



Excerpt from the Introduction to *Shinto World Religions*

Shinto is Japan's native religion. It developed in prehistoric times on the Japanese islands, and it is deeply etched in the minds and hearts of the Japanese people. Because of its close association with the land's geography and history, Shinto is very nearly synonymous with the Japanese character. It has both shaped and been shaped by all of Japanese culture.

[...]

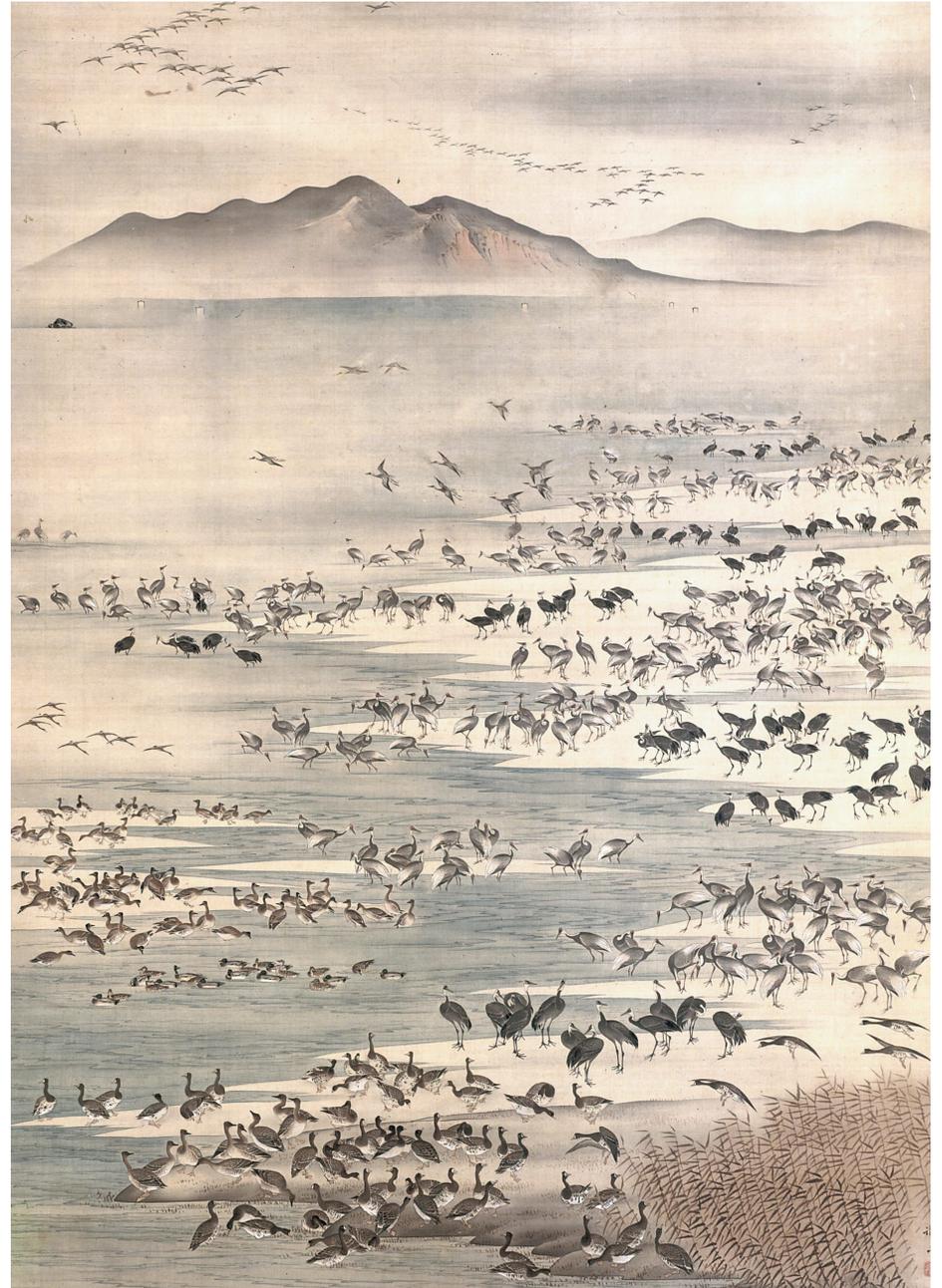
Shinto had no formal name at all until Buddhism... came to Japan in the sixth century C.E. and people found it necessary to make some distinction. Before that, the Japanese had simply followed rituals and beliefs that had, it seemed, always been a part of their world—those many rituals and beliefs that had served them well.

[...]

To understand the Shinto religion, it is important to understand the concept of *kami*. *Kami*, which is both singular and plural, literally means “high” or “superior.” It is sometimes translated as “god” or “deity” but more often as “spirit.”

[...]

Kami, spirits, are everywhere, and almost anything in creation may be *kami*. Natural phenomena—rocks, trees, mountains, streams, waterfalls, animals, thunder—may be *kami*, especially if they are unusual or outstanding in some way. Not every natural object is *kami*, but in the Shinto world respect for natural creation is encouraged, because even the most humble object may turn out to be invested with spirit.



Mori Tetsuzan, *Myriad of Aquatic Birds* (detail), 1775–1841, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 62 1/8 × 39 1/8 in (157.7975 × 99.3775 cm). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Crane Fund (2000.65).



A World of Edo Art Environment

[...]

Although there is no fixed dogma, or body of belief, to which a Shinto follower must adhere, Shinto does provide its followers with a code of values and a way of thinking that is deeply ingrained in Japanese life. Cleanliness and purification are emphasized. The grounds on which Shinto shrines are placed always include running water, often a spring or a stream, and as a sign of respect, worshipers bathe their hands and mouths before approaching a shrine. The Shinto ideal is to lead a pure and sincere life that is pleasing to the many kami.

The country of Japan itself is an important element in the religion. While people do not worship their native land, they learn from childhood to love and respect it. Japan is a country of great natural beauty and variety, from snow-capped volcanoes and high mountains to ocean shores and peaceful inlets. Its trees and rocks, streams and waterfalls, along with its living creatures, are all seen as having a spiritual nature.

[...]

As a rule, people do not join Shinto in any formal way. They are born to it and grow up in it, learning to identify themselves as followers of Shinto in much the same way that they identify with their family, their town, their island, or their country. Throughout their lives, whether they consider themselves religious or not, the followers observe Shinto festivals and follow Shinto practices.

Hartz, Paula R. Excerpts from "Introduction: Shinto and Japanese Life." In *Shinto: World Religions*, 3rd edition, 8–12. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009.