

The Wayⁱ forward? - Shinto and a 21st Century Japanese Ecological Attitude

By Daniel M. P. Shaw

Shinto can be sufficiently isolated from other Japanese ideological traditions in order to be considered separately from them. Upon investigation, one discovers beliefs, values, themes, an attitude and a worldview that are specific to Shinto spirituality and in many cases integrated into everyday Japanese life. Shinto worship of spirits which permeate the world is concurrent with a Japanese self-identification of being 'at one' with nature and natural phenomena. These beliefs can be shown to lead smoothly to ecocentrism and potentially an holistic ecological attitude of 'respect for nature'. Such an attitude would be bolstered by the Japanese importance of maintaining a 'mindful heart'. That Shinto beliefs are already latent in Japanese society indicates that it would not be unreasonable to propose the possibility of the Japanese assuming such an attitude in practice. One can imagine implementation of various Shinto values and themes making an immediate eco-friendly impact on daily life. Certainly, Japan is in dire need of a change in treatment of the environment, as is evidenced by a gamut of environmental problems. I hope to convince the reader that the beliefs and values exhibited in Shinto spirituality could play a fundamental role in developing a Japanese ecological attitude.

ⁱ Shinto is translatable as 'The Way of the Gods', although, 'god' is only a very approximate translation of 'kami' and 'Way' not to be overemphasised.