

Shinto and the Sacred: An Analysis of Its God-images through the Holotropic Paradigm, Jungian Archetypes, and the *Imago Dei* of Contemporary Psychotherapy

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Shinto has stood at the heart of Japanese spiritual worship for two millennia, and in modern times has demonstrated a number of intriguing correlations to various Western disciplines, including the holotropic paradigm and Jungian theory and psychotherapeutic practice. This comparative study analyzes their respective cosmologies, insights, and often striking similarities, especially in relation to Shinto's God-images and their association to certain key precepts of depth psychology and the deeper spiritual implications of quantum physics.

Keywords: *musubi, kami, Great Nature, God-images, quantum physics, implicate/explicate orders, archetypes, active imagination, psychotherapy*

The ancient religion of Shinto has been traced back to Japan's Yayoi period (300 BCE to 300 CE), and for some 2000 years has retained a prominent and widespread influence on the social customs, belief systems, and ritual practices of this dynamic East Asian culture (Hardacre, 2017). In modern times, a number of compelling associations have arisen between this religious discipline and other prominent areas of inquiry such as quantum physics and depth psychology, and an exploration of certain overlapping characteristics reveals an array of intriguing correlations that hold the potential to expand humanity's understanding of its deep-seated interconnection with nature and the cosmos. Within this framework, this study examines the often striking similarities that exist between the fundamental principles of Shinto, the holotropic paradigm, and Jungian archetypal images and processes, and applies these findings within the context of the *Imago Dei*—the God-image—in contemporary Western psychotherapy.

Shinto: An Overview

Native to Japan while incorporating aspects of Chinese thought (especially Taoism and Confucianism) that has influenced its worldview and religious practices, Shinto contains animistic and polytheistic elements that demonstrate a deeply engrained reverence for nature and an abiding belief in the interrelationship of all things (Hardacre, 2017). Its indigenous mythological tradition can be traced to two 8th century CE sources, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, which associate the discipline's origins with the sun goddess *Amaterasu*, who gave birth to *the land of the rising sun*. Shinto represents the nation's most populous spiritual tradition, one that exists harmoniously alongside Buddhism, with which it shares many overlapping characteristics. The worldview expressed in Shinto serves to create a framework through which its adherents sustain social cohesiveness and experience spiritual meaning and interconnectedness in their lives, which in turn has a direct correlation to their understanding of manifest existence in both human and non-human terms.

This cosmology emphasizes the intimate interrelationship between humanity, nature, and the universe, all of which are linked in their most essential form to the notions of *musubi* and *kami* (Boyd and Williams, 2005; Yamamoto, 1999). The first term represents the timeless, all-encompassing, life-giving force that permeates and binds together all of existence, and the latter term exemplifies sanctified entities and singular forms—both animate and inanimate—through which this generative power is expressed and made accessible to human perception. This occurs through a profound experiential merging with one of the innumerable manifestations that exist in the infinite spiraling ocean of creative forces on earth and throughout the cosmos, which is referred to as *Great Nature* (Daishizen). According to the Shinto High Priest Yukitaka Yamamoto (Yamamoto Guji), in “this vast cosmic setting in which we are born . . . we are part

of the restless movement of Great Nature itself” (quoted in Boyd and Williams, 2005, p. 44).

This perspective emphasizes humanity’s embedded presence in the utterly vast and mysterious processes of musubi, and it is through merging with one of its many exalted forms and entities, or kami, that arise in the continuous and creative unfolding of Great Nature that one experiences a profound sense of the sacred both inwardly and in the world at large.

This uniting of kami with the human spirit is known as *shingin-goitsu*, and may manifest in earthly and ethereal forms of pronounced potency and power, which include mountains, rivers, trees, and stones; ancestors or human beings of exceptional spiritual character; and supernatural entities and other sentient phenomena who coexist on the earthly plane or derive from other dimensions (Boyd and Williams, 2005). Merging with kami often involves what can be described as a mystical *I-Thou* communion, a kind of thoroughly coupled interconnectedness in which the usual divisions of self and other fall away to reveal a greatly heightened sense of union with the sacred essence of musubi. Within this context, Shinto emphasizes consecrated immanence and a perpetual, ongoing process of creation on earth over notions of transcendence and speculative origination. Realization of musubi through the monumental forces of kami thus occurs in the here and now and in this earthly dimension, although concurrently it may involve greatly expanded levels of awareness that include encounters with ancestors or otherworldly entities. One is thus brought into direct contact with profoundly meaningful aspects of existence, which in turn serve to activate deep awakenings and exalted psycho-spiritual processes through which humanity and the world evolve.

Fundamental to the process of realization and communion with musubi are the principles of purity and pollution, which can be enunciated through the symbolism of dust on a mirror (Boyd and Williams, 2005). Dust, as pollution (e.g., mental afflictions), obscures the clarity of

the mirror's unobstructed reflection (i.e., purity of heart and mind), thus inhibiting contact with the manifest forces of musubi found in Great Nature. Purity in this context is directly linked to the ability to transcend one's usual sense of inhabiting a distinct and separate identity, which is so often accompanied by the mental impurities of self-centeredness, anger, jealousy, and other psychological contaminations. According to Yamamoto Guji, "purification . . . means becoming nothing. . . . This nothingness will create something out of nothing, and new spiritual energy, or *ki*, will emerge" (quoted in Boyd and Williams, 2005, p. 46). Ritual cleansing, both literal and symbolic, plays a central role in this process, and includes practices and rites performed by priests at Shinto shrines that are designed to induce clarity of mind and an attitude of genuine humility, awe, and reverence for Great Nature. These principles are perhaps most readily symbolized by the traditional red *torii* gates that are placed at the entrance (and within) Shinto shrines as demarcations of sanctified space—as thresholds, or passage ways, to the sacred. The intricate ceremonies and events that occur within these confines often focus on more practical concerns (e.g., a successful harvest, harmonious social relations, and coming-of-age celebrations), but there also exist many esoteric practices that reveal the pronounced spiritual aspects of Shinto. Although an in-depth explication of the various activities and axioms pertaining to shrine worship is beyond the scope of this study, the following overview provides a sense of the essential focus and effects of such rituals:

Shinto priests seek to create an occasion for liminal experience for all participants attending the ritual. This is accomplished in part by means of aesthetically refined, dramatic performance, creating moments when the usual conventions, demands, and distinctions of daily life recede into the background and there arises a sense of interconnectedness with the world around us. These moments are ritually symbolized at the conclusion of a full service when all participants drink consecrated sake. (Boyd and Williams, 2005, p. 47)

The experiential aspects, precepts, and ritual practices cumulatively described above outline the arcane orientations of Shinto, which emphasize a hallowed and harmonious interrelationship with the natural world, society, the cosmos, and all of the various manifestations of Great Nature (Boyd and Williams, 2005). This sense of abiding interconnectedness, whether experienced in solitude in the presence of a great mountain or collectively through the rites performed in sanctified rituals, represents the very essence of Shinto. Through this worldview one's identity is greatly expanded beyond the egocentric and often destructive mindsets and activities (i.e., pollution) that can arise from a distinctly separate sense of self to include—in its most imposing forms—sacred communion with one's fellow human beings, the planet, and the array of powerful spiritual forces that arise from the vast and mysterious immensity of musubi. Purity of mind and action leads to such awakenings, which in turn result in great benefit to the human domain and the natural world. And in reflecting upon this principle of living in harmony with nature, Yamamoto Guji stated succinctly that “co-existence and co-prosperity, this is *kannagara* – the way of the *kami* . . . as perceived by the Japanese spirit” (1999, p. 124).

Shinto and Its Correlations to the Holotropic Paradigm

Since the last century, with the revolutionary discoveries that have accompanied the development of quantum physics, an emerging set of theoretical propositions has arisen in the form of the holographic paradigm, which has found correlations to a number of diverse esoteric disciplines. These areas of focus include remarkable psycho-spiritual experiences such as states of timeless, nondual unity (often pertaining to a setting in nature or a particular natural form); contact with divine entities, both seen and unseen, of supreme power and insight; greatly expanded psychic powers such as extra-sensory perception (ESP); out-of-body episodes involving meetings with deceased relatives and friends; and an array of other utterly mysterious

paranormal phenomena. (Talbot, 1991). And when the findings and theoretical tenets of the holotropic paradigm are applied to the principles of Japanese Shinto, one finds a number of intriguing correlations that help to elucidate and deepen one's understanding of the precepts of this ancient tradition and its interrelationship with the sacred in myriad forms.

A Summary of the Holographic Paradigm

This theoretical model is most notably associated with the eminent physicist David Bohm of the University of London and Karl Pribram, a prominent neurophysiologist and researcher at Stanford University (Talbot, 1991). Their findings are highly suggestive of the hypothesis that the universe exists in the form of a giant hologram with which the human brain reflexively interacts, thus creating the objects and impressions that one encounters in earthly existence. Holographic phenomena arise and are perceived in the form of three-dimensional images, and their association to the processes of the human brain thus reveal physical matter as essentially a kind of 3D projection of *information*, or energy frequencies, that merge with and are translated as solid “reality” by the mind, which itself exists as “a hologram enfolded in a holographic universe” (Talbot, 1991, p. 54). In addition, the discoveries unearthed and disclosed by Bohm, Pribram, and others postulate the staggering proposition that “our world and everything in it—from snowflakes to . . . spinning electrons—are also only ghostly images, projections from a level of reality so beyond our own it is literally beyond both space and time” (p. 1). Within this revolutionary framework, the new paradigm writer Marilyn Ferguson stated:

Our brains mathematically construct 'concrete' reality by interpreting frequencies from another dimension, a realm of meaningful, patterned primary reality that transcends time and space. The brain is a hologram, interpreting a holographic universe with multiple plains of existence and a multitude of patterns with mystical and quantum perceptions that appear different but are interconnected and interpenetrated. (quoted in Roop, 2013, p. 52)

An effective metaphor that helps to further elucidate this beguiling process involves the premise that “the observer is the observed. The observer is also the measuring device, the experimental results, the laboratory, and the breeze that blows outside the laboratory” (Talbot, 1991, p. 50). Within this context, consciousness and physical matter—including both animate and inanimate objects—are conceived as consisting of the same elemental qualities and origin, and in unison these seemingly separate constituents represent an undivided, inseparably interwoven pattern of dynamic energy. Accordingly, all phenomena are integrated aspects within this universal pattern, and in turn “just as every portion of a hologram contains the image of the whole, every portion of the universe enfolds the whole” (p. 50).

In 1980 Bohm’s *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* was published and has since become a classic text in the field of quantum physics. In this much lauded work, he associates the primordial reality mentioned above with what he termed the *implicate order*—i.e., enfolded reality, which conceptually finds direct correlations to Shinto’s musubi. Concrete or material reality is represented by the term *explicate order* (i.e., unfolded reality), and includes the innumerable objects and beings in manifest existence that can be broadly associated with Shinto’s notion of Great Nature, although in ordinary waking consciousness such manifestations are perceived as being distinctly separate rather than aspects of a unified whole. This psychic fragmentation, according to Bohm, represents the very foundation of the modern world view and underscores a critical misreading of nearly every facet of the modern mindset including the very structure of language itself (with its separation of subject and action, doer and deed). In response to this predicament, he called for new forms of communication and new ways of perceiving and processing the world that transcend the divisions that arise through purely rational, dualistic conception. In association with the far-reaching dilemmas created by this mind-matter dualism,

for example, he strongly emphasized a “world view in which the universe is regarded as a continuous field” (p. xv), and stressed the importance of fostering a contemporary cosmology and ontological framework that exists in concert with the profoundly expanded notions of the unified reality revealed in the holotropic paradigm. Bohm passionately asserted that mind and matter are constituents of the same all-encompassing source—the implicate order—with matter being an expression of a denser form of energy frequency and information, or *mind*. And in a manner paralleling the Shinto notion of musubi, he stressed that matter (both animate and inanimate) and consciousness alike arise from this common universal ground and represent energy patterns that exist in inseparable union. Further, in a framework that finds direct correlations to the movement of Great Nature in Shinto, Bohm described this unified, ever-present, creative unfolding as the *holomovement*. This designation pertains to all earthly manifestations and to the universe at large, and as such “everything is to be explained in terms of forms derived from this holomovement” (p. 226).

The Intersection of Spirituality and Physics

Bohm was seeking a means through which to firmly set his findings in a more coherent and understandable framework, and this search took him beyond purely scientific theory and into serious considerations of the nature of human psychology and spirituality (Bohm & Krishnamurti, 1985/2014). This process ultimately led to a series of recorded conversations with the Indian mystic and philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose teachings were conceived by Bohm as presenting psychological parallels to his quantum hypotheses in a variety of crucial contexts. One especially pertinent parallel relating to the ontological notion of a unified totality was Krishnamurti’s (1969) insistence that “the observer is the observed” (p. 97), which

exemplifies his assertion that any form of human experience or perception that induces division or fragmentation between self and other represents a fundamental misunderstanding of reality.

Bohm, Krishnamurti, and the Ending of Time

The dialogues between these two men—one being an eminent scientist and the other a renowned spiritual teacher—were eventually published in the book *The Ending of Time* (1985/2014), which examines and clarifies the underlying similarities found in their respective viewpoints and stresses, among other things, the crucial importance of a timeless awareness beyond thought that is directly linked to the unified totality in question. The book contains a number of engaging exchanges in which a range of questions are explored in relation to humanity's mental frameworks and spiritual development, and the relationship between thought, the psychological experience of time, and the identification of oneself as a separate entity. Bohm, the scientist, and Krishnamurti, the mystic, each speak of a vast energy that permeates all of existence (with its correlation to Shinto's notion of musubi), an immense universal energy that emerges only when the mind is empty and utterly silent. Ordinary waking consciousness, however, operates through thought in a manner that induces division and the distinction of self and other. In order to transcend such divisions, Krishnamurti passionately stressed the importance of “the absolute cleansing of the mind from the accumulation of time” (p. 37) and emphasized that this process represents “the ending of the 'me' as time. . . . In the ending of it, there is that sense of nothingness . . . and nothingness is this whole universe” (p. 42–43). This perspective, with its emphasis on purity of mind and the dissolution of the separate self as imperative to awakening to this deeper ground of being, is directly aligned with the earlier quote by Yamamoto Guji in which he states that “purification . . . means becoming nothing. . . . This

nothingness will create something out of nothing, and new spiritual energy, or *ki*, will emerge” (quoted in Boyd & Williams, 2005, p. 46).

Shinto’s God-images through the Lens of Jungian Archetypes

Jung’s (1963) seminal articulation of archetypal forms and processes became a central feature of his theoretical cannon and psychotherapeutic practices. As a young child and throughout his long life he felt a special affinity with nature, and as in the Shinto tradition, experienced an enduring sense of the sacred in its various earthly manifestations:

Trees in particular were mysterious and seemed to me direct embodiments of the incomprehensible meaning of life . . . but . . . the infinity of the cosmos, the chaos of meaning and meaninglessness, of personal purpose and mechanical law, were wrapped in stone. This contained and at the same time *was* the bottomless mystery of being, the embodiment of spirit. What I dimly felt to be my kinship with stone was the divine nature in both, in the dead and the living matter. (pp. 67-68)

In nature’s various forms he also identified religious and cultural representations in which certain aspects have held universal symbolic meaning throughout human history, and such examples include the world mountain, the tree of life, and the sacred stone (Jung, 1964). These natural forms exist alongside a vast array of other symbolic forms that include the great goddess, the wise old man, the divine child, various animal deities, ethereal and celestial forces, and other primordial symbols and figures. Jung referred to such highly potent representations as *archetypes*, and described these phenomena as follows:

The archetype is a tendency to form such representations as a motif— representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern . . . but the motif itself remains the same. . . . These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world—even where transmission by direct descent or ‘cross fertilization’ through migration must be ruled out. (p. 58)

Jung’s development of the theory of archetypes was part of a broader process of intensive research into the religious and mythological foundations of numerous cultures

and historical periods, and much of the material he explored was also encountered in his own psychic life and in the dreams and fantasies of his patients (Jung, 1963). This process led to the publication of his groundbreaking work *Symbols of Transformation* in 1912, which postulates that such mythic forms reveal the presence of a universal religious instinct in humankind.

Jung (1964) placed great emphasis on sustaining a numinous link with the natural world in a manner that reveals parallels with the Shinto faith, including the conception of nature—in both its animate and inanimate forms—as possessing spiritual agency. In addition, his explorations into medieval European alchemy resulted in his alignment with the principle of *unus mundus* (Latin for “one unitary world”), which, like the Shinto concept of musubi, stresses the innate interconnection of all things and processes. He also asserted that much of modern humanity’s deeply felt sense of alienation stems from its separation from the natural world in both its spiritual and symbolic aspects:

As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional ‘unconscious identity’ with natural phenomena. . . . No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of a man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no cave the home of a great demon. . . . His contact with nature is gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied. (p. 95)

The loss of this sacred connection to nature stands in stark contrast to the experience of the numinous that occurs through such archetypes as the world mountain, which is most prominently represented as a manifestation of kami in Japanese culture and Shinto cosmology through the iconic Mt. Fuji. Such mythic engagement between humanity and the natural world stands at the threshold of the merging of inner and outer dimensions, as the exterior form (the physical mountain) serves to activate the interior archetype (the word mountain), creating a penetrating sense of the underlying interconnectedness and sanctity of what is ultimately understood as a unified totality.

Jung's (1963) engagement with such autonomous wisdom figures as Philemon represents another intriguing correlation to the Shinto notion of kami. This entity first appeared to Jung in a dream and "appeared above a great ocean as a wise old man with the horns of a bull and the colors of the kingfisher. He carried a collection of four keys, with one being held as though he were preparing to open a lock" (pp. 182-183). Philemon served in the capacity of a spirit guide of superior insight and became Jung's most revered inner companion and a vehicle through which he experienced a great expansion of consciousness and the merging of experiential realms, a phenomenon that is also a central tenet in the Shinto faith.

Jungian Psychotherapy and the *Imago-dei* of Western Culture

The latter part of Jung's long and very productive life was dedicated to an in-depth investigation of medieval European alchemy, and he ultimately concluded that the esoteric aspects of this discipline were "ceaselessly engaged in preserving a bridge to nature, i.e., the unconscious psyche." (1944/1968, p. 34). This was due in his estimation to the emphasis that traditional Christian orthodoxy places on the rational, masculine orientation of the historical figure of Christ at the expense of the divine feminine. The Church's insistence on unquestioned faith on this exterior figure thus became the God-image, or *imago-dei*, of the West's most prominent and influential religion, and served to strongly emphasize exterior faith over the direct inner realization of one's divine nature. Jung outlined this crucial predicament as follows:

The demand made by the *imitatio Christi*—that we should follow the ideal and seek to become like it—ought logically to have the result of developing and exalting the inner man. In actual fact, the ideal has been turned by superficial and formalistically minded believers into an external object of worship, and it is precisely this veneration for the object that prevents it from reaching down into the depths of the psyche and giving the latter a wholeness in keeping with the ideal. Accordingly the divine mediator stands outside as an image, while man remains fragmentary and untouched in the deepest part of him. (p. 7)

This transcendent, patriarchal God-image also resulted in an emphasize on spirit-matter dualism, which in the Western mindset has had the effect of "largely severing from nature any immanent divinity" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 165). This displacement of the sacred from the natural world (and by extension the human body) thus assigns spirit to a purely mental sphere and has directly contributed to the sense of spiritual dislocation on the earthly plane, and this in turn can be understood as one of the primary reasons for the sense of alienation in contemporary Western culture. Further, the overt emphasis on the exterior, historical figure of Christ largely severs any link to the direct experience of a deeply sanctified unitary state of timelessness—or *primordial time*—which inextricably lies at the heart of the esoteric principles of both the holotropic paradigm and Shinto.

In an effort to redress the effects of this psychic and spiritual dissociation, Jung (1963) developed a number of creative psychotherapeutic methods and techniques, which include various forms of art and archetypal therapy, which include the processes of *active imagination* and *amplification*. Such practices are directly linked to his concept of the *transcendent function*, which represents the interplay and merging of ego-consciousness with the unconscious through archetypal processes and results in the experience of psychic wholeness. This alchemical healing process represents "a movement out of the suspension between opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation . . . a quality of conjoined opposites" (Jung, 1960, p. 90).

The following dream (one of my own) serves as a framework for this unifying effect:

I am standing in a room and am engaged in a conversation that reveals with great certainty that at a later date I will be involved in the dissemination of Jung's theories to a wider audience. This realization is accompanied by a strong sense of personal pride at the prospect of professional accomplishment and recognition in the outer world. Then I suddenly pass through a curtain and find myself on a football field preparing to kick a field goal that will signify my success in this endeavor, but when I kick the ball, it hits the goal post, and falls short. Then I wake up. (Davis, 2015, pp. 38-39)

Intrigued and baffled by the seemingly contradictory messages contained in this dream and convinced that it somehow held special significance, I chose to engage in the practice of active imagination. This imaginal exercise involves consciously reentering the dream state by means of focusing intently on the dream's most prominent image and then allowing an *inner drama* to unfold freely from the depths of the unconscious (Jung, 1960; Davis, 2019). The goal post was undeniably the most prominent and potent image, and thus I proceeded to close my eyes and engage this figure in a concentrated focus. Then, after waiting patiently with no inner movement or activity, I suddenly experienced the following:

In a short time I found myself again on the football field, this time playing quarterback. Each time I tried to pass the ball, I was quickly tackled. Finally, I decided to keep the ball and attempt to cross the goal line by my own volition, and was then able to maneuver my way through the defense, ultimately being brought down as I successfully crossed the goal line. As the football I was carrying touched the ground, it suddenly turned into an enlarged, glowing blue diamond, and this was accompanied by a wordless telepathic communication that can only be described as a sacred revelation, one that arose from a deeper part of myself that I rarely have direct access to, and yet somehow instinctively know to be my true self. And what this communication revealed to me was that the *goal* in life is not about achieving success or status in the outer world, but rather, the true meaning of this life is to reconnect, to return *home*, to the very source of one's being. (Davis, 2015, p. 39)

This remarkable encounter with the emergence of the blue diamond from my innermost depths brought forth the undeniable realization of what Jung termed "*the archetype of the God-image*" (1944/1968, p.11), and he stressed that this union of the psyche's two primary aspects (i.e., the ego and the Self) is central to the developmental process and to the broader experience of psychic wholeness. The above phenomenon also supports the notion of numinous universal archetypes, as the diamond has existed as a sacred symbol of indestructibility, purity, and spiritual radiance in numerous religious traditions throughout human history, including Shinto and the underlying emphasis in Japanese culture on unity, harmony and indomitable spirit.

Conclusion

The ancient discipline of Shinto, the holotropic paradigm, and Jungian depth psychology share a number of fascinating characteristics, with each positing the existence of a timeless and all-encompassing source that exists as a unified totality and the basis of all manifest existence. Arising from this ultimate principle on the earthly plane are figures, objects, and images that merge with human perception and reflect this primordial unity, and whether this force is revealed through the kami of the Shinto faith, in Jungian archetypes, or in the inseparable multitude of phenomena that emerge in the holotropic paradigm's explicate order, they stand together as enduring testaments to the consecrated nature of earthly existence and the interrelationship of all things.

The convergence of these disciplines in key aspects of their essential principles presents the modern world with a revolutionary and radically expanded conception of the nature and origin of earthly existence. This in turn holds the potential to transform and transcend the limitations of scientific materialism and to move toward a genuinely holistic understanding of all phenomena and of human life itself. In a time of ever-increasing degradation of the natural world and the accompanying and often dramatic divisions in the political, racial, and socio-economic spheres, the emergence of a new paradigm that stresses the unity and sacredness of all things is crucial for planetary survival and may ultimately usher in a much needed awakening to the profound spiritual potential of humanity.

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