Shinkoku

Reconsidering the Concept of Sentient Landscapes from Japan

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Introduction

Japan is often considered an ethnically and culturally homogenous society—by cultural nationalists, tourist guidebooks, and the business literature alike. In reality, Japanese society always was ethnically diverse and multicultural, and many of the Japanese traditions demonstrating the assumed cultural homogeneity must be considered invented traditions (Vlastos 1998: 1). Until the end of World War II, this diversity was embraced to justify the Japanese imperial project (Oguma 2002).

Today, the four main cultural and ethnic minorities in Japanese society are the Indigenous Ainu people of the northern island of Hokkaidō; the Burakumin, who are commonly described as descendants of outcast groups in feudal Japan; the Ryūkyū Islanders from the prefecture of Okinawa; and Korean long-term residents known as *zainichi Kankokujin* 在日韓国人 (CERD 2018; Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 31–32; Lie 2004: 3). From a contemporary standpoint, these minorities differ considerably in how they diverge from mainstream Japanese society, culturally and legally. What they have in common, however, is that their status as outsiders can be linked to the conception of the Japanese archipelago as the "country of the gods (*shinkoku* 神国)," a sentient landscape in which gods, bodhisattvas, tutelary deities, and ancestral spirits are manifest in specific sites forming the Japanese ethnoscape as the territorial embodiment of Japan.

This term shinkoku is nearly as old as Japanese (written) history itself. Unsurprisingly for such an old term, its meaning was neither static nor did it always imply Japanese superiority. In fact, it implied Japanese inferiority in the Middle Ages. In the nineteenth century, however, it became

intimately tied to Japanese imperialism, as the Japanese socialist Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911) critically observed already in 1901 (Kōtoku 1901: 17; Tierney 2015: 149). The term also features in the 1937 official summary of the ideology of Japanese "ultranationalism," the *Kokutai no hongi* 国体の本義, translated as *Cardinal Principles of the National Entity* (Monbushō 1937: 64; Gauntlett and Hall 1949: 105). When Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō 森 喜朗 (b. 1937, in office 2000–2001) therefore publicly stated in 2000 that Japan was the "country of the gods," a backlash both domestically and internationally was ensured (Watts 2000).

The term sentient landscape was introduced in anthropological scholarship in the context of the study of Indigenous societies in former settler colonies. While there is no shared and widely agreed upon definition of the term, common traits can be identified in the literature (Peterson 2011: 167–68). Sentient landscapes are territories inhabited by Indigenous peoples, whose collective identities are shaped by and dependent on their interaction with those landscapes. They are not thought to be sentient per se, but are considered as such, because the landscapes are understood to be populated by ancestral and other spirits or deities. These divine beings have shaped the community in the past and continue to communicate with community members (Sharp 2002: 58). Therefore, sentient landscapes are necessarily also social spaces shaping the community's identity in the present (Cruikshank 2005: 152). In the literature employing the term, it is usually implied that out of a community's dependency on a territory, not only economically but also culturally, there arises an exclusive right to it. Sentient landscapes are thus to be differentiated from what Henri Lefebvre has called the "abstract spaces" of capitalist modernity, the measurable and exchangeable plots of lands that are treated as commodities (Cruikshank 2005: 259; Lefebvre 1991: 307; Povinelli 1993: 217–18). The necessarily exclusionary nature of a sentient landscape due to a community's dependence on it is not problematized. Rather, the concept is applied only for Indigenous minorities struggling to preserve such landscapes (as well as the sustainable economic activities and cultural identities dependent on them) against the onslaught of an exploitive neoliberalism often linked to an Anglo-Saxon and Protestant majority culture—an assessment in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007).

Yet sentient landscapes are at the same time strikingly similar to what the scholar of nationalism Anthony D. Smith has labeled "ethnoscapes." These are sacred national homelands, and constitutive elements of nations, created through the territorialization of collective memories of historical events and persons, through which the nation's "geobody" and people merge. As is the case with the sentient landscapes, the nation's

identity and the ethnoscape are mutually dependent on and definitional of each other. Ethnoscapes differ from sentient landscapes in the former's clearly defined boundaries, and because the mosaics of ethnoscapes' *lieux de mémoire* are the product of conscious historical projects. Yet most importantly for his volume, they differ because sentient landscapes remain "enchanted gardens," in which ancestral and other spirits or gods are really existing, while the national homeland is sacred but not considered sentient (Smith 2009: 49–51, 72, 77–78, 94–95; Nora 1989: 8; see also Wehler 2007: 40).

Japanese nationalism and its conception of the archipelago as the country of the gods—*shinkoku* 神国—offers a case study to interrogate these concepts and especially their exclusionary nature. Contemporary Japan is not just an ethnoscape of sites of national significance but simultaneously a sentient landscape, where national, local tutelary, and other deities remain accessible in a myriad of shrines.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the genealogy of shinkoku as a concept limiting claims to political legitimacy. Defining the Japanese islands as a sentient landscape also always meant creating a social hierarchy between those closest to divine authority and thus to political legitimacy, and those farther removed and excluded from the exercise of legitimate power. With the introduction of the novel ideas of nationalism and scientific racism to Japan from the late nineteenth century onward, the Japanese islands additionally became an ethnoscape to which the Japanese nation as a whole had a unique relationship. Whether specific sites are considered to be really inhabited by gods or spirits or are simply sites of national memory depends, of course, on individual belief.

The second part of the chapter delineates how various forms of exclusion in postwar Japan experienced by the Burakumin, the Ainu of Hokkaidō, and the Ryūkyū Islanders have their roots in shinkoku thought. Due to a lack of space, the Korean residents of Japan (*zainichi Kankokujin*) are not covered here. As immigrants or descendants thereof, the denial of their ties to the country of the gods as literal outsiders is also the most straightforward one.

A Short History of the Country of the Gods

The term shinkoku, the "country of the gods," is nearly as old as Japanese history itself. It describes Japan not only as created by the gods, but also as a territory in which gods as well as ancestral and tutelary deities are manifest, interacting with its inhabitants. Shinkoku appears first in the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀), composed in 720. The text describes

an invasion of the Korean peninsula by the mythical Empress Jingū. The King of Shilla is overawed by the disembarking force of her "divine soldiers (*shinpei* 神兵)" crossing over from the country of the gods, ruled by just and wise kings (*seiō* 聖王), who carry the titles of "heavenly sovereigns" or *tennō* 天皇 (Kuroita 1962a: 118; Aston 1896a: 230). Shinkoku was thus already in this very first known instance a political concept linking the notion of Japan as the country of the gods—a country with an identity distinct from Korea, and by extension China—to the legitimacy of the royal court of the Yamato clan (Itō 2003: 80). The Yamato had established their hegemony over other clan groups by the end of the sixth century and ruled over Western Honshu and Northern Kyushu from their base in present-day Nara prefecture. To create legitimacy for their suzerainty, they systemized the ancestral myths of the various clans around their own ancestral deity, the sun goddess Amaterasu-Ōmikami, and crafted a common ritual system (Mori 2003: 14–26). In the *Nihon Shoki*, these myths were written down, creating a history linking creation to the establishment and expansion of Yamato rule. In this sentient realm, ancestral and local tutelary deities were ever present, shaping the lives of the people and providing legitimacy to the continuing authority of local clans.

When Buddhism was introduced from the Korean peninsula, the bodhisattvas appear to have been first understood as foreign deities intruding into this sentient landscape. To avoid angering the local deities, the veneration of the newcomers was initially limited to members of a powerful immigrant clan of the nobility (Kuroita 1962b: 48; Aston 1896b: 65–68). Being associated with the civilizations of the powerful states of China and the Korean peninsula, however, the court began to embrace Buddhism and to use it to legitimize the centralization of its power. The expansion of seventh-century Yamato power was thus contemporaneous with the establishment and spread of Buddhist practices and beliefs throughout the country (Como 2008: 15).

In the second half of the seventh century, a centralized bureaucratic polity based on Chinese models was built. An important difference from the Chinese blueprint was the inclusion of a so-called "Ministry of Kami (gods, divine beings) Affairs" or *Jingikan*, which ritually ordered the sentient landscape of the realm's deities through a network of officially recognized and centrally administered shrines, complemented by a similar network of temples. (Mori 2003: 29, 38, 44, 50). Territorial expansion occurred through the conquest of lands in northern Japan from the people referred to as *Ezo* or *Emishi* 蝦夷. There territories were also understood as sentient landscapes. And so, integrating the new territories into the realm meant not only defeating the Ezo but also pacifying through the establishment of shrines the tutelary deities that might otherwise take revenge for

the clearing of forests (Breen and Teeuwen 2010: 25). In this process of territorial and ritual expansion, the sentient landscape of the country of the gods was thus understood to be congruent with the realm of the imperial court in Kyoto.

Shinkoku:
From Marker of Inferiority to Proof of Superiority

The coexistence of the two religious frameworks and the simultaneous use of them by the court appears to have caused the search for an overarching framework accommodating both Indigenous gods and foreign bodhisattvas. This was found in the original Japanese paradigm of "original forms of deities and their local traces (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹)," which first took shape in the eighth century. It interpreted Japanese deities as local incarnations of the bodhisattvas and thus subordinated the former to the latter (Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003). By the turn of the second millennium, the court's ability to maintain a centralized administration throughout the realm had broken down and a feudal polity began to take shape. This extended to the ritual sphere, where shrines and temples were increasingly independent from imperial control. In 1185 the first government by a military noble (samurai) was established in Kamakura. Territorial expansion had led to the amassing of estates effectively outside the court's control by local nobles and temples shifting power from the capital. With the disintegration of the bureaucratic institutions, order broke down. For contemporaries, the age of *mappō* (末法), the period of the degeneration of the Buddhist teachings, had arrived (Mori 2003: 64–65, 79). At this time, long after the Buddha had acquired nirvana, and in this country far from India, the bodhisattvas could only reach and save the people by showing themselves in the form of local gods (Bialock 2007: 208). Japan at the time was thus the "country of the gods" precisely because of its inferiority.

This interpretation was reversed following the failed invasions of the Mongols. While they had overrun China and Korea, their invasion fleets were destroyed by typhoons that became to be known as "divine winds (*kamikaze* 神風)" of the gods of the Japanese islands (Mori 2003: 81). The deities manifest in the archipelago, making it a sentient landscape, had defended the country of the gods from foreign invaders.

Yet the defense preparations caused an economic and political crisis that led to the fall of the government in Kamakura in 1333. Competing imperial courts, a northern one in Kyoto and a southern one in the town of Yoshino, emerged and would compete for dominance until 1392. To support the claim of the Southern court, the aristocrat Kitabatake Chikaf-

usa 北畠 親房 (1293–1354) around 1340 wrote the *Jinnō Shōtōki* 神皇正統記 (*Chronicles of Gods and Sovereigns*). Drawing on the *Nihon Shoki*, its famous opening lines explicitly call Japan the "country of the gods" because its dynasty had descended from the sun goddess, making Japan not just unique but superior to all other countries (Kitabatake 1914: 1; Varley 1980: 49). In the end, however, the Northern court, supported and controlled by the shoguns of the Ashikaga clan, won and cemented the political dominance of the warrior (samurai) class.

This was reflected in the 1480 political memorandum *Shōdanchiyō* 樵談治要 (Principles of ruling the realm according to a humble woodcutter), written by the courtier Ichijō Kaneyoshi 一条 兼良 (1402–1481) for the shogun Ashikaga Yoshihisa 足利 義尚 (1465–1489). The text stated that all people in the "country of the gods," high and low born, were descendants of the gods, thereby extending the divine legitimacy to the warrior ruling class (Ichijō 1480). By this time, however, a succession struggle following the death of a shogun in 1467 had already turned into a full-blown civil war. It caused the imperial court to lose control over the remaining hierarchy of shrines, and the court also lost access to its estates in the provinces, severely diminishing its income. This created opportunities for religious innovators. The most successful and brazen of them was Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田 兼倶 (1435–1511), a shrine priest from a family of court officials.

By cultivating ties with the imperial court and the shogun in the capital as well as with local shrines' priests in the provinces, Yoshida was able to secure his access to both funds and religious authority. In 1473 the emperor declared Yoshida's shrine the most important one in the country of the gods and, in 1489, even accepted the claim that the gods of the Ise Shrine, intimately linked to the imperial dynasty, had migrated there. More importantly, Yoshida invented a new doctrinal system partly based on texts made up by himself. Its main text explicitly addressed the idea of the country of the gods as defined by the divine descent of the emperor from the sun goddess. Yoshida reversed the former hierarchy and argued that the Japanese gods had come first and Buddhism as well as Chinese philosophy were secondary to them (Hardacre 2017: 208–22). This worldview made Japan superior over all other countries due to its direct relationship with the gods and thus the sentient nature of its landscape.

His descendants continued to cultivate relationships with feudal lords. This might have included the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537–1598), who came close to uniting the Japanese archipelago through conquest in the late sixteenth century (Hardacre 2017: 230; Kang 1997: 90, 96, 101). Yoshida's thought might have been particularly attractive for Toyotomi, as he had been born a peasant and lacked both the descent from an emperor that shoguns had shared so far and a high education focused

on the Chinese classics and Buddhism. But Hideyoshi also used Yoshida's interpretation of Japan as a divine and therefore superior country to legitimize a new and aggressive foreign policy. In 1591, after he had conquered the southern island of Kyushu, whose warlords had entertained close relations with Portugal and Spain, Hideyoshi outlawed Christianity, explicitly referring to Japan as the "country of the gods" in a letter to the governor-general of Portuguese India announcing his ban (Saitō 2006: 205).

A year later, Toyotomi launched an invasion of Korea with the aim to conquer China and have the Japanese emperor rule over all three countries. A visit to the shrine of Empress Jingū prior to the troops' embarkment likened this endeavor to the history in the *Nihon Shoki*. The Japanese forces were able to subdue Korea but soon found themselves bogged down on the peninsula once Ming China intervened on behalf of its vassal. After Toyotomi's death, a council of elder vassals was supposed to administer Japan until the maturity of his heir. The most powerful member, Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543–1616), was however quickly able to make himself the ruler, unify the country, and make peace with Korea.

Claiming the Sentient Landscape of the Gods for All "Japanese" through Early Modern Scholarship

The political system that Tokugawa Ieyasu and his heirs established proved to be remarkably successful. It lasted until the mid-nineteenth century, when Japan was opened to trade by the colonial powers. Its legitimacy rested on an amalgamation of ideas from various traditions, among them a deification of the founder after his death, which associated Ieyasu with a bodhisattva but also with the sun goddess. Like his predecessor, he employed the discourse of the divinity of Japan to justify outlawing Christianity (Saitō 2006: 206).

To maintain the new political order, feudal lords were required to attend court every other year in the shogun's capital. When they were in their own domains, they had to leave their wives and children as hostages in the capital. This necessitated the construction and maintenance of a road network traversing the whole country, which would impress nineteenth-century European visitors. More importantly, however, peace, mandatory traveling, and infrastructure boosted economic growth, especially in the towns along roads. And so, during the period of the "great peace," as the Tokugawa period would come to be known, a protocapitalist economy emerged. While theoretically they occupied lower rungs in the social hierarchy than the samurai and peasants, town-dwelling merchants and craftsmen benefited most from this. And this state of affairs

would then be reflected in the religious landscape. New doctrines and practices found adherents promising them their own agency and thus challenging the established institutions and lineages. With prosperity and safe roads, commoners began to travel to important shrines and temples. The print industry in the large towns churned out manuals for the travelers explaining "foreign" manners to them but also providing information about the landscapes and sacred sites in them.

In texts such as the *Jingikun* written by Kaibara Ekiken 貝原 益軒 (1630–1714), sites of local significance were linked to the myths of the imperial court and the archipelago. This simultaneously made such sites accessible to ordinary people and confirmed that Japan was indeed a sentient landscape in which various deities were present, thereby truly making the islands the "country of the gods" (Ethington and Toyosawa 2015: 76–87). One particularly important sentient site was Mount Fuji, which had long been recognized as sacred. Jikigyō Miroku 食行身禄 (1671–1733). The sixth leader of the confraternities of the Fuji cult introduced the notion that the mountain replaced Mount Sumeru, the axis mundi in the Buddhist cosmography, precisely because it was located in the "country of the gods" (Earhart 2011: 118–19).

In the seventeenth century a scholarly tradition also emerged that applied philological methods to analyze the most ancient Japanese texts to derive an understanding of the pure Japanese "heart," or authentic nature, as it was assumed to have existed before any Chinese influence. *Kokugaku* 国学, as it later became known to differentiate this line of inquiry from the study of Chinese sources, naturally came to the conclusion that Japan was the country of the gods and superior over China and India. The unbroken line of emperors descending from the sun goddess was an essential element in this conception of Japan (Antoni 1998: 133). At the same time, Confucian scholars in Japan grappled with the problem that the concept of China as the Middle Kingdom rendered Japan inferior. But with the fall of the Ming dynasty to the Manchus and the establishment of the new Qing dynasty by this "barbarian" people, Japanese Confucianists increasingly embraced the notion that Japan had become the true middle kingdom, replacing China (Wakabayashi 1999: 29).

While *kokugaku* scholars tended to be hostile toward everything Chinese, the two lines of thought could be reconciled easily enough in what has since been named *Mito-gaku* 水戸学 after the name of the feudal domain where it emerged. Japan could be imagined as both: it was the "middle kingdom" precisely because it had a virtuous court with an unbroken line of emperors descending directly from the sun goddess, which simultaneously made it the "country of the gods" (Wakabayashi 1999: 29, 56–57). This was made explicit in *Mito-gaku's* most famous text. The "New Theses

(*Shinron* 新論)" were written by the samurai scholar Aizawa Seishisai 会沢 正志斎 (1782–1863) in 1825 (Wakabayashi 1999). Due to its influence on the movement that would later succeed in overthrowing the Tokugawa in the Meiji Restoration, it has been labeled the restoration movement's "bible" (e.g., Shimazono 2010: 113).

Likewise, in the early nineteenth century the scholar Hirata Atsutane 平 田 篤胤 (1776–1843) broke with the philological approach of his *kokugaku* peers, who concentrated on literary sources. For him the true Japanese identity remained accessible in the lives of the peasantry; unsurprisingly, rural elites were the most important segment of paying students in his academy. Indeed, for Hirata, all Japanese, including commoners, were descended from the gods and therefore superior to other people (McNally 2005: 4, 9, 13, 186–87, 197, 199, 206, 210, 212). Hirata developed his own theology, in which all ancestors were lifted to the status of emperors as "manifest deities" (*arahitogami* 現人神). The daily prayers introduced by Hirata to his disciples imagined the Japanese islands as overlapping and hierarchically ordered sentient landscapes. Practitioners would start their day by praying to the deities of the whole realm before "working their way down" through the deities of their provinces and local communities to those of their household and their ancestors (Hardacre 2017: 337–38). To be Japanese for Hirata meant to consciously live in a sentient landscape. Explicitly excluded from this imagined community were the outcastes due to their perceived ritual impurity (Maeda 2014: 44).

The Sentient Landscape of the Gods as the Basis of Japanese Modernity

By the mid-nineteenth century, the theoretical engagements with the iden- tity of Japan as a country of the gods in which the deities were manifest had sparked a movement demanding a return to imperial rule. At this time, Japan suffered from a protracted economic crisis as the feudal and agrarian economy had reached its limit of growth while the population kept growing. At the same time, Western ships came close to Japanese shores with increasing frequency, challenging the strict controls of foreign trade and travel introduced by the early Tokugawa rulers. In 1854 the shogun was finally forced to open the country. This, however, only served to worsen the economic crisis while also demonstrating the weakness of the shogun's government. Under siege domestically and pressured by the colonial powers, the shogun visited the emperor in Kyoto to gain his sup- port. This endeavor was not only unsuccessful but also demonstrated the shogun's acceptance of the higher status of the emperor, further embold- ening his opponents. In early January 1868, forces from the two powerful

Western domains of Satsuma 薩摩 and Chōshū 長州 occupied the imperial palace and had the sixteen-year-old Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) declare the restoration of imperial rule (the Meiji Restoration).

The following decades saw a protracted and often violent struggle over the future of the Japanese archipelago between factions ranging from traditionalists, who aspired to return to a utopian age of the gods, to modernizers striving to adopt Western "civilization" wholesale. In the end, the Meiji system codified in the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (1898) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) combined the institutional framework and constitutional mechanisms of nineteenth-century Europe with an ideology essentially derived from *Mito-gaku*. The conception of the Japanese archipelago as a sentient landscape of the gods served as the ideological foundation for the modern Empire of Japan.

The constitution of imperial Japan was comparable to those of contemporary European nations, if not more liberal. It granted the freedom of religion as long as the exercise of one's faith did not violate one's duties as an imperial subject (Josephson 2012: 138, 226–32). At the same time, the participation in the cult of the imperial dynasty as well as the paying of respect to historical loyalists and fallen soldiers at national shrines was defined as nonreligious and a patriotic duty for all Japanese. At school, the myths were taught as history and the constitutional mechanisms that removed the emperor from close to all decision making remained largely unexplored. Apart from a small minority, who received a higher education or had the opportunity to study abroad, the majority of Japanese were taught that Japan was indeed the country of the gods, ruled directly by a direct descendent of the sun goddess (Kuno and Tsurumi 2015: 132).

The late nineteenth century had seen the introduction of modern scientific disciplines to Japan, including folklore studies, archaeology, and physical anthropology/scientific racism. The ethnic nation of the Japanese, whose origin was now explored with the new techniques and concepts introduced, was named the Yamato people (*yamato minzoku*), after the country's archaic name in the *Nihon Shoki*. This differentiation between "true" Japanese and other imperial subjects such as Chinese, Koreans, or the Indigenous Ainu of Hokkaidō, but not the people of the Ryūkyū Islands, was made explicit in the textbooks employed in the empire's schools (e.g., Monbushō 1935: 5–6, 143–44).

A Really Existing Country of the Gods

By the early twentieth century, the political, economic, and social modernization through the selective adoption of Western institutions and practices had turned Japan into an industrial power at the center of a co-

lonial empire. Yet the archipelago remained a sentient landscape shaped by gods, ranging from imperial ancestors to one's own as well as to local tutelary deities. In this regard, the myths of state ideology, official national history, and anthropological research into the "racial" origins of the Japanese mutually confirmed each other.

But while Japan had become the only non-Western country recognized as an equal by the European and North American colonial empires at the end of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly isolated after World War I. In East Asia, the empire became the main competitor to the British, resulting in 1923 in the end of the Anglo-Japanese alliance agreed upon in 1902.

Anglo-Saxon countries banned immigration of Japanese with legislation based on racist arguments, while domestically, Japan suffered from Great Depression. In the countryside, villages depended on additional income derived from raising silkworms, the silk of which would be exported. Radical nationalism gained ground at this time, especially among young officers who had experienced poverty in the countryside and had been indoctrinated at preparatory schools and military academies. Conspiracies were formed to overthrow the government and usher in direct imperial rule by Emperor Hirohito (1901–1989). Significantly, the members of a clandestine group behind a failed coup in 1933 called themselves the *shinpeitai*, or "band of divine soldiers," explicitly using the term from the *Nihon Shoki* that also appears in Aizawa's *New Theses*. Attempted coups and the assassination of civilian politicians and industrialists failed to open the doors to utopia. Rather, the killing of a Chinese warlord in Manchuria and the subsequent invasion thereof led to the Japanese exit from the League of Nations, increased international isolation, and finally to full-blown war in China and Japan's entry into World War II. At the same time, the murder of politicians allowed militarists in the armed forces and the bureaucracy to take the helm and steer the country toward war with the willing support of the industrial conglomerates.

Against this backdrop, what political scientist Maruyama Masao has called ultranationalism and what Walter Skya referred to as Shinto fundamentalism not only took firm hold in Japanese society but was actively propagated by the state (Skya 2009: 354). As an official summary of the state ideology, the ministry of education published in 1937 a booklet titled *Kokutai no hongi* (国体の本義), translated after the war as the *Cardinal Principles of the National Entity* (Gauntlett and Hall 1949). One of its authors was the scholar Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 (1873–1958), a self-taught man who had ascended through the ranks of the education system to become the president of the Kogakkan University, an institute for the education of Shinto Priests, in 1940. Skya refers to a magazine essay published by

Yamada in 1943 as exemplary of the author's political ideas and of wartime ideology in general. Yamada understood the Japanese creation myth literally. Japan was the country of the gods because the Japanese emperors and the Japanese people had indeed descended from the gods, who had created the world. "Being a divine country," he wrote, "is not just a metaphor, or a figure of speech, but a fact and a reality in our country." On this fundamental belief, then, rested the conviction that Japan was destined to unite the "eight corners of the word," as a wartime slogan derived from the *Nihon Shoki* went, under benevolent imperial rule (Skya 2009: 301–10).

Under the benevolent emperor, the various ethnicities of the empire were hierarchally ordered, with the Yamato people, the true people of the country of the gods, on top and other ethnicities and minorities subject to different degrees of discrimination and exploitation. For them, only in death was equality and full acceptance into the sentient landscape of the gods achievable. From 1869 onward, fallen soldiers were enshrined in the newly founded Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo to be worshiped as tutelary deities of the nation and therefore to became part of its sentient landscape (Harootunian 1999: 145, 150–53).

Nihonjinron: The Sentient Landscape of the Gods as a Cultural Heritage

The policies of the American occupation of Japan after the empire's surrender in August 1945 were outlined in the *United States Initial Post-Surrender Policy* for Japan, issued on 6 September 1945 (State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee 1945). To democratize the country, the document made clear that religion was not to be used for nationalist and militarist purposes. Accordingly, the so-called *Shinto Directive*, issued by the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers in Japan on 15 December 1945, separated Shinto from the government, abolished institutions that had supported the imperial cult, and banned religious instruction in state schools. Private institutions remained free to teach, however, as long as their doctrines were not considered "militaristic or ultranationalistic." The *Kokutai no hongi* was officially outlawed as was "the doctrine that the islands of Japan are superior to other lands because of divine or special origin" (GHQ of the Allied Powers 1960). The American written constitution then enshrined a strict separation of state and religion in Article 20. While rewriting the constitution has been a declared goal of Japanese conservatives ever since, they so far have not been able to mobilize a large enough share of the electorate to amend it, proving popular support for the document.

Defeat in World War II and outlawing of the wartime ideology made a reconceptualization of Japanese national identity necessary. This led to the emergence of *nihonjinron*, a literary genre exploring the uniqueness of the Japanese, but now understood culturally rather than religiously or racially (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 204). Ironically, the war-time study of Japanese culture by Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* made available to the public in 1946, is widely understood today as having been the "urtext" of the nihonjinron literature (Lie 2001: 249).

Shinto is here understood as the authentic and original religion of Japan, an essential element of Japanese culture that distinguishes the country from other countries in Asia. This religious tradition links the nation or people of Japan through the mediation of the emperor to the state and its institutions. Nihonjinron does not consider the Japanese as superior per se, nor does the literature assume a really existing sentient landscape of the country of the gods. Rather, the practices and beliefs related to the shinkoku concept are thought to make Japan culturally unique. This is linked to the belief in an essential cultural homogeneity of the Japanese, which remains widespread. The exclusionary nature of this conception of the Japanese nation is evident from the results of the 2019 World Values Survey. Only 0.2 percent of Japanese participants answered that they would trust individuals of another nationality completely, and 29.1 percent did not want to have foreign workers as their neighbors (World Values Survey 2019: Q21, 63).

Present in the Sentient Landscape of the Gods, Yet Excluded from the National Community: Discrimination against Minorities Based on Shinkoku Thought

Every construction of a nation as culturally and ethnically homogenous rests on the identification of a boundary marking outsiders to the national community. As mentioned in the introduction, in post-World War II Japan there are four main groups of outsiders within the nation's borders: the Ainu, the Burakumin, the Ryūkyū Islanders, and immigrants from Okinawa or Korea as well as their descendants. (CERD 2018; Lie 2004: 3; Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 31–32). What these diverse groups have in common is that they were originally not considered to be people of the country of the gods and thus were not considered to belong in its sentient landscape. The nature and degree of their discrimination has changed, of course, from imperial Japan to the postwar period to the present. Their common exclusion from the national community was—and partly remains—spatially visible through their concentration in segregated neighborhoods

and their occupying the lowest tier in the urban labor market. It must be stressed, however, that much has been achieved in the last three decades to overcome these discriminations and their economic consequences for the minorities.

Burakumin 部落民, *the Outcast "Hamlet People"*

After the resignation over a fundraising scandal of Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō (b. 1937), who as mentioned above had made international headlines with his description of Japan as the "country of the gods," a leadership contest among high-ranking members of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan took shape. Chief Cabinet Secretary Nonaka Hiromu 野中廣務(1925–2018) was a top contender until, according to credible rumors, Minister of Economic and Fiscal Policy Asō Tarō 麻生太郎 (b. 1940) remarked, "We are not going to let someone from the *buraku* become the prime minister of Japan, are we?" It took no more than this reference to Nonaka's membership in the minority group of the Burakumin to reduce his chances of being elected enough for him to drop out (Yamaguchi 2009).

The Burakumin, or "hamlet people," are a disadvantaged minority of about 1.2 million people living in approximately 4,600 communities or *buraku* 部落 (hamlets) throughout Japan. This group arose in imperial Japan through the merging of former members of outcast groups in the feudal order with a newly emerging lumpenproletariat, and through the appearance of segregated settlements for them. The former outcasts were a heterogenous group, but they shared two characteristics. First, they engaged in nonagricultural work. Second, the nature of their occupations made them impure or defiled based on pre-Buddhist as well as Buddhist ideas, as they were engaged with the killing and disposal of animals and humans. The words used to name the two best known groups, commonly referred to when discussing the Burakumin, make this clear. These are *eta* 穢多 (abundant filth/pollution) and *hinin* 非人 (nonhumans). Members of these groups were, for example, leatherworkers, butchers, or executioners (Kobayakawa 2021: 112–14; Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 34–43). But Eiko Ikegami has also related the emergence of the outcast groups to the rise of the samurai to power. Previously, the court nobility had considered the warriors to be similar to these outcast groups due to their violent occupation and hunting culture. The rise of the former to the apex of power necessitated a more rigid segregation of the latter (Bialock 2007: 54; Ikegami 1995: 57 – 60, 113 – 116). Their segregation become most rigid in the Tokugawa period, when social mobility in general was considered a danger to the feudal order.

Their existence in Japan was a conceptual problem for Japanese scholars in the Tokugawa period, who were convinced of a pure Japanese identity

linked to their divine homeland. They therefore came to the conclusion that the Burakumin were not just "lowly people" but not even people of the country of the gods. They were from a "different stock," possibly descending from the "barbarous" Ezo (Ooms 1996: 300–5). This discursive exclusion from the sentient landscape of Japan was made visible in the practice of omitting their villages in maps and leaving out the sections of a road passing through their settlements when calculating the distance between places (Ooms 1996: 287).

Following the Meiji Restoration and the introduction of a new system of family registration, the feudal status system was abolished in 1871. Outcast groups became commoners but were administratively kept separate as "new commoners" (*shin heimin*). This and their living in separate settlements opened a door for continued discrimination that lasted throughout the postwar period. As the Burakumin lost their monopolies on their traditional occupations, most of them remained impoverished (Kobayakawa 2021: 113–14). Embracing scientific racism, Japanese anthropologists also translated *kokugaku* beliefs about the origins of the former outcasts into the new era by advancing that they were "racially" different from—and morally inferior to—the Yamato people (Taïeb 2019).

In 1922 the Levelers Association of Japan (*Suiheisha* 水平社) was founded as a self-emancipatory movement to fight discrimination against the Burakumin. It remained unsuccessful until its dissolution during World War II. After the war, the "new commoner" designation was dropped for Burakumin, but their discrimination based on family records and neighborhoods continued. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, however, the Buraku Liberation League (*Buraku Kaihō Dōme*i 部落解放同盟), with the support of left-wing parties, was able to pressure the government to decide more comprehensive measures. Fearing a radicalization, the government enacted the Special Measures Law for Assimilation Projects in 1969 (Law No. 60 of 10 July 1969). It provided the legal basis for large-scale investments into buraku districts to lift standards of living and increase educational achievements, thereby assimilating them into mainstream society. In the same year, family registration records were made inaccessible to outsiders, making the background checks allowing for discrimination illegal (Neary 2003: 270–71; Hah and Lapp 1978: 494–99). The Assimilation Projects were discontinued in 2002 after USD 136 billion had been spent and economic and educational gaps significantly narrowed. Yet Burakumin still show lower educational achievements and economic disadvantages in the present (Tsumaki 2012; Uchida 2008; Alabaster 2009; Lie 2001: 85–89).

Additionally, the twenty-first century saw the rise of hate speech, especially online, targeting Burakumin as well as other communities. Recorded

instances of such dehumanizing hate speech have explicitly used the term *eta* and referenced the animals commonly considered dirty, showing a continuity with the prejudices of the feudal past (Yamamoto 2021: 107–9). In 2016 the government acknowledged this ongoing discrimination and discursive exclusion by enacting the Law on the Promotion of the Elimination of Discrimination against Buraku (Law No. 199 of 16 December 2016). A recent survey by the Ministry of Justice shows that while discrimination and hate speech are still not uncommon, identifiable perpetrators are now nearly exclusively over fifty years of age (Hōmushō jinken yōgo-kyoku 2020: 9, 10–11, 13, 14, 16, 19, 21).

Japan's Indigenous People, the Ainu

On 13 January 2020, Deputy Prime Minister of Japan and Minister of Finance Asō Tarō remarked in Fukuoka that there was no other country which, over a two-thousand-year history, had had only one ethnicity and one dynasty. Japan was therefore a splendid country (Kakihana and Tōyama 2020; Kakihana 2020). Commentators were quick to point out that this statement contradicted the official policy of his own government. Only in April 2019, it had enacted the Law on the Implementation of the Policies to Realize a Society Where the Pride of Ainu People are Respected (Law No. 16 of 19 April 2019), which for the first time recognized the approximately two hundred thousand Ainu, mainly living on the northern island of Hokkaidō, as an Indigenous people with their own distinct culture (Tsutsui 2017: 1061).

In premodern Japan, the Ainu were referred to as Emishi or Ezo and Hokkaidō as the land of the Ezo *(Ezo-chi* 蝦夷地*).* The Ainu were thus linked to the "barbarians" in eastern or northern Japan mentioned in the historical chronicles, whose lands were conquered by the imperial court. With shinkoku in the medieval period not being a clearly bounded geobody but the realm of the emperor, the expansion of the country of the gods was only possible through conquest and the subsequent exclusion of these people and the simultaneous integration of the tutelary deities into the sentient landscape of the realm. This point was made implicitly in Aizawa's *New Theses* (Wakabayashi 1999: 173–74). Until the early seventeenth century, still little was known about the geography of Hokkaidō and a connection to the Eurasian continent was considered possible (Walker 2001: 31–33). Here, it is noteworthy that in the medieval period the use of the term Ezo overlapped with a word used for a type of outcast group. Cultural practices provided the linkage as the Ezo were known first of all as hunters (Bialock 2007: 53). Some scholars imagined an Ezo genealogy for the Burakumin as mentioned above (Ooms 1996: 305).

In the Tokugawa period, the feudal lords of Matsumae residing in Southern Hokkaidō were given a trading monopoly used to economically exploit the Ainu. This necessitated making it possible to differentiate between Japanese and these "barbarians." The Ainu were therefore explicitly banned from adopting Japanese customs such as speaking Japanese or dressing like Japanese. This policy was reversed in the early nineteenth century, when Russian ships began exploring Hokkaidō. This assimilation policy failed, however, due to a lack of funds (Howell 2004: 327, 330).

In 1869, the year after the Meiji Restoration, *Ezo-chi* was annexed as Hokkaidō. The island was to be actively developed through the Hokkaidō Development Commission, a government agency, to prevent a Russian intrusion on Japan's northern frontier. The new territory was merged ritually into the sentient landscape of imperial Japan through the construction of new shrines, including ones for pioneers, who became tutelary deities for the region (Hardacre 2017: 392–95). In 1899, the Imperial Diet in Tokyo enacted the Former Natives Protection Act, which provided the Ainu with Japanese citizenship and aimed to assimilate the Ainu to majority Japanese culture, turning them into farmers. They were, however, not considered to be members of the Yamato people but of their own inferior "race." As land was handed out to immigrants from the other islands, and Hokkaidō's natural resources were exploited by companies from these islands, the Ainu became impoverished and were reduced legally to being wards of the state (Siddle 2005: 70–75).

Only after World War II, in 1946, was the Hokkaidō Ainu Association, a mutual assistance group, founded by members of the Indigenous minority. Significantly, in 1961, the group dropped their people's name due to its derogatory associations in Japanese society (Tsutsui 2017: 1060–61). In postwar Japan, the Ainu found themselves in a paradoxical situation. They were at the same time discriminated against for having no (or only part) Japanese "blood," and they were officially considered nonexistent as the Japanese nation was said to be ethnically homogenous after the loss of the colonial empire (Siddle 2005: 156–57). A sense of Indigenous pride emerged only in the 1970s following collaborations with Indigenous people in other parts of the world leading to a campaign against the negative portrayal of Ainu in official textbooks and for a new Ainu law (Tsutsui 2017: 1063–67). In 1997, the government responded with the Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture and Dissemination and Enlightenment of Knowledge about Ainu Tradition (Law No. 52 of 14 May 1997), which nevertheless failed to recognize the Ainu as an Indigenous people. Following the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 and questions regarding the status of the Ainu in Japan's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council the follow-

ing year, pressure was finally successful. In June 2008, the Japanese Diet recognized the Ainu as an Indigenous people of Japan, leading to the law of 2019 referred to above (Tsutsui 2017: 1068–69; Lewallen 2016: 27).

The Ainu's embrace of an identity distinct from mainstream Japanese society and its recognition by the Japanese state is mirrored in the closing of the economic gap between the two demographics, which nonetheless remains significant. While at the turn of the millennium Ainu in Hokkaidō were twice as likely to receive social welfare, in 2017 this was down to a mere 10 percent difference. During the same time period, the percentage of Ainu entering senior high school approximately doubled from 16.1 percent to 33.3 percent. This remains, however, significantly lower than the average percentage for their communities which is 45.8 percent (Hokkaidō Kankyō Seikatsubu 2017: 5, 7).

From Foreigners to True Japanese: The Ryūkyū Islanders

The Ryūkyū Islands are an island chain stretching roughly from the south of Kyūshū to the north of Taiwan. Okinawa is the largest of these islands. In the early fifteenth century, the islands were united as the Ryūkyū Kingdom, a tributary to Ming China. In 1609, Okinawa was invaded by the feudal domain of Satsuma in Southern Kyūshū, who forced its king to be a vasal to both the lord of Satsuma and the shogun in Edo. Throughout the Tokugawa period, the Ryūkyū Islands continued to be regarded as a foreign country and therefore not as a part of Japan conceived of as the country of the gods (Toby 1984: 45–52).

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the future status of the islands within the Japanese Empire was unsettled, with leading members of the political oligarchy considering their inhabitants to be not Japanese. Due to the island chain's strategic location, however, a policy of political integration was adopted. And so, political leaders, anthropologists, and historians alike discovered the Ryūkyū Islanders to be "racially" Japanese (Oguma 2014: 19–35). Nevertheless, the people of the islands were not considered to be equals of the inhabitants of Japan's main islands after the integration of the kingdom as a prefecture in 1879. They were considered backward relative to the Japanese of the main islands, and an assimilation policy was enforced that was aimed at eradicating the island's distinct culture. Due to this backwardness, conscription was introduced only in 1898 and the limited suffrage was extended to the prefecture of Okinawa only in 1912. A colonial plantation economy was introduced that extracted wealth from the Ryūkyū Islands, while those migrating to the main islands, to Japanese colonies, or even to foreign lands suffered from discrimination (Matsuda 2018: 32–39; Oguma 2014: 47, 58; Lie 2004: 98–99).

This marginalized position of the islands and of their population was made most evident in the closing days of World War II, when the military chose Okinawa as the main battle site to resist the American advance. The 150,000 civilians who were killed in the fighting, committed suicide, or were massacred by both militaries amounted to a third of Okinawa's population. The islands were sacrificed once again in 1947, when Emperor Hirohito, for the sake of peace in the Far East, advised the US government to continue its occupation after the return of sovereignty to Japan in 1952. The Ryūkyū Islands would remain a quasi colony of the United States until 1972. During this period, most US military bases were shifted from the Japanese main islands to Okinawa, where they remain today (Oguma 2014: 137, 157, 313).

At the same time, Ryūkyū Islanders continued to be considered ethnically Japanese. The two hundred thousand who had settled on the main islands where thus legally treated just as other Japanese citizens, who nonetheless pejoratively considered them to be "third country people" (Oguma 2014: 171, 178; Kalicki, Murakami, and Fraser 2013: 217, 222–23).

While at present the vast majority of the islands' people are in favor of at least a drastic reduction of the American presence, the future of the military bases in the prefecture is determined by the national government in Tokyo (Kōno 2017: 20). It is therefore not surprising that there is an active protest movement against the bases, against violent crimes committed by soldiers against women, and against the risks that accidents of military airplanes pose, a burden on the community that has been recognized by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD 2018). Ironically, members of the far right have come to consider such activities, which essentially aim to achieve a return of the islands to complete Japanese sovereignty, as "anti-Japanese" (Ealey and Norimatsu 2018). This is an interpretation that arguably once again points to Ryūkyū Islanders not being fully considered part of the Japanese people.

Today, the prefecture of Okinawa remains one of the least developed prefectures in Japan, with the second-highest unemployment rate and the lowest gross prefectural product per capita (Sōmushō Tōkeikyoku 2021; Keizai Shakai Sōgō Kenkyūjo 2017).

Conclusion

The sentient landscapes of Indigenous communities are usually considered to be distinct from the ethnoscapes of modern nation-states. Most importantly, sacred national homelands are mostly not imagined to be sen-

tient. But both sentient Indigenous landscapes and modern nation-state ethnoscapes have in common that they shape the collective identities of communities—Indigenous ones in the former, national in the latter case— and that these collective identities are dependent on these lands for their reproduction. This chapter has argued that Japan may offer a unique vantage point to interrogate the supposed conceptual differences between Indigenous sentient landscapes and modern national ethnoscapes, as well as their necessary exclusionary nature that both share.

At least since the early eighth century, Japan has been referred to as *shinkoku*, "the country of the gods." This was not simply because Japan was created by the Japanese gods but because the gods and their descendants and especially the imperial house have shaped the history of the archipelago and remain present in the myriad shrines throughout the country. This idea of the country of the gods was always a political one. It was first employed to carve out a distinct identity for a court that only recently had created a kingdom in central Japan and appears to have had territorial ambitions on the continent, while establishing the legitimacy of the dynasty. The eastward and northward expansion increased the size of the country of the gods but only by excluding—through the conquest of their lands—the *Ezo*, and by pacifying and including tutelary deities into the sentient landscape.

These people were later interpreted as having been the ancestors of the Ainu, the Indigenous people of Hokkaidō, and they were speculated to have been the forefathers of the outcast Burakumin. When Hokkaidō was incorporated into the newly founded Japanese nation-state and empire in the late nineteenth century, the Ainu were integrated as a separate and less developed race and their land was annexed into the sentient country of the gods through the building of new shrines. In the postwar period the Ainu found themselves at once excluded through discriminatory practices in labor and marriage markets as well as officially cast out from the ethnoscape through an official discourse that denied their very existence. Only in 2019 did the Japanese state officially recognize them as an Indigenous people within its boundaries.

The Burakumin mostly likely emerged as a group in modern Japan. But they inherited and became defined through the prejudices against occupational groups that were considered impure in medieval Japan at a time when shinkoku implied Japanese inferiority vis-à-vis the continent. Their existence in the country of the gods became problematic once shinkoku was interpreted as signifying a superior status. Interestingly, even before the introduction of scientific racism from Europe, Japanese scholars hypothesized that the Burakumin must have come from somewhere else,

that they were of a different "stock," to explain their existence in the sentient landscape of the Japanese islands. These prejudices lasted long into the postwar period, as is evident from the issuance of a law in 2016 to combat hate speech and discrimination against this minority.

The outsider status of Ryūkyū Islanders is more straightforward. The Ryūkyū Islands had not been considered part of the country of the gods in premodern times. For the Japanese of the main islands, they would remain foreigners. Suffrage was granted to the islanders only in 1912. After World War II, Ryūkyū Islanders residing on the Japanese main islands were not deprived of their rights. But the Ryūkyū Islands as a whole were sacrificed, first to achieve Japanese sovereignty after the US occupation and then to have US troops largely redeployed from the land of the gods to military bases in places like Okinawa, where they remain today.

The society of imperial Japan was recognized as a multiethnic one, in which various people could live together harmoniously in a hierarchical order—with the Yamato people of the Japanese main islands at the top—under the benevolent rule of the emperor. There were of course important differences in how these groups were integrated into the unequal social structure. Yet there was also the commonality that there was only one way for Burakumin, Ainu, Ryūkyū Islanders, and Korean or Taiwanese colonial subjects to be recognized as true equals to their Yamato peers, and thus to be fully integrated into the sentient landscape of the gods. This path was dying as soldiers for the emperor and becoming enshrined in Yasukuni Shrine as deities protecting the sentient landscape by becoming part of it. In an eerie echo of the days of World War II, present-day right-wing commentators imply that for the people of the prefecture of Okinawa to be recognized as true Japanese, they cannot argue for a reduction or dissolution of the American military bases.

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