Introduction

In discussing post-World War II Shinto, we would like to address three general themes relevant to this conference. The first theme is the ability of citizens to move from enmity to friendship. To illustrate this we will sketch the biography of a Shinto priest, the late Yamamoto Yukitaka Guji. 1 The second theme concerns Japanese and American perceptions of each other. Here we want to clarify for Americans the differences between Shrine Shinto and State Shinto and will offer an interpretation of the world view of Shrine Shinto as taught us by Yamamoto Guji.2 Third, we wish to address the conference’s central theme – considering ways to construct world peace - by suggesting how Shrine Shinto has something important to contribute in this endeavor.

I. From enmity to friendship – the life of Yamamoto Yukitaka

The life of the late Yamamoto Guji, chief priest of Tsubaki Grand Shrine, Mie Prefecture, spanned the war years and post war period. In his youth he served in the Japanese military in New Guinea as a political officer in the Marine Corps. He believed he was working for the development of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and was committed to freeing the nations of the Pacific from colonial overlords. The purpose of his training and administrative role was to improve the living standards in the region. He was quickly disabused of this notion when he realized that Japan was locked in deadly combat with the United States, which itself was claiming to liberate Asia from Japanese rule. In bitterness, he realized that he had been deceived -- that war was not a means to peace and prosperity.

Following the landing of American and Australian forces on April 22, 1944, he was among 15,000 Japanese men who fled into the dense jungles of New Guinea. He writes:

For 550 days I did not have even a single grain of rice. I ate the buds of trees and grass. I ate nuts, berries, anything I could find. Five thousand of us died of hunger and disease before we reached a river. Five thousand more died before we reached a second river, crocodiles claiming 20 of us. Of the remaining Five thousand, 4,700 turned back, their number diminishing to 2000 by the time they staggered into Hollandia.

Of the 300 who pushed on, only three made it back to Japan …(1999:23).

This experience forced Yamamoto “to think profoundly about what humans must do to prevent such a diabolical cataclysm from ever taking place again (1999:24).” “Coming
face to face with the sufferings and privations of war is the best source of motivation to seek peace…(1999:23)."³

When he returned to Japan, he tried to discover the nature of the Shinto tradition he had inherited. His father, who was the first conscientious objector in the Suzuka city area and who resisted government enforcement of State Shinto, provided an exemplary model of what the life and work of a Shrine priest should be. Determined to search for inner truth and understanding of his tradition, Yamamoto began to practice the ascetic discipline of misogi harai – a ritual act of water purification. From 11 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. every night for 10 years he ritually cleansed himself by standing under a free-flowing waterfall and in solitude contemplated the meaning of his age-old tradition.

He began reflecting on aspects of Shinto, such as the shimenawa – the intertwined cords of rice straw wound and knotted together (musubi) and placed horizontally across the entrance to the shrine – a marker of a purified area. Like the intertwined strands of rope, he saw that people are also linked and bound together, hand in hand around the world. Yamamoto came to the conclusion that Shinto had something to offer the people of other nations – a perspective on life that may contribute to world peace.⁴

He decided to act on this insight, and began the process which led to the establishment of a Shinto shrine in America, the purpose being to provide a “forum for growth and understanding between the United States and Japan… searching together for ways to work for world peace through presentation, participation, encounter and dialogue” (1999:57). In 1987 he registered as a non-profit charitable organization Tsubaki America, a shrine first constructed in Stockton, California, and later located in Seattle, Washington. He also became active in a worldwide interfaith organization the IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom), and in 1996 became the first Shinto priest to serve as president, completing his term in 1999. During this time he also authorized an American-born Aikido master Koichi Barrish to become a Shinto priest -- a dramatic statement of his profound sense of friendship with a nation he once thought was the enemy.⁵

II. American perceptions of Shinto: Shrine Shinto vs. State Shinto

What did Yamamoto Guji think Shinto had to offer in this dialogue for growth and understanding between the United States and Japan? Before answering that, it is necessary to clear up the lingering perception on the part of many Americans that Shinto is synonymous with State Shinto. Even many Japanese, right after the war, “had mixed feelings if not misgivings about Shinto” (Yamamoto 1999:39) because of its associations with State Shinto, which was “a system embodying nationalism, loyalty and Emperor veneration” from the Meiji to subsequent governments of the mid-twentieth century (Clammer 2001:237). Yamamoto Guji would agree with the Japanese writer Chikao Fujisawa (1959:55) that State Shinto was a “perversion of Shinto theory and beliefs into militaristic and ultra-nationalistic propaganda."
Western scholars, like John Clammer, have shown that Shrine Shinto is not as organized and bureaucratically managed as State Shinto or even Sect Shinto, because it is diffused and localized in nature (2001:237). Tsubaki Grand Shrine, for example, is located at the foot of the Suzuka mountains, and its specific locale – its physical placement -- is an essential part of its meaning and significance as a shrine (we will discuss this more fully in a moment). This shrine is but one of some 80,000 shrines located throughout Japan. Given the diverse and pluralistic nature of Shrine Shinto, its structure has historically resisted the centralizing tendencies of the state and even the centralizing tendencies of the Jinja Honcho, a post-war voluntary association of Shinto shrines. This organization is a voluntary association, with little official power over individual shrines in matters of doctrine or ritual. 6

Furthermore, the world view of Shrine Shinto is in some ways politically subversive, in the sense that it “points to a mode of thinking, organization and rootedness in the universe” which goes beyond politics (Clammer 2001:235). Although there are important political dimensions to Shrine Shinto (and we will have to discuss the role of the Emperor and Yasukuni Shrine in a moment), its principal focus is nature and the cosmos, and it is from within this much broader context that human interests, including politics, is best understood. 7 To explain this, we turn to a brief interpretive analysis of the world view of Shrine Shinto, as seen through the perspective of Yamamoto Guji.

III. Shinto’s world view: humans and the environment

In contrast to some religious philosophies that endeavor to explain the world in terms of transcendent principles which exist prior to this world (e.g., a transcendent God who creates the world), Shrine Shinto presents us with an image of an unfolding universe, a religion of immanence, not created from above, but produced from within. This vast expanse of Great Nature (daishizen) is the only world there is, a world infused by a connecting life force (musubi) that is continually manifesting and increasing in complexity. Humans, and all aspects of nature, are expressions/manifestations of this immanent creative life principle (musubi). 8

A. The environmental debate

From this perspective questions of how human beings should relate to each other (issues of peace) cannot be separated from issues of how human beings relate to nature. In some fundamental way environmental issues are intimately bound together -- intertwined like the straw cords of the shimenawa -- with the multitude of political, economic and religious concerns. The world, Great Nature, is the basic context in which we must think about all these matters. That is, the shimenawa not only suggests how human beings are linked and bound together across the world, it also exemplifies the deep bonds and connections we have with the processes of the natural world, of which we are a part.
Consider, for example, the contemporary environmental debate. Because Shinto is founded on a vision of an unfolding cosmos prior to, and larger than, individuals and their interests, it brings a broader perspective to the whole debate. In distinction from many theories of environmental ethics that derive from political interests, Shinto contributes to the environmental debate a deep, processive cosmic vision of nature, similar to what Westerner’s term “Deep Ecology.” This is not a reduced or miniaturized, idealized nature, which some cite as a typical Japanese response to the unpredictability of the natural world (Asquith and Kallard 1997). Rather, nature is immense and awesome, without bounds – an unfathomable mystery of vast immensity in which all human activity occurs. So Shinto is suggesting a metaphysical orientation quite different from many human centered environmental theories (Boyd and Williams 2002).

B. Practical implications for the environment

This orientation has important practical implications. It suggests, for example, that nature is not merely an object out there, something for humans to observe and study. Though this is at times a useful cognitive stance, it is also important to realize that we are embedded in the natural world – it is inseparable from us. We have a symbiotic relation with nature, hence we do not control nature as much as we participate in nature; land is not to be thought of first and foremost as property but rather as the site of astounding spiritual and regenerating forces (Clammer 2001: 228,230). From Yamamoto’s life experience he can affirm that once we are in tune with the immediate natural environment surrounding us, we are able to tap into the ki or universal energy of all of life’s forms, and that in turn can be transformative of one’s life and one’s relationships. To experience the ki or energy of nature effects a “sincerity and purity of heart” (makoto no kokoro) which enables a human being to more clearly evaluate and act positively in daily life, including all its political, economic, and social aspects.

This human connection with the environment can be explained in another way. First, our relation to nature is not merely a general, theoretical one; it is always a matter of relating to a specific place. Shinto Shrines honor the location where they are built. In the case of Tsubaki Grand Shrine, it is at the foot of the Suzuka mountains, in a forest of 500-year-old Japanese cypress trees, where the mountain waters have been channeled to create a waterfall. Here Yamamoto Guji practiced a ritual of water purification (misogi) in order to directly experience his connection with nature. In so doing, he came to the conviction that a genuine encounter with nature brought about a transformation of human consciousness. It helped cultivate a bright, powerful, clear-minded disposition and attitude toward life (akaki kiyoki kokoro) that celebrated not only our deep embeddedness in nature but also our relatedness with each other.

Furthermore, the shock of a cascading waterfall hitting the back of the neck not only means direct relation to water, it also fosters ones’ attention to the immediacy of the moment. You can imagine that it is almost impossible for a person’s attention to slip away toward future and past when standing under a cold, forceful waterfall. At such times, according to Yamamoto Guji, you are not only more in tune with the processes of
Great Nature – again, in this particular instance, water -- than at other times, but you are truly experiencing the present – you stand in the “middle of the now” (naka ima). In those moments there is an unmitigated resurgence of the life force itself, a momentary intimation of the “way of the kami” (kannagara). This fosters an uninhibited attentiveness and energy that aids one in the daily tasks of everyday life and its continual challenges, personally and socially.

In other words, Yamamoto Guji is saying not only that the boundaries between humans and nature are permeable, but that human consciousness is malleable and transformable, that we can come to know and act in ways that are energetic and constructive in building strong, binding, peaceful relationships with humans and the environment. Issues of peace are metaphysically linked to issues of the environment, and it is in our relation to the environment that we find the energy and clarity to deal wisely with the human social, political and economic problems needed to establish peace. These are bold claims, but they are authenticated by the life and work of Yamamoto Guji and worthy of serious consideration in any discussion that seeks to find ways to construct world peace.

IV. Shinto’s religious perspective on political issues

As we have noted, the political activities and social reality of humans are folded into this larger vision. From within this perspective we can turn to some very specific questions often asked of Shinto, given the World War II heritage of State Shinto and its confusion with Shrine Shinto. First, what is the role of the emperor in Shrine Shinto? Secondly, what is the relevance of Yasukuni Shrine – the place where Japanese war dead are enshrined? These are very complex issues, and our purpose here is merely to suggest some aspects of a contemporary Shrine Shinto religious view. A fuller account of either of these topics is not possible here.¹⁰

A. Kami and the emperor

To start with the question of the status and role of the emperor, we first need some background perspective regarding the term kami, its English translations, and the traditional way it has been applied to the emperor. The meaning of the term kami is fluid, complex and multifaceted, but it should always be understood in the context of a religious philosophy of immanence rather than one of transcendence. Among many Shinto scholars there is a “distaste for the word “god” as a translation for kami because this term, like “deity” carries inappropriate connotations of a transcendent order – the supernatural realm of the gods (Havens 1998:235). In Shinto thought, the visible and manifest is regarded as more fundamental than the invisible or concealed. The connotations of the term kami as “superior” or “unusual,” therefore, do not intimate that kami belong to a superior, invisible dimension of reality transcending the natural order. Rather the term refers to unusual and superior instances of the immanent life force (musubi) that stimulate in us a sense of wonder and possess a kind of awesome potency (Havens 1998:235).
That is, there are occasions or instances in our lives when we sense something sublime about a specific time or place or even an unusual person. It may be an encounter, says Yamamoto Guji (1999:67) with “a flower, the beauty of the mountains, the pure snow, the soft rains or the gentle breeze,” or a field of rice, the sea, some birds or animals, insects, trees, grass, minerals, or a great hero or leader – people or places that elicit in us awe and wonder. Shinto designates those instances as experiences of *kami*. *Kami* are not countless gods, but countless phenomena. Because Shinto’s world view is one of immanence, not transcendence, the center of gravity is in this world, not in the heights, and everything is grounded in the natural processes of world. Fundamentally, everyone and everything are *kami*, or have *kami* potential.

Given this understanding of the term *kami*, what is the role and status of the emperor in Shrine Shinto? The emperor is a human, not divine, leader whose status and role can invoke a sense of wonder and deeply felt respect, even veneration, among the Japanese. The emperor’s traditional title as “manifest *kami*” (*akitsumikami*) or “*kami* which has appeared in reality” is suggestive of many things. On one level, it suggests that the emperor as a human leader has a symbolic-inspiring role for the Japanese. The title of emperor, in itself indicating a non-everyday, unusual and superior status, can function as a visible symbol of political legitimation for the whole of Japanese society and state; it can provide an integrating symbol of the nation for the Japanese people.

But there is a further dimension to the emperor’s status. The person who bears this title, because he can be viewed as the paramount leader of the nation, becomes the exemplar of the *kami* nature in which we all participate. In his symbolic role he may serve as a living example, a visible intimation of both the interconnected relations of all persons in society as well our connection with the larger context in which we all live -- the cosmos. The emperor does not manifest a transcendent divinity, but can exemplify, through his heightened status and role as the symbolic leader of a people, the immanent and visible *kami* nature in which everyone and everything is grounded.

We realize that there is more to it than this, and one must investigate further, for example, the enthronement rite and its meaning for the role of the emperor when he is claimed to attain certain mystical union with *Amaterasu omikami*. But even so, given what we have said about Shrine Shinto, metaphysically all of us are part of Great Nature, so the claim of intimate union with an aspect of nature is not as far a reach as some might imagine, especially if the term *kami* is understood to designate unusual and superior manifestations of the immanent generative power that permeates the cosmos.

B. Yasukuni Shrine

Finally, we turn to the issue of the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. Established in 1869, this shrine was dedicated to the souls of all the Japanese who had died in wars against foreign powers. There are major political problems connected with this shrine. For example, prominent politicians sometimes visit the shrine to pay respects to war
dead, and in so doing enflame those people of other nations who suffered under Japanese
occupation. Such visits also raise political questions concerning the separation of church
and state, and appear to be a re-affirmation of State Shinto.\textsuperscript{14}

Yamamoto Guji’s view on this is principally religious, not nationalistic. Although
Yasukuni Shrine, like other shrines dedicated to the war dead, is often viewed as a “war
shrine,” i.e., a shrine dedicated to war, Yamamoto Guji sees this matter in an entirely
different light. In his view, we human beings are not only intimately bound together with
the environment and with each other, but also with our ancestors. In some very elemental
way, the dead remain living presences in our lives. Yamamoto Guji came to a very
specific realization of this after ten years of water purification practices. He knew the
historical fact that during Oba Nobunaga’s wars in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century more than 400 Shinto
and Buddhist priests were killed in the region of Tsubaki Shrine. Yamamoto Guji began
to sense uneasy presences – what he called ‘restless souls’ of the departed, because their
violent deaths had not been properly mourned nor sufficiently consoled in that mysterious
process of movement from life to death. As John Hersey (1989: 63) states: "Disposal of
the dead, by decent cremation and enshrinement, is a greater moral responsibility to the
Japanese than adequate care of the living."

Consequently he developed a memorial service for the dead priests, one that
paralleled the Shinto Consolation Rite. For ten years both the memorial service and the
Consolation Rite (\textit{ireisai}) were held daily. He also erected a Memorial tower in their
honor, thereby establishing something tangible and visible that recognized both the
connection the living have with the dead, and our moral obligation to them.

In his view, this obligation applies to all those who lost their lives during World
War II. He was convinced that the Japanese people, beginning with the Prime Minister,
must show proper respect for the noble spirits of \textit{yasukuni} (the spirits of those who, in
their various capacities, gave their lives for the nation at different times)(1999:88). The
living, by offering condolences through shrine rituals, establish a connection with those
who lost their lives and in doing so, help to still or quiet their restless presence. This kind
of dedication, in turn, Yamamoto believes, will help raise the moral and ethical standards
of the public.

Yamamoto states:

We now have a government posture toward foreign affairs in which apologies are
made, over and over, for our having become engaged in military aggression…but
it is only right… that we should be showing proper respect to those who sacrificed
their lives for the nation. Their peace makes our prosperity possible (1999:88,89).

There is no contradiction in his mind between memorializing the war dead and being
totally opposed to war for the sake of constructing world peace.

As the \textit{shimenawa} taught him, \textit{we} are bound together with both the living and the
dead. These relationships can be embraced with honesty and clear-minded cooperation
when we are in tune with the vastness of Great Nature through which we draw our life
force. In this way we can begin to establish true relations with each other and the world.

**Conclusion: Contributing Perspectives to World Peace**

In conclusion, Yamamoto's life is an example of how one’s whole outlook can
change – from enmity to friendship, and he worked tirelessly to demonstrate that Shinto
has something important to contribute to humanity. He was convinced after his
experiences in World War II that Shinto has a universal message which should not be
confined to Japan. Although he would strongly agree with the remark made by the
eminent historian Edwin O. Reischauer that “It would be hard to imagine Japan without
Shinto…,” he would strongly disagree with the notion in the second half of Reischauer’s
statement - it would be hard to imagine “… Shinto anywhere else but in Japan” (Picken
1980:6). Yamamoto not only imagined Shinto outside of Japan but established a Shinto
Shrine in America with the primary purpose of providing a place of “encounter and
dialogue” with Americans so that we could begin to see the truth symbolized in the
shimenawa: we are linked together, hand in hand, around the world.

It is difficult to summarize Yamamoto Guji’s sincere and clear-minded approach
to the task of constructing a world peace. But perhaps the remark he made one evening
after we had enjoyed the warm waters of an onsen might suffice. We were riding in his
car back to the shrine when he turned to us and said: “True relations are hadaka no
 tsukiai (“naked relationships”).” This meant that in genuine human encounters there is no
place for false notions or masked attitudes which interfere with, or prevent, personal,
social, and national relationships from being bonds of friendship. “Only in this way,” he
said, “can we begin to construct a world of peace.”

**NOTES**

1 The authors are grateful to the late Rev. Dr. Yamamoto Yukitaka for dedicating so much time to us during
2 Hardacre (1989) has examined closely the role of State Shinto. Likewise, the official distinctions between
Shrine Shinto, Folk Religions and New Religions have been well documented; cf., e.g., Hori (1999).
3 It would be an interesting study to compare some of the life stories of Japanese holdouts after World War
II with the values and actions of Yamamoto Guji, both before and after the war. Nogi Harumichi, for
example, adored Hitler and Mussolini, and used the emperor’s authority during his naval career (cf
Cook: 1992); Hiroo Onoda (1974) maintained a military outlook and loyalty to the state throughout his
sojourn; Kenzo Okuzaki embarked on a one-man war against the Japanese establishment trying to force
them, including Emperor Hirohito, to recognize the crimes committed during the war (cf. Hara, 1986).
4 Yamamoto was not alone in his view that Shinto has something important to contribute to humanity.
Chikao Fujisawa (1959:30), e.g., states: “The time has finally come for the Neo-Shintoists [Shinto after
World War II] to embark on “universalization” of the Way of Kami….”
5 There are other Shinto shrines outside of Japan, and have been for some time, but they were established
primarily for Japanese émigrés to, e.g., Hawaii and other Pacific Islands. But Tsubaki America, as we have
noted, was founded with the unique purpose of searching “for ways to work for world peace.” Reverend
Koichi Barrish is now in charge of the Seattle shrine.
Muraoka (1988) divides ancient Shinto thought into three characteristics: political, ethical, and philosophical. The political (k? koku shugi: “Imperial Countryism) is fundamentally intertwined with the others, and we will touch on two aspects it, the Emperor’s status and the role of Yasukuni Shrine. For discussions of kokutai (“nation body” or national polity) as it pertains to the Emperor, cf. Dower (1999) and Bix (2001).

For a more extensive discussion of Shrine Shinto’s world view, focusing on Yamamoto Guji’s perspective, cf. Boyd & Williams (2005 [forthcoming]).

Clammer (2001:233) refers to Iwata Keiji’s further critique of deep ecology from an “animistic” point of view, namely that as a movement deep ecology remains “too materialistic because of its unwillingness or inability to penetrate to deep enough levels…,” i.e., to actually encounter the universe as pervaded by the numinous rather than being content with intellectual discussion which ultimately misses the point.

A fuller account of this topic would include the extensive literature in the social sciences, for example. We rely on the work of John Clammer and Norman Havens for the substance of the following remarks.

The crucial lines of the Rescript state that the “ties between Us and Our people have always stood upon mutual trust and affection. They do not depend upon mere legends and myths. They are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine…” While the Japanese word translated as “divine” here is the Japanese term akitsumikami …(kami which has appeared in reality” or “manifest kami,” a traditional referent for the emperor), some Shintoists have suggested that what the emperor was really denying was the notion that he was as transcendent deity modeled after the Christian God, and that as such the declaration was meaningless, based as it was on a “misunderstanding” of the nature of kami. Ueda Kenji, for example, states that the emperor’s Declaration of Humanity is sometimes taken as a rationale for a denial of emperor worship, but “this is fundamentally an error. The error is the result, primary of confusion between the Christian concept of an absolute god and traditional Japanese beliefs.”

In other words, Emperor Showa was denying that he was a supernatural supreme being, not that he had kami- nature (which in any case would be largely dependent upon his subjects’ own subjective perception of his “non-everyday power”).

Whether or not this was the intent of the Allied architects of the Shinto Directive, it is germane to a discussion of Shrine Shinto’s view of the status and role of the emperor.

Cf. Picken (2002: 47-48, 55-56) for a brief discussion of the Emperor’s sacerdotal role, a view basically in accord with Yamamoto’s perspective, according to Picken and Reverend Koichi Barrish (personal communication). Our concern in this discussion is to clarify, from a Shrine Shinto perspective as taught us by Yamamoto Guji, the metaphysical assumptions that underlie much of the debate about the role and status of the emperor. Assumptions of a “transcendent metaphysic” seem to underlie the vocabulary of most discussions of this issue: cf., e.g., Dower (1999:308ff); Bix (2001: 121, 561). Furthermore, it may be the case, as T. Fujitani (1996:233) has so carefully argued, that the “emperor was a product of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” and that the imperial office is increasingly trivialized in modern Japan. Fujitani writes how, for example, the pageantry of the imperial house helped foster feelings of intimacy and love among the people through imperial weddings and anniversaries, official pardons, public ceremonial practices and constructed gendered images. Such an analysis, however, does not make explicit the assumptions of the Shinto world view that may have made these constructions possible, nor should it exclude the possibility of a people’s genuine devotion toward the “manifest kami” understood from a Japanese point of view; cf., e.g., Hersey (1989:115).

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