shimaenaga* シマエナガ (Long-tailed tit), which can be found in Hokkaido from fall to spring. Not only one can experience the view of this particular and cute little bird at the shrine, but one can also buy the *omikuj* shaped like it, which contains the fortune of the person that buys it. This particular kind of *omikuj* costs five hundred yen and it is particularly cute, with its little black eyes and its eyebrow, so it is easy to understand how this could be put in a collection and why people chose to buy this kind of merch, if not for habit or for a religious region,

of course it is because of its *kawaii* aspect.³⁵

There are a lot of ancient temples in Japan, especially in the center of Kamakura, in Kanagawa prefecture, that is a very well-known place as a travel destination for tourists from all around the world. In this particular place, one can find *omikuji* shaped like a *jizo* じぞ, the so-called *nagomikuji* なごみくじ, that cost around five hundred yen each. A temple where you could find *omikuji* of this kind is the Hasadera 羽佐寺.

But Japan largely believes that there is a god in the nature, in every creature, so it does not surprise that there is a shrine in Kyoto, the Okazaki shrine 尾崎神社, that is drawing the attention of all the rabbit lovers. The region that surrounds the shrine is said to be a natural habitat for rabbits, and from this rabbits are said once again to be the messenger of the local deity. The shrine itself is decorated with some features and decorations of some rabbits, for example it presents some lanterns and sculptures rabbit-shaped, so obviously, the *omikuji* comes to have the shape of a little and cute white rabbit. Once again, the link with the *kawaii* culture is pretty evident and also the choice of marketing is obvious (Figure 5).³⁶

Figure 5: *omikuji* with the shape of a rabbit ³⁵



Figure 6: *daruma omikuji* ³⁵

³⁵ <https://blog.japanwondertravel.com/what-is-omikuji-29421#toc16>. Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 were taken from <https://blog.japanwondertravel.com/what-is-omikuji-29421>

³⁶ Ibid.

Another important shrine that sells a lot of different *omikuji* is the Atago shrine 愛宕神社, that provides a lot of different *omikuji*, but the *darumamikuji* だるま御籤 are the most well-known and beloved (Figure 6). One of the most interesting features of this kind of *omikuji* is that you can choose the face of the *daruma* that you like the most, since they are all different. The paper of the *omikuji* is inside this little *daruma*-shaped box and so you have to put it out from it with the help of a little stick in order to determine your fortune.³⁷

Another interesting form of *omikuji* of this era, where everything is devoted to marketing and selling, are the *omikuji* online. In case you are away from Japan or the shrine where you want to visit, you can always throw a “digital” *omikuji* online. I drew myself some online *omikuji* now that I am not in Japan anymore and what is even more fascinating, I *bought* some *omikuji* online in order to bring them to my family and friends in Italy. Here you will find some *omikuji* online as abovementioned.

- Atago Shrine: this kind of *omikuji* is a very general one and as a general of its kind, it comes with the fortune of various aspects of life, such as health, love, business, wishes, travel and a lot more. It is written in Japanese, so one should use Google translate to understand the content.
- Meiji shrine 明治神宮: this kind of *omikuji* is more original, since you will throw out a *waka* poem written by the Emperor Meiji or the Empress Shōken 昭憲皇太后. There is also an English translation for all the tourists and people from around the world that want to take one of this online.
- Keta taisha 気多大社: this kind of *omikuji* online is dedicated to the goddess of love, who is worshipped in this shrine, in the prefecture of Ishikawa. You can throw an *omikuji* online from here if you want to find your soulmate or if you want to know your luck in love affairs.³⁸

As one can see, *omikuji* differentiate for form, design and they can even be found online nowadays. I think that this particular differentiation and the online twist that *omikuji* take can simply reflect what

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

modern times bring to religion. The fact that *omikuji* are so different in design means that there are people who want to buy different kind of *omikuji*, so that there is a demand of different *omikuji*, maybe just because people want to make a collection.

Also, the demand seems to be so high that even people who are not in Japan anymore desire to have *omikuji*, and from here some temples and shrines offer the online *omikuji* option, in order for the public to have them even if they cannot go on the specific spot that sells them. This is a typical and significant change that one can observe due to the marketization of the product and the transformation of the modern times, in which one could want to have a certain object even if it is not a physical product and could accept even an online service instead.

The way to have an *omikuji* at Enryakuji

In countertendency to the *omikuji* online, it is also interesting that one can also have *omikuji* in the “traditional” or “original” way at Enryakuji. Let us see how to have them at this temple.

The first step to do is to come over to the given date and describe on a piece of paper which is the problem you would like to know about from the *omikuji*, so what you want to discuss. An interview will be made to you based on the information you have given and it will be discussed of whether or not you should draw an *omikuji* at the temple. If you decide for the *omikuji* to be drawn, the monk will sing a sutra for you and then he will draw the *omikuji*, explain then the content to you, so that you can understand the answer of the *kami*.

Now, you have to keep in mind that the *omikuji* is not meant to encourage or discourage you to make a certain decision, but it is an help for when you do not know which direction to take in your life and you would like an help in that sense, when you are at a crossroad and would like an advice on which way whether to go, they simple contain advices on the choice you are undecided to make. It is not meant to encourage or discourage you on your way, but simply it is an advice you should bring with you in order to remember you can have that kind of idea of behavior and guideline if you need them. It does not involve luck, the *omikuji* are the words of a Master that you can follow or not, based on

your own choice in life.

If the advice given from the *omikuji* will result in success, the person should then give an offer as a thank-you to the *kami* for the great resolution one has had thanks to the *omikuji* itself. Normally, one can see there are a large number of offerings for Gansandaishi, so we should think that the drawn *omikuji* were successfully resolved in their resolution. This kind of *omikuji* are not meant to be for everyone, but if someone wants to be sure to have one, this *omikuji* can be drawn at the beginning of each year, when there is a New Year's lottery for the general public.³⁹

This kind of *omikuji* are not drawn by the visitors, but by a priest, which respect the tradition of the fortune-telling of one thousand years ago. It is said that the *omikuji* had been discovered through a dream and that if this dream would not have been there, the Japanese tradition of the *omikuji* would not be existing either. Moreover, we need also the monks that take care and transmit this traditional way of drawing the *omikuji* itself, since if there were not such a person, the tradition could have been lost in the time and we could have never known its origins. Of course, the practice of drawing an *omikuji* at Enryakuji today is still simplified and more accessible than it was in ancient times in its origins, but it is still interesting one can experience a sense of authenticity by drawing an *omikuji* this way, similarly to the *omamori* phenomenon.⁴⁰

It is interesting to have this particular traditional practice because since, as discussed before, *omamori* can be a way to understand Japanese culture from a tourist's point of view, why could not be *omikuji* a similar thing? If tourists could draw an *omikuji* in the "traditional" way of Enryakuji, this could possibly be a way to understand the roots of Japanese culture and in this sense, I think it is a limitation that this kind of drawing "is not for everyone", also because I do not believe there would be a translator who will translate in English or in another language the explanation of the *omikuji* made by the priest.

We could also talk about how it could be interesting from the point of view of marketing, since

³⁹ <https://1200irori.jp/content/interview/detail/guests10>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

tourist could look for “traditional” Japanese practices and this could be one of them and could attract a lot of people to the temple just for trying the experience of this particular practice. Even if it could be seen as a “countertendency” to modern times, I believe that every country “sells” also its history and traditions, so it would be the other side of the medal of the online *omikuji*, to sell the experience of the “traditional” *omikuji* too.

2.3- *Ema*

***Ema*: significance and history**

Ema are little wooden tables, made in the form of an irregular pentagon, with the base of about twenty centimeters that one can easily find in Japan in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines.

The word is written with the characters of *e* 絵, which means “picture”, or “drawing”, and the ideogram of *ma* 馬 (horse). This means that *ema* literary means “horse picture”. The reason behind this name, comes from ancient time in Japan, when the horse was the largest animal raised in the country, so that meant there was no other animal more suitable for the gods, more right to be sent to them or more deserving of being used by the *kami* themselves. Moreover, it was also the most suitable animal to represent the supernatural beings and the mystique realm.⁴¹

Given that, we can clearly see how the first *ema*, that dated back to the eight century, were in fact pictures of horses, since in the ancient cosmology of Shinto, they were considered the *kami* messenger, being considered like this a kind of animal that was very closed with the celestial realm and the sacred. They were very important animals in all the festivals and ceremonies, but most important was their role because they were capable of communicating the days of rains on Earth, so they were an intermediary between the *kami* and the human world. So, in this context, a black horse was used to request more water and rainfalls, while a white horse was used when humans wanted to stop the rain or to have less of it. They were also extremely expensive as an offering, so their value was very high

⁴¹ TOSOLINI, “Dizionario...”, cit., p. 26-27; D. C. HOLTOM, “Japanese Votive Pictures (The Ikoma Ema).” *Monumenta Nipponica* 1, no. 1 (1938): p. 155

and they were very elevated in their position next to the *kami* realm.

In this context, since the horse was very high in cost, it seems that the habit started to substitute a real horse with a little clay tablet and then with a picture of a horse on a wooden one (i.e. *ema*). So, this changes enabled people from every social class and every place of life to ask directly to the *kami* their needs and communicate directly with them.⁴²

Archeological evidence point to the fact that this kind of practice was typical of the Nara period, since it seems that a lot of wooden and clay tablets with an horse engraved in them have been excavated since that particular ages. The proof of this particular kind of *ema* came especially in 1972, when an *ema* was found in the Shizuoka prefecture, in Hamamatsu; it was engraved with the picture of a horse, it measured circa seven by nine centimeters, and it came from the Nara period, even if other proof support the existence of even older *ema* for what we know them today. The oldest example is said to be an *ema* of nineteen for twenty-seven, that would come from the very first Nara period and would have the picture of a saddled horse on it. People can see it in the Nara National Research Institute of Cultural Properties today, since it has been discovered near the Heijo Palace in Nara, following what a report of the *Mainichi Shinbun* 毎日新聞 on September 5, 1989 would say.

It was in the middle of the tenth century that Japanese scriptures and documents started to present the fact that a wooden model instead of a real horse could be presented at the *kami* for a request. The first time we see the term “*ema*” is in the *Honcho bunsui* 本朝文粹 of 1013, since it was mentioned in relation to the offer of the *shikishi ema sanbiki* 鉢洙絵馬涉匹 (three paper *ema*) at the Kitano Tenjin shrine and after this reference, the term became common in the Heian literature, for example in the *Honcho Hokegenki* 本朝法華驗記 and the *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語.⁴³

⁴² Ian READER, “Letters to the Gods: The Form and Meaning of Ema.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991): pp. 25-26. It is also interesting to note that other cultures have practices similar to *ema*, but involving other objects, for example Nuer of the southern Sudan used cucumbers in rituals of sacrifice serving as stand-ins for the less economically disposable oxen. If the reader wants to know more about the subject, cfr. READER, “Letters to the Gods...” cit. p. 27

⁴³ Ibid. pp. 26-27; It is particularly interesting the use of the counter for small animals, which is *hiki* 匹, to refer to the wooden tablet in the abovementioned references, since this indicates that the

The fact that the ancestors are from Shinto does not have to make you think wrong, since *ema* were frequently used also in Buddhist temples, especially in situation where people wanted and want to request and desire some help from the *kami*. However, it is not clear when exactly they began to be used in the Buddhist temples as a method to communicate with Buddha, but somehow it is said that they have spread in this sense somewhere during the Kamakura period, since there are a lot of evidences, like for example in the illustrated scrolls of this era, including the *Nenchu gyoji emaki* 年中行事絵巻, that point to the fact that *ema* were used in a lot of different ways, in both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples.

It was during the Muromachi and the Tokugawa period that this kind of merch grew in diversity and started to develop in more designs and motifs, maybe because the people who requested them were growing as well and so the demand was higher. It was in this moment that the art of *ema* provided the opportunity for everyone to try to communicate their needs to the *kami* with a large diversity of themes and variety.

During the Muromachi period what was the most popular was the large-sized *ema* (*ōema* 大絵馬), which were commissioned to an artist from someone who requested them. They were usually one meter both of height and width. Once again, they were proposed to a shrine or temple in order to receive a an help in some aspect of the life of the person who presented it, or in order to give an offering to appreciate an assistance received. Shrines and temples all over the country still provide some examples of the *ema* of this type, for example there are a large number of large-size *ema* of the seventeenth century at Kiyomizudera 清水寺 in Kyoto. This kind of *ema* were put in some enormous and specialized rooms, the *emadō* 絵馬堂, which became similar in some way to some art galleries of today, where the artist could show their skills in designing such a piece of art; in fact, the depiction of this kind of *ema* seemed to be so high in demand that it became a profession.⁴⁴

object was in fact seen as an *animal*, a living creature (as a horse could be) instead of an item, in the mind of the donator. Cfr. READER, "Letters to the Gods..." cit. pp. 27-28.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 29-30

In addition, one have to think that some new themes and symbols began to appear, together with the more known religious figures. It began to appear a lot of different designs and patterns that indicated directly the message one wanted to convey to the *kami*, that indicated the direct reason and the message one wanted to convey to them. This ensemble of pattern evolved as a symbolic language that people used to convey a direct message for the *kami* in order to make them understand the desire. The vocabulary of it developed in Japanese folklore and traditions, with a particular attention for the Japanese daily-life needs, issues and necessities, with the idea behind it being that one can process and realize a need that one have by giving it a concrete form, which is again a sort of reification. So, in order for these needs to be solved and to receive help, the “language” of *ema* comprehended the vocabulary of the things that needed to be understood by the *kami* in order to solve the problem or the issue one needed, since they were the graphical objectification of a need.⁴⁵

It is particularly interesting to note, in among these pattern and motifs, the relationship between the images that they have and the meaning, for example it could be interesting to see the interrelation between the image of the Empress Jingū Kōgō 神功皇后



Figure 7: An *ema* in which Jingū Kōgō sits in the ship on the right surrounded by Japanese warriors, and approaches Korea on the left ⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 29- 30; Figure 7 was taken from ANDERSON, Richard W. “Jingū Kōgō ‘Ema’ in Southwestern Japan: Reflections and Anticipations of the ‘Seikanron’ Debate in the Late Tokugawa and Early Meiji Period.” *Asian Folklore Studies* 61, no. 2 (2002): p. 259

and the discourse on the *seikanron* 征韓論 (the invasion of Korea) of the Meiji period. We have an example in the "Jingū Kōgō crossing the sea" (Figure 7), that shows the empress sited on a ship on the right side of the *ema* and with a lot of Japanese soldiers who are just waiting to fight the war, while on the left side there is Korea itself, which has been approached. It shows clearly the desire of the Japanese to conquer and submit the Korean people, in a fight that will be the same desire of the Japanese and the Empress themselves, and so that it is the very aim of this kind of *ema*, which ask for the *kami* help in this sense and that allude to the tales of the Empress Jingū Kōgō and her invasion of Korea of this period.⁴⁶

Going on in time, during World War Two what began to appear were the so-called "soldier *ema*" (*gunkokuema* 軍国絵馬), which were particular, because they were antimilitaristic engraved tablets in a Japan that did not contemplate anti-war propaganda, since it had been prohibited since the beginning of the war. Even so, there were a lot of anti-war propaganda written on them, together with feelings of fear and unhappiness about the war itself. They depicted what was called the "improper thinking" that should have been prohibited. Some of them depicted also simple regular soldiers.

Since the soldier *ema* (Figure 8) depicted both the anxiety and the fear people had about the war, but also the sense of pride for



Figure 8: soldier *ema* (9.5 inches by 8 inches)⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Richard W. ANDERSON, "Jingū Kōgō 'Ema' in Southwestern Japan: Reflections and Anticipations of the 'Seikanron' Debate in the Late Tokugawa and Early Meiji Period." *Asian Folklore Studies* 61, no. 2 (2002): pp. 257- 258. Figure 8 was taken from SHIKO Junzō 石子順造 *Koema zufu: Hōjikomerareta minshū no inori 小絵馬図譜一封じこめられた民衆の祈り*. Tokyo: Haga Shoten. First published 1972, 1974, p. 68

the country, culture and history they were having in that particular moment, this kind of *ema* has multiple layers on which they can be read, since people had different and controversial emotions regarding the war itself. Because of this reason, the *ema* of this kind could have different significance, both for what it regarded the visual and the textual reference. Soldier *ema* also reacted to what was happening in a particular time and space, as always the culture does, so they spread a lot during the period of World War Two in a lot of shrines and temples and their text and figures reflected the typical mood of that period.⁴⁷

Nowadays, the normal *ema* comprehend two different sides: one of them has the printing of the zodiac animal of the Chinese horoscope of the correspondent year, for example the tiger, dragon, snake, etc., or it has depicted the temple or shrine that has sold the *ema*, while on the other side people usually write their name and their wish they want to ask the kami to grant them (*onogai* お願い), which can be a general request or an individual one which is linked to the life of the person, such as health, money passing the school exams etc. Moreover, the *ema* can also be a way to express a message for an ancestor, a spirit, or even a child one has aborted or can be used to express a vow for something, or again can be a message of gratitude for a desire that has been accomplished. The *ema* is not an object that embody the spirit of a *kami*, like *omamori*, but instead they are used to send a message to them, in order to communicate with them, so they are burnt on New Year's Eve.⁴⁸

Anyone can buy this kind of *ema* and have them for their desires. You can buy them also by yourself, since if anyone is nearby, you can just put the money in a wooden box next to them; they usually cost around five hundred and one thousand yen and you can be sure that your money will go to finance the temple or the shrine you are taking the *ema* to. There are no rigid guidelines to complete the *ema*, so it is not so difficult: you can put your desire on the front side, covering the figure, while your name and address can be put on the reverse side, or you can also write the desire on the reverse side, and

⁴⁷ Jennifer ROBERTSON, "Ema-Gined Community: Votive Tablets (*Ema*) and Strategic Ambivalence in Wartime Japan." *Asian Ethnology* 67, no. 1 (2008): pp. 46-47; p. 50-51

⁴⁸ TOSOLINI, "Dizionario...", cit., p. 27

you can also use a lot of different languages, since there are a lot of tourists that write an *ema* in large cities like Tokyo, for example at the Meiji shrine.⁴⁹



Figure 9: modern *ema* for the year of the tiger ⁴⁹

An interesting case regarding the *ema* of today are the so-called *itaema* (痛絵馬). The episode of their birth happened on January 2015, when a young boy who was twenty-two years old visited the Kanda Myojin shrine, in

Tokyo, in the Fukui prefecture and he was very surprised to find a character of *Love Live!* on an *ema*. He liked it so much that he started to send some messages and picture of it on different SNS chats and channels. The *ema* became famous and a lot of young people started to imitate the boy and to go to that specific shrine just to have this particular kind of *ema*. This is a perfect example of how our life among social could influence traditional culture and also of how the market react to these changes. In fact, the shrine noticed that the demand of this kind of *ema* was becoming higher and higher, and it started to produce this kind of merch, in order to meet the demand of the public, starting to call them *itaema*.⁵⁰

The abovementioned case is just the first one, since it seems that due to the rise of the pop-culture tourism in Japan (which is the tourism related to pop culture, especially *anime* and *manga*), there are a lot of different cases of this type of *itaema*. One that I can think myself is Suga shrine in Tokyo,

⁴⁹ <https://zoomingjapan.com/wiki/ema/>. Figure 9 was taken from <https://zoomingjapan.com/wiki/ema/>

⁵⁰<https://experiencetokyo.net/kanda-myojin-shrine-and-the-animemanga-love-live-version-of-good-luck-charms/>

which is famous to be the shrine next to the stairway of the famous *anime* film *Your Name* (君の名は), which again sells *ema* with the famous stair of the final scene of the *anime*.⁵¹

***Ema* as an activity: is that a *religious* activity? A debate**

Now that we know what an *ema* is, we shall also take into consideration whether writing on an *ema* is considered a religious activity or not by Japanese people. It is quite interesting, since there seems to be different point of view regarding this idea.

If we follow Reader, there seems to be the impression that writing an *ema* is in fact a religious activity, since he states:

The humorous and ludic dimensions to *ema*, often emphasized in their colorful designs and styles, provide a further reason why they are a popular means of expression for those who, like many of the students who pray for help with their examinations, may not as a rule participate in other *religious activities*. Their accessibility and the blank check they provide to the writer to determine the extent and nature of his or her request, further help to make *ema* a flexible and undemanding means of *religious expression*.⁵²

If we want to compare Reader's vision with another different one, we have the vision of Anderson, who analyzes a number of varieties and statements of different people who buy and sell *ema* so that one can comprehend if Japanese people see it as a religious activity or not.

The first thing to take into consideration is that people do not refer to the practice of writing an *ema* with the terms *shinkō* (belief) or *shūkyō* (religion), as already mentioned above, but, Anderson state,

⁵¹ Ibid; Yamamura, Takayoshi (2015-01-02). "Contents tourism and local community response: Lucky star and collaborative anime-induced tourism in Washimiya". Japan Forum. 27 (1): 59–81. doi:10.1080/09555803.2014.962567. ISSN 0955-5803.

⁵² Ian READER, "Letters to the Gods..." cit., p. 46. Emphasis added.

they prefer the term *shūkan*, which best translate with “habit” or “custom”. If we want to put it in other words, in Anderson’s view people write an *ema* as a form of habit, they continue to do the same action they did before as a form of practice they are used to do, since they are doing it for a number of years and they do not consider it a religious practice.

Now, Anderson criticize also the analysis of the NHK, since the analysis in question take into consideration lucky charms like the *omamori* and the reason why people buy them, but do not question at all if people *believe* in the actual power of the object; the survey, in fact, focuses on whether people buy *omamori* or not, but do not help us to understand if they consider buying the objects a religious activity. Given that, in a similar way, we cannot understand if people buy *ema* because they believe in the power of the object or because it is a simple habit for them, but, since Anderson interviewed a lot of Japanese and they simply seem to be used to buy an *ema* in order to do a practice they are used to do as a custom, we could conclude that Japanese people think about this practice is that they do it as an habit, a mere buying-selling act. However, since the author spoke with people without doing a real survey, because he stated that he spoke with them “informally”, I think one should take into consideration this aspect as well when deciding who is right between Anderson and Reader.

In addition, Anderson criticizes also some scholars who take into consideration whether or not Japanese people hold in their houses some particular religious objects but that, again, do not focus on the actual belief in this objects from the point of view of the Japanese themselves and they reduce the idea of the possession of this object, without the religious aspect of the practice.⁵³

We should also take into consideration the point of view of shrines and temples, since it is quite new that both of them sell *ema* on a major base, instead of a reduced one. In fact, Reader states that the businesses of shrines and temples are actually producing the religious objects, including *ema*, so that the temple or the shrine can have a return on them. If one check the catalogs of these businesses, however, it will be seen that every single *ema* which is sold, generates from sixty to eighty thousand

⁵³ R. W. ANDERSON, What Constitutes Religious Activity? (I). Cit. pp. 369-370

ema sold annually, which means a price markup of 100%. Now, when Anderson asked about the religious significance of *ema* to both Buddhist and Shinto priests, they replied that there is no religion in selling this kind of objects, but that these objects are for sale in order to correspond to the demand of people, who wish to have their desires become true. *Ema* are seen from many priests and monks as a simple way to make money.

Again, Anderson takes into consideration two more different examples for which some more important questions are better to be taken into account, which are (I quote): “What makes an activity or object religious? Is place important? Does buying an *ema* at a religious site (temple or shrine) make the action religious? (...) Or is it the object itself?”⁵⁴

Let us now see the two examples we are talking about. One friend of Anderson is an artist, not a priest, who make *ema* for living, so that when there are festivals and other big events, he goes and sells his *ema* as his activity requires to him. One may now ask if it is considered a religious activity to buy an *ema* from him, since he is not a priest and because he does not sell the *ema* at shrines or temples. The other example take into consideration another friend of Anderson, who has a restaurant in Tokyo, where he has a huge collection of *ema* that hang by the walls. Also, he gives away *ema* to his clients as a gift. Again, we are talking about a person who is not a priest and does not even sell *ema*, he just gives them as a gift to people that come to his restaurant. Should we consider it as a religious activity?

If we take into consideration Anderson’s point of view, the most important factor to take into account is the mentality and the intention of the person that decide to buy and engrave an *ema* as an activity, since it is often what people do not consider. What Anderson points out, in the most simple form put, is that objects and actions cannot be seen as religious if one do not take into consideration the intention and the consideration that the person behind them has while performing that same activity. In his view, again, a lot of people today are not engaged in any religious activity when engraving and buying an *ema*, since there is nothing in their intentions and motivations that would derive from a religious

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 371

intent. That would be the idea behind Anderson and some other scholars of Japanese folklore, since nobody that has something to do with the practice of writing an *ema* consider it a religious activity: the priests and monks think about it as a selling-buying act and Japanese people see it as an habit. To conclude, Anderson also say that the practice could be religious if the intention of the person turns to religion in their intentions, but today it seems that people who do such a thing in this way are the minority.⁵⁵

If, on the other hand, we follow the idea of Reader, he states that it is true that the act of buying an *ema* is not a religious act, since one is simply buying an object, but it will also be part of a bigger act, that would be that of engraving the *ema* with a desire as a message for the *kami*. Moreover, they buy it at a temple, a religious site, and also they would make a prayer when presenting the *ema* to a shrine or a temple. If we take into consideration this point of view, Anderson's friend who simply give an *ema* to his clients as gift, is simply making a present to them, without any religious activity involved. The religious activity would be if the client, after taking the *ema*, would bring it to a temple or a shrine, write a desire on it and asking the *kami* or the Buddha to accomplish it by doing a prayer to them clapping their hands. In Reader's opinion, the topic of the intention is irrelevant, since the prayer *is* a religious activity, and in the same way the question of who created the *ema* and their profession, whether they are priests or not, becomes irrelevant as well. The most important thing here is the fact that people will involve the artifact and the religious place, together with the practice of praying in order to have a desire come true or simply to talk with the *kami* or the Buddha. Together with the irrelevance of this ideas, also the fact that monks and priests do not consider selling *ema* as "real religion" (which is also an ambiguous term) falls into this category, since we already mentioned the fact that intention with which one does the activity is not important for the religiousness of the activity itself. It is obvious, that the activity of selling the *ema* is not religious, but the important thing is that what comes next to it, is in fact religious.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 371-372

⁵⁶ Ian READER, "What Constitutes Religious Activity? (II)." Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 18,

It is true, Reader says, that one should consider the belief when taking into consideration religion, but it different if one takes into consideration a religious act or the religion expression, since they cannot be contained into a specific field like this. There are a lot of fields one should take into consideration, for example the roles of social and cultural norms, questions of identity, the dynamics of circumstances, situations, challenges, and demands, as well as ludic behavior and economics, since religion has to be taken into consideration in all its nuances and expressions.⁵⁷

Given these two different point of view, it is very interesting to think about an *ema* from the two different ideas of these authors, since Anderson states that *ema* is a simple act of buy and sell that comes from the habit of doing it, so he takes into consideration the object and wonder if it could be considered religious in its selling and purchasing relationship itself, while he considers the activity to be an atheistic one, with no religious intention, and this would make *ema* an object unrelated with religion, and the practice of it just a mere act of buying.

On the other hand we have Reader's point of view, who believes that what should be taken into consideration is the act, not the object, and how it is related to the religious location of purchasing an *ema* and inscribing them with a religious intent, since, Reader think, if people buy an *ema* at a temple or a shrine, they are doing an act of religion, similarly to a Christian who buys a candle in a church, also because they are praying a *kami* or a Buddha to help them with their desires.

I would be very curious to know what the reader of this thesis would think, but in my opinion this two points of view could be the two parts of a same medal: from the point of view of buying the object, one cannot deny that it is a mere purchase-selling act. Also the priests say that, as Anderson investigated, buying an *ema* is the mere act of buying it and that it does not constitute a religious activity. However, what comes *next* does. The act of writing one's desire in order for the *kami* to help the person with something and do a prayer to them for the realization of the wish, *is* in fact a religious activity, since is referred to *kami* and is done in a religious site, as Reader stated.

no. 4 (1991): pp. 374-375

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 376

If one is wondering if what the buyer think in relation to effectiveness and belief is important in my view, I would answer that yes, it is, since if one *does* religion by inscribing an *ema* and offering it to the *kami*, you are doing a religious act, because you are in fact praying the *kami*. What the buyer think the effect could be or if believes in that act it does not matter, because it has to do with *believing* in religion, not with *doing* it. I myself go to the church for some ceremonies, such as marriages and funerals, and in those cases I *am doing* a religious act, even if I *might not believe* in God; in a similar way, I “did religion” a lot of times in Japan at temples and shrine by praying and giving offerings to the *kami* and Buddhas. This does not necessarily means I believe in Buddhism or Shinto.

It is nonetheless very interesting, though, how the mechanic of buying could be seen in such different ways and different prospective. I am sincerely not surprised that Anderson see the religious act of inscribing an *ema* as a non-religious one, since the boundary is so slight that one could think as him and it will be fine to me. It depends on the point of view that one may take, since it is undeniable that this is an example of marketing and religion perfectly amalgamated together.

2.4- *Goshuinchō* and *goshuin*

History and ritualistic of *goshuinchō* and *goshuin*

Now that we have examined *omamori*, *omikuji* and *ema*, let us talk about one last important object of Japanese religiousness, which is to say *goshuinchō* and *goshuin*.

When talking about a *goshuinchō* we must also consider the *goshuin* related to it. If one want to translate the term, “*goshuinchō*” literally means “book of seals”, and so the related term “*goshuin*” is referred to the seals. Every temple and shrine has its own seal and so, one can collect them. I had a collection of *goshuin* myself when I went to Japan and so, when you visit a sacred site you might notice a lot of people lining up in order to have one of this seals, so that they can expand their collection in their book of seals, the *goshuinchō*. But, where does this seals come from?

There are different opinion regarding the origins of this items, but the most well-known is the one

that state these seals were given to a person or a believer as a sign that the person had copied *sutra* as a sacred practice and had paid respect to the *kami* or Buddha in that way. A *goshuinchō* was used as a useful item for after your death, since it was believed to be a sign of your great faith in deity. It was put your dead body and it would have been cremated with you, as a sign of devotion for the *kami* in the afterlife, a sort of passport of how devoted you have been in your life.⁵⁸

In addition, the idea of the origin of *goshuin* is linked to the so-called *junrei* 巡礼, which is a pilgrimage through thirty-three, sixty-six or eighty-eight temples or shrines that date back to the Nara period. People travel through these temples and received their *goshuin* as a proof that they have been in that particular sacred spot. Moreover, the *goshuin* was considered to be the mirror of one's soul and self, a symbol of piety, since that was written beautifully by hand, in order to spread the will of the *kami* or the Buddha and to ask them one's most desired wish.⁵⁹

One may wonder if this use of *goshuinchō* is still practiced, and the answer is yes, but it is also interesting how this practice is more seen as a secular one now and, as I stated above, a lot of people does it just to have a beautiful collection of seals and a good souvenir, because they can just be seen as a way to remember also the spots of the temples and shrines you have been to, especially if you are a tourist as I was. However, I wonder if this could be also a type of reification as already stated for the *omamori* phenomenon, since we link the memory to an object and, independently from its religiosity, we have a beautiful memory which is linked to it.⁶⁰

What it is also very interesting to notice, is how much Japan is related to stamps. In fact, one should not confound normal stamps with *goshuin*. Japanese culture is related also to normal stamps that you can find in famous tourist spots and train stations, but it will be quite easy to identify where a *goshuin* is sold at a temple or shrine, since you will find a sign (with the *kanji* 御朱印 or simply 朱印) that indicate the spot. If you want to collect different kind of stamps, remember to keep them in separate

⁵⁸ <https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/>

⁵⁹ https://livejapan.com/en/in-tokyo/in-pref-tokyo/in-tokyo_train_station/article-a0002402/

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

books, since a *goshuinchō* is used just for sacred seals. If a priest sees something that is not a *goshuin* in your seals book, he may refuse to put another seal on your *goshuinchō*, or he will flip the book, in order to put it the other way around and to keep the *goshuin* separated from the other seals.⁶¹

These seals are handwritten and it is in this aspect that they are different from any other. When you get to the temple or the shrine, you have to ask to the priest or the monk to write you the *goshuin* in your seals book. You will open the book on the page you want the seal to be written in and you politely ask to write it down. In some temples and shrines, there are more than one *goshuin* and you can choose which one you prefer, or even more than one or all of them if you want. Some sacred sites may ask you to leave your *goshuinchō* at the spot for some time to have your *goshuin* done. If it is like this, you will be given a number in order to recognize your *goshuinchō* when you will come back to pick it up. In some cases, if there is no monk or priest that can write the *goshuin*, you maybe could receive just a piece of paper where the seal had been written before, or maybe they will apologize by saying they have no *goshuin* for that day. Once this is done, you will be asked for a donation from three to five hundred yen, or more for particularly expensive seals, since there are some *goshuinchō* and *goshuin* that are more expensive, maybe because they are special of some particular festivity, for example the *goshuin* for the New Year.⁶² When you have finished one way of your *goshuin*, flip the pages the other way and start from the other side, until you finish the *goshuinchō* and you will have to buy another one.⁶³

There are a lot of people who still collect *goshuin* for the same reasons of the pilgrims of the past, but there are now also more secular reasons as I already stated, even if for some time, people could have a *goshuinchō* just for religious reasons, but now not only the elderly go after *goshuin*, but it has become an hobby that people of all ages can afford. Some enthusiasts are also called “shuin girl”, since there are some girls (or some people in general), that are so obsessed with them that will go

⁶¹ Ibid; https://livejapan.com/en/in-tokyo/in-pref-tokyo/in-tokyo_train_station/article-a0002402/

⁶² https://livejapan.com/en/in-tokyo/in-pref-tokyo/in-tokyo_train_station/article-a0002402/

⁶³ Ibid; <https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/>

after hundreds of them in order to have a huge collection.

Types of *goshuinchō* and *goshuin*

At the most larger temple, you can also get the *goshuinchō*, usually for one thousand yen or a little more, it depends on the temple and the *goshuinchō* itself. One should keep in mind that is a sign of respect to have a *goshuinchō* where to put your seals in and so it is highly recommended to buy one if one wants to have a collection of *goshuin*, regardless of the reasons why one is doing that, being them religious or not.

The *kanji* that form the word mean, in order, “red or orange ink” and “stamp”, while the last one means “book”, so *goshuinchō* literary means “book of the red stamps” and so the name itself explains the function of the object.

Most of the temples and shrines will have their own version of the *goshuinchō*, in fact, it is said that you should buy a *goshuinchō* in a temple or shrine where you feel comfortable to go to. It resembles to a notebook, with a cover that could be made both in fabric or wood, regular pages with a very thick and porous texture and the most used one have the so-called “accordion” pages, which unfold in a unique and long page that show a lot of *goshuin* in a unique line. Usually, we will have to put one *goshuin* per page, so they are usually twenty to forty per *goshuinchō*.



Figure 10: *goshuin* in a line into an “accordion” type of *goshuinchō* ⁶⁴

You can buy different type of *goshuinchō*, of different sizes, but the most common, so the traditional one, is of eleven per sixteen centimeters. Some people today use different books to separate the *goshuin* that come from shrines and those that come from temples, but it is not a strict rule, since

there is no evidence that this was the original practice, so one can do as they prefer and ultimately the most important thing is to understand and respect the practice.⁶⁴

Speaking about the type of *goshuinchō*, the one that are sold at a temple are usually more plain in color and monochrome, made especially in cloth, while the *goshuinchō* sold in shrines are more colorful and have threads of silk in a lot of colors. In the front page, there is written 御朱印帳, which is “*Goshuinchō*”, while on the other side of the cover there is the name of the shrine or the temple.

Some places sell the *goshuinchō* with a plastic cover to prevent damages. One can also put it the other way around when one side of the book is finished. Also, some temples and shrines could sell some little bags too in order not damage the book.⁶⁵

There are also different type of *goshuin* seals. As already mentioned, a shrine or a temple could offer more than just one seal. For example, there are the seals of the Seven Lucky Gods, which are an alternative to the normal *goshuin* and that are offered at a temple, affiliated with the so-called

Figure 11: two different *goshuinchō*, one with the cover in fabric and one in wood ⁶⁴



⁶⁴ https://livejapan.com/en/in-tokyo/in-pref-tokyo/in-tokyo_train_station/article-a0002402/#e;
[https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/#:~:text=A%20goshuinch%C5%8D%20\(%E5%BE%A1%E6%9C%B1%E5%8D%B0%E5%B8%B3\)%20is,at%20the%20shrine%2Ftemple](https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/#:~:text=A%20goshuinch%C5%8D%20(%E5%BE%A1%E6%9C%B1%E5%8D%B0%E5%B8%B3)%20is,at%20the%20shrine%2Ftemple)

Figures 10 and 11 are taken from [https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/#:~:text=A%20goshuinch%C5%8D%20\(%E5%BE%A1%E6%9C%B1%E5%8D%B0%E5%B8%B3\)%20is,at%20the%20shrine%2Ftemple](https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/#:~:text=A%20goshuinch%C5%8D%20(%E5%BE%A1%E6%9C%B1%E5%8D%B0%E5%B8%B3)%20is,at%20the%20shrine%2Ftemple)

⁶⁵ [https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/#:~:text=A%20goshuinch%C5%8D%20\(%E5%BE%A1%E6%9C%B1%E5%8D%B0%E5%B8%B3\)%20is,at%20the%20shrine%2Ftemple](https://www.discoverkyoto.com/kyoto-voice/goshuincho/#:~:text=A%20goshuinch%C5%8D%20(%E5%BE%A1%E6%9C%B1%E5%8D%B0%E5%B8%B3)%20is,at%20the%20shrine%2Ftemple)

“lucky pilgrimage”. What happens is that different *kami* and Buddha are associated with different *goshuin*, so if one wants the protection of a particular Buddha or *kami*, they would choose a particular seal instead of another. One example is the Kiyomizudera, which offers more than ten different seals and merch for different pilgrimages. There are also different type of seals depending on the site itself, some are related to different kind of status or a specific festival of the period.⁶⁶

Tourism related to *goshuin* map: the Kisarazu case

Since there are a lot of signs that *goshuin* are very popular while doing tourism, there is a study that tried to find some ways to promote tourism through the selling of *goshuin*. In particular, the study analyzes how a *goshuin* map would be useful to promote tourism in Kisarazu, especially around the Minato exit in the Kisarazu station.

In fact, the study states that, even if there are a lot of temples and shrines listed on the maps that are distributed at the information centers for tourist, it is rare that these maps also sign temples and shrines that give out a *goshuin*, and this seems to be an important loss, since there are a lot of tourists that visit temples and other sacred spots in order to get a *goshuin*.⁶⁷

If one wants to find out where you can find temples and shrines that give a *goshuin*, one should use one of the method listed below:

- Look up on internet through SNS etc. if the temple or the shrine one is interested in give a *goshuin* in advance, but the person should take into consideration that the information on this kind of sites are not perfect, since people have to visit the site in order to see if the information found on internet is true.
- Make a phone call to the temple or the shrine in advance, in order to see if they have a *goshuin*, but I would add that one cannot be sure whether they will have that for that specific day.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ UEMURA Shigeki, “Goshuin MAP ni yoru Kisarazueki Minatoguchi Kankō Shinkō Sakusen”, Tourism promotion by GOSHUIN MAP around Minato-exist of Kisarazu station, Department of Civil Engineering, 2021, 67-74

- Visit the temple or the shrine one is interested in and directly ask if they have a *goshuin*.
- Ask for information at the tourist information centers.⁶⁸

Since, as already mentioned, there is no guarantee that the information found on SNS will be true, one is obliged to use one of the other method in order to see if a temple has *goshuin*, which requires a lot of effort, also because there is no such a thing as a *goshuin* map that would list the sacred sites that give a *goshuin*. This is a pity, since there are a lot of tourists and people who are interested in this practice, as mentioned in the other part of the chapter, so from this the idea of a *goshuin* map came out, because it seems to be very convenient, also the tourism.

At the moment, there are the “Shimonoseki Shrine Goshuin Map” from Shimonoseki City, in the Yamaguchi Prefecture, and the “Kyoto Rakuhachi Shuin Meguri” of the Kyoto prefecture that could help people to find temples and shrines that have *goshuin*. Moreover, there is the “Mihara Goshuin Tour/Temple School” in the Hiroshima prefecture, that make a course on the etiquette one should have when getting a *goshuin*, so that this kind of tourism can be promulgated. It is an example also of the so-called “*goshuin* map”, since the Mihara prefecture also had a map with all the temples and shrines, and those where you could get a *goshuin* were marked in red, with the word “Seal”, so that tourists could understand where they could get a *goshuin*.⁶⁹

From this, the idea to extend the *goshuin* map also to a city like Kisarazu came up, also because the temples and shrines of this city where you can get a *goshuin* are all concentrated next to the Kisarazu station in the Minato exit. A *goshuin* map would be very useful for those tourist whose hobby is to collect *goshuin*, since not only it would be useful to have more tourists at these sites, but the item would also promote tourism in general, because religious sites would be promoted together with the *goshuin* practice.

There were also others proposals in order to promote tourism thanks to the *goshuin* and there will be listed below.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

- During the Port Festival of Kisarazu, one should use signs and signboards to promote *goshuin* around the exit of Minato station, since in this way there will effect also people that are not usually interested in *goshuin* collection, because you will be using a specific period in time. In this occasion, there are also some shrines like Yatsurugi Hachiman Shrine 八剣八幡神社 that distribute special *goshuin* typical of the period, the limited edition ones, that could involve more people to come and get them.⁷⁰
- Another idea is to have a *goshuin* tour for people who are going to Kisarazu for the first time, and since one of the biggest problem is that sometimes people get lost. In this case, the idea would be that of creating a unique route in which there are seven different temples and shrines to get a *goshuin* to, so that people would simply follow one road and won't get lost while doing a sort of pilgrimage following the signs in order to get all the *goshuin* on their way.
- A third hypothesis was that of inaugurate a period of enhancement for receiving *goshuin* at temples and shrines together with other events of the year of the city of Kisarazu, for example in July, when there are some main events like the festival at Yagata Hachiman Shrine on Friday and other festivals on Saturdays and Sundays. The idea is to have a special period of time of the year to have *goshuin* at temples and shrines in concomitance with this festivals, and also to have special kind of these red seals, so that people would be more driven to buy this stamps and to revitalize the tourism in the region.
- Other ideas were to use internet, especially SNS, to develop the idea and the tourism related to *goshuin* and to use also YouTube to make videos about it in order to promulgate that same idea. Another idea was to have a tour in which people could make shopping and collect *goshuin* at the same time.⁷¹

Since there were so many ideas to develop tourism using *goshuin*, we have to comprehend and deduce that there is a branch of tourism related to it, so that there are a lot of people that maybe visit

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

some shrine and temples just to collect their *goshuin*. I was very interested myself in such a practice when I was in Japan and for me the *goshuinchō* is a beautiful memory I came back with from Japan. Again, it is an idea of reification, and there are a lot of people who could do the same thing with a *goshuinchō* instead that simply buy an *omamori*, so again this develop the idea of marketing behind these kind of religious object, that of course can have a religious significance, but that if they are also related to tourism and are considered atheistic practice, take a relevant importance in marketing.

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to analyze religious practices in various different objects and try to understand how these kind of practices were related to both marketing and religion.

The history of both Shintoism and Buddhism has shown us how religion could be started as an institution with different people and books related to it, and today it has degenerated into a series of practice. Japanese people give importance to the rites of both of these religions, but the most important thing is to *do* religion, to practice it, since people now understand Shintoism and Buddhism more as a series of practices and rites, more than as institutions related to people and books. However, I thought it was extremely important to see how the change in this sense happened, so for me it was also important to see the major religions of Japan (Buddhism and Shintoism) as institutions related to people and writings, in order to have a major impact when the change appeared, especially during the Meiji period.

Today, the “religion of people” is related to practices that go hand in hand with the various periods of life and that go together with people from life to death. In this practices, we also have a lot of different objects that are involved, and it is undeniable that even if people do not believe in the religious power of these kind of items, the market for all of them is so huge that they have to be taken into consideration, at least from the marketing point of view.

Omamori are taken into consideration by people when they want to protect themselves or others from something, if they want to wish good luck for exams, for the good delivery of a child, or even if one wants to protect a person from the traffic. In this sense, one might think people buy them because of religious reasons, but the most important intention is that of being in support of the other person by wishing them the best through an object. There are few people who keep the *omamori* because of religious reasons, they are most likely to keep them because they have a value since it is a present from a loved person. Moreover, if people would take the *omamori* just because of religious reasons, this would exclude tourists, while we have seen that a lot of tourists buy *omamori* to better comprehend Japanese culture and to have a beautiful memory of their trip. It is impossible to think

as this object just as a religious one also because the practice of reification, the practice to link a memory to a specific object, to have like this a material “vision” of the memory itself. In addition, *omamori* seems to be an intermediate among cultures, and if it is like this with this kind of object, why should not it be the same with others?

I think *omikuji* is another perfect example. We have seen how different temples and shrines have different kind of *omikuji* and also the practice seems to be developed so much that now there are also the *omikuji* online, so that people can have their *omikuji* from home without visiting the sacred site. It is quite interesting, because there are this kind of *omikuji* and nobody seems to have nothing to say about this kind of modern practice. Simply, the practice has evolved with time without being afraid of being “modernized” and I believe this is quite normal in Japan: things change little by little because the culture changes with modernization and the new era of marketing. People now have *omikuji* not only because of religion, but also because they are used to have them or because they want to make a collection, and nobody could deny that there are a lot of different *omikuji* because of marketing reasons, because the religious practice and the sell and buy practice are perfectly amalgamated between each other.

This is also quite visible with the practice of *ema*, the votive tablets in wood to express a wish, desire or to pay a thank you to the *kami* or Buddha. It has been largely debated if the practice of *ema* is religious or not, and it has been concluded that there are two different moments when doing the practice: one is the moment in which one buy the tablet, and the other is when one makes the prayer for their desire to become true. The first one is simply an act of marketing, but the second moment is a religious one, so it is a perfect example of marketing and religious living together. Moreover, it is also pointed out how the intentions of people doing the practice is often not religious, and how *ema* are also sometimes sold and bought without any religion connection, showing that the two can live together and amalgamate.

Similarly to *omikuji*, another example is that of *goshuin* and *goshuinchō*, that are taken for different religious reasons, since the *goshuinchō* is seen as a passport for the afterlife, but the practice is also

done by a lot of tourist, again, maybe as a way of reifying the moment through a practical object. In addition, the case of Kisarazu shows us how they are clearly related to marketing, since they are used as ideas to develop tourism through the *goshuin* map idea, and also through the different idea to promote the area on SNS and YouTube with advertising and videos.

The example of Japanese Shintoism and Buddhism related to practice and marketing at the same time, shows us that there is nothing bad if religions change and also are linked to selling objects and things, since the reason is to help the temple or the shrine to stay alive. Also, it is really interesting how they are so flexible that can be practiced by anyone, being the person Japanese or from a completely different country and culture, since the important thing is to pay respect for the religion, not to follow the rule.

Religiousness of today should follow this example and be more flexible about who and how to profess and do a certain kind of religion, since modern time changes practices and culture because of the time itself, because of the modernization, the globalization, the marketing and because of a lot of different reasons that will inevitably change also religions together with all of the rest of the society. So I firmly believe that the practice related to religious objects and religion and marketing could without any kind of problem live together, as they are already doing, without the idea that “true religion” is something else. Religion is made by people in Japan, as we already mentioned, it is in the practices they make, it is understood and not followed and learnt in books, so it is what people do, and if it is related to objects that anyone can buy, in items that anyone can relate to because of the intention behind them, I believe that could be a beautiful evolution from the classic religious institution that too often seem to be too far away from the reality of culture, people and society.

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Daijōkai 大乘戒

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Dazaiфу Tenmangu Shrine 太宰府天満宮

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Eisai 明菴

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Emperor Shōmu 聖武天皇

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Jingiin 神祇院

Jingikan 神祇官

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Jinja Seido Chōsakai 神社制度調査会

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Kusha 俱舍宗	Ritsu 律宗
Kyoiku chokugo 教育勅語	Saichō 最澄
<i>Kyōgyō Shinshō</i> 教行信証	Saijoshō Daigengu Shrine 齋場所大元宮
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Mappō 末法	School of Jōdo 淨土宗
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Mikkyō 密教	School of Rinzai 臨濟宗
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Mononobe no Moriya 物部守屋	School of Sōtō 曹洞宗
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Sensoji 浅草寺	Teikoku kenpo happu 日本国憲法発布
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<i>Tannishō</i> 歎異抄	<i>engi</i> 縁起
Taoism 道教	<i>enmusubimamori</i> 縁結び守り
Tariki Hongan 他力本願	<i>enmusubi</i> <i>suzuran</i> <i>mamori</i>
<i>Teiki</i> 帝紀	縁結びスズラン守り
Tenmangu Shrine 天満宮	<i>fudasho</i> 札所
<i>The Tale of Genji</i> 源氏物語	<i>gakugyoujoju-mamori</i> 学業成就守り

ganzandashi hyakusen 元三大師百籤

gohonzon 御本尊

gokoku jinja 護国神社

goshintai 御神体

goshuin 御朱印

goshuinchō 御朱印帳

gunkoku ema 軍国絵馬

hakamairi 墓参り

hatsu miyamairi 燼宮参り

hatsumōde 初詣

hijiri 聖

ihai 位牌

itaema 痛絵馬

jingu uji 神宮寺

jizo じぞ

judo 柔道

kami 神

kamidana 神楽

karate 空手

kazokusō 家族葬

kendo 剣道

kokka no soshi 国家の宗祀

kokutairon 国体論

kōan 公案

mamoru 守る

matsuri 祭り

mikoshi 神輿

Mikuji hon みくじ本

miyamairi 宮参り

Namu myōhō rengekyō 南無妙法蓮華經

nagomikuji なごみくじ

naorai なおらい

obi 帯

oema 大絵馬

Ōjōyōshū 往生要集

omairi お参り

omamori お守り

omikuji お御籤

onagai お願い

sake さけ

sansankudo 三々九度

seikanron 征韓論

shichigosan 七五三

shikishi ema sanbiki 鉢洙絵馬涉匹

shimaenaga シマエナガ

shinkō 信仰

shizensō 自然葬

shōgun 将軍

shōkonsha 招魂社

shoubaihanjomamori 商売繫盛守り

shūkan 習慣

shūkyō 宗教

shūkyō hōjinrei 宗教法人令

sūkeisha 崇敬者

suzuran スズラン

temizu 手水

tenjikureisen 天竺靈籤

ubasoku 優婆塞

ujigami 氏神

ujiko 氏子

yaku yoke 参除け

yuiitsu 唯一

zazen 座禪

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