

Jason Morgan

## The “Unity of Economic and Moral Practice”: Japanese Religious Sensibility and the Person-Centered Economic Tradition of Japan

In the wake of the so-called Enlightenment in Western Europe and, later, throughout much of North America and other European colonies, the concept of the economy and the study of economics was gradually divorced from religion.<sup>1</sup> Scottish economist and moral philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790), for example, spoke of the “invisible hand” as a way to explain the tendency of economic action to level out supply and demand and to allocate resources efficiently.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) understood the economy as a pitched battle between limited resources and increasing population, the inversion of the biblical injunction to go forth and multiply.<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Bentham’s (1748-1832) economic thought was marked by a Utilitarian approach blind to the hu-

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<sup>1</sup> On “the economy,” see Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993). My thanks to J. Mark Ramseyer for this suggestion.

<sup>2</sup> But see Jonathan Schlefer, “There Is no Invisible Hand,” *Harvard Business Review* (April 10, 2012). Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>3</sup> See Genesis 1:22 and 1:28.



man person as a moral being and therefore at odds with human dignity and the strictures of the Ten Commandments. Karl Marx (1818-1883) saw economics and history as a Hegelian set, a force moving inexorably across the pageant of human life and pushing individual human beings along toward a final conclusion indifferent to the individual. Even anti-collectivist liberals such as Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), in his discussions of the “constitution of liberty” and the organically-organizing spontaneous order of the free market, in a sense abstracted individual actors out of their activities and substituted unrepeatable economic interactions with economic-political theories.<sup>4</sup> All of this was at a far remove from traditional religious understandings of human actions as under the watchful eye of Providence.

As thinkers moved away from real-world economic interaction and began to see an abstraction called “the economy” in generalized terms, the human person tended to be obscured or even occulted in economic thought. Macroeconomists created a new being, “the economy,” and imbued it with almost supernatural powers (a way to explain, indirectly, the disappearance of the human agent from economic considerations). In tandem with the divorce between “economics” and the human person, in other words, the economy and economics came to assume mystic, sometimes even religious dimensions. While more recent economic thought has focused on microeconomics much more than on macroeconomics, the return to the individual brings to the fore the original problem anew. There appears to be no way to harmonize the individual and the aggregate under a strictly secularist scheme.<sup>5</sup>

In Japan, however, the jarring disconnect between microeconomics and macroeconomics found in the West has been much less of a problem. This is because the ideal of economic practice in Japan has

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<sup>4</sup> F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Ronald Hamowy (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to J. Mark Ramseyer for prompting this clarification.

long been rooted in a native Shintō-inspired religious sensibility according to which the world is populated by a myriad of deities (*yaoyorozu no kami*; lit., “the eight million gods”).<sup>6</sup> The gods are everywhere and imbue everything with a significance greater than the visible, and bigger than the moment at hand. People are not, in this divine milieu, to be treated as means to an end. This understanding of the other in an economic transaction as having a transcendent nature, and of the household and wider society as a fortiori transcending (both spiritually and diachronically) the individual economic actor, has nurtured a person-centered approach to economic activity in Japan.<sup>7</sup>

In this article, I examine three iterations of Japanese spiritually-inflected economics—the Ōmi merchants centered on Lake Biwa near Kyoto, the Shingaku teachings of Ishida Baigan (1685-1744), and the “unity of economic and moral practice” views of Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931) and later business ethics thinkers—to show that, regardless of specific creed, Japanese economic thought tends to reproduce the understanding of the economy as ideally beneficial for human persons.<sup>8</sup> I

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<sup>6</sup> See “Yaoyorozu no kamigami no keifu,” in Inoue Hiro’o, *Hito ga kami ni naru jōken: hito wa naze, hito wo kamisama to shite matsuru no ka* (Tokyo: Ryonsha, 2007), 9–36. Cf. also H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (Encino, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1974), 19–20, cited in Phillip E. Hammond, “The Conditions for Civil Religion: A Comparison of the United States and Mexico,” in Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1980), 40–41.

<sup>7</sup> An overview of some of the moral and religious doctrines presented in this paper is at Nobumichi Watahiki, “Sources of Business Ethics in Japan,” *Euromentor Journal* 10, no. 1 (March 2019): 7–24.

<sup>8</sup> On the persistence of human-divinity thought in Japan, see, e.g., Matsuzaki Kenzō, *Hitogami shinkō no rekishiminzokugakuteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwata Shoin, 2014), 13, and generally Part Three, “Jinshin shinkō no tayōsei,” 149–287. Of course, Japan is not the only country to have developed a human-centric economic model. See, e.g., the mention of “Human Capital analysis” in Bill Mihalopoulos, “Gendered Japan: Law, Empire, and Modern Girls on the Go,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 77, no. 2 (2018): 532, citing *inter alia* Theodore W. Schultz, “Investment in Man: An Economist’s View,” *Social Service Review* 33, no. 2 (1959): 109–117. See also Chapter Five, “The Irreducibility of Moral Behavior,” in Amitai Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New*

take my cue here in part from the American scholar of Japanese religions, Robert Bellah (1927-2013), who detailed at length in his classic 1957 study *Tokugawa Religion* the moral-economic valences of both the Ōmi merchants and Ishida Baigan's Shingaku. But I go beyond Bellah in many ways, too. For instance, I include in my considerations the “father of Japanese capitalism,” Meiji entrepreneur Shibusawa Eiichi, whose business ethics were heavily influenced by Confucianism. And I conclude by considering the modern-day doctrine of *dōkei ittai* (akin to Shibusawa's Confucian-inspired “philosophy of the unity of morality and the economy” (*dōtoku keizai gōichi setsu*)), which has been adopted by many in the business world in Japan as a way to privilege people over profits and the long-term social good over short-term individual or corporate gain.<sup>9</sup> I conclude by recommending a morally- and religiously-grounded economic ethos to all societies, finding what I call the “Shintō personalism” of Japan—that is, the view of the human person as divinely contextualized and therefore to be treated in economic transactions as an end, and never as a means to an end—to be an ideal way to achieve order and moral conduct in economic life.

### Theoretical Grounding

In making my arguments here, I draw in part from the locus classicus in English on Shintō sensibilities as the foundational socio-economic ground in Japan, Robert Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan*. Working to locate a “functional analogue” to Max Weber's (1864-1920) famous arguments about “the

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*Economics* (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1988), 67–87, and “Discourse II: On the Moral End of Business,” in Orville Dewey, *Moral Views of Commerce, Society, and Politics, in Twelve Discourses* (New York, N.Y.: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 48–73.

<sup>9</sup> Tahara Michio, “‘Dōkei ittai’ no ittai to wa,” *Dōkeijuku*, no. 106 (January 2017): 50–52.

Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism,” and building on Paul Tillich’s (1886-1965) definition of religion as, in Bellah’s paraphrase, “man’s attitudes and actions with respect to his ultimate concern,” Bellah finds in many areas of Japanese a spiritual immanence, one which seems to cross beyond doctrinal and even creedal boundaries.<sup>10</sup> For example, Bellah sees Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land Buddhism) as having had great influence on the socially conscious Ōmi merchants, but also stresses the more homespun sense of morality found much more broadly in Japan—even unto the “fus[ing]” of economics and spirituality.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Bellah, however, I follow a number of Japanese historians and other thinkers (introduced in more detail below) in seeing Buddhism as having had much less of an effect on business practices among the Ōmi merchants than Bellah surmised.<sup>12</sup> Buddhism is one of the cultural staples of Japan. But Buddhism, I argue, did not mold the Japanese ethic—Buddhists in Japan were able to build on much deeper, Shintō foundations in inculcating moral practice among economic actors.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1957), 2–3, 6, 126–131; see also Chapter Four, “The Weber Thesis and the Economic Development of Japan,” in Winston Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), 113–151, and Hans G. Kippenberg, “Max Weber: Religion and Modernization,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), 63–78. For a discussion on “functional analogue,” see Amy Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no. 2 (May 2016): 468. I am very doubtful about the application of the Weberian thesis to Japan, particularly since Weber, and many others who have studied capitalism’s origins, emphasize the particularly English nature of the phenomenon. See, e.g., Chapter Eight, “Capital-ism: The Cradle of Capitalism—the Case of England,” in Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 170–190.

<sup>11</sup> Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 168.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 117–126, citing *inter alia* Naitō Kanji, “Shūkyō to keizai rinri,” *Shakaigaku* 8 (1941): 243–246.

I go beyond Bellah, too, in arguing that Shintō religious ideas—not shrine Shintō, but the basic and pervasive sense of immanent deity and a myriad of gods (*yaoyorozu no kami*) inhabiting the world, coupled with a strong revulsion at offending the gods and incurring spiritual pollution<sup>13</sup>—have pervaded Japan since quite literally the beginning of recorded Japanese history. I find that these effect, from age to age, a sense of “spiritual economics” which sees the human person and the social good as the end of economic activity, due to the latent spiritual power in the world.<sup>14</sup>

Here, I am conscious of Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō’s (1889-1960) attempt to “imagine a modern society bounded by emotional ties of kinship and nation,” an “ideal of a natural, organic social unity, rooted in the power of cultural identity.”<sup>15</sup> However, contra Watsuji’s larger project, my argument in this paper is not political. I am not trying to justify any particular political form or to rescue the Japanese nation-state from the clutches of liberal modernity (as worthy a goal as that would be).<sup>16</sup> Nor am I following Mito thinker Aizawa Seishisai (1782-1863) in his view on *saisei itchi*, or the “unity of religion [literal-

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<sup>13</sup> See Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 64–66.

<sup>14</sup> So immanent are the Japanese gods that they do not scorn human work, such as agricultural labor, and even deign to dine with the sovereign once a year. See, e.g., “4. (1) Shinwa no jidai to buke shakai no hayai tōrai,” in Yamada Shūhei, “‘Hataraku’ wo kangaeru (1),” *Tottori Tanki Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō*, no. 68 (December 1, 2013): 25. See also “(2-1) *Tama* as Mediator between Two Realms,” in Tomoko Iwasawa, *Tama in Japanese Myth: A Hermeneutical Study of Ancient Japanese Divinity* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2011), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” 469. See also Augustin Berque, “Offspring of Watsuji’s Theory of Milieu (*Fūdo*),” *GeoJournal* 60 (2004): 389–396.

<sup>16</sup> I also do not engage in depth here with Maruyama Masao’s critique of Bellah, or at all with the “modernization” school and its many, many critics in the United States and elsewhere. Those are discussions for another day. See, e.g., Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” 474–476.

ly, ritual] and government.”<sup>17</sup> Watsuji and Aizawa were concerned with justifying a political order. I am not.

Instead, my assertion is religious and social. I argue that Japan has a baseline of regard for the other, for the human person, and that that baseline is pegged to the cultural, religiously-formed practice of sacralizing interpersonal interactions so that humans are treated as ends and not as means to an end.<sup>18</sup> Bellah, writing in 1970 (well more than a decade after the publication of *Tokugawa Religion*), said that “the Japanese tradition of this-worldly affirmativeness, the opposite of denial” was the “ground bass, so to speak” of Japanese life, which prevented “the note of transcendence,” the “great outpouring of transcendence” during the Kamakura Period (1185-1333) from becoming rooted in Japanese society.<sup>19</sup> I disagree that “this-worldly affirmativeness” is the “ground bass” of Japanese life. This is a key point where I leave Bellah behind. Instead, I think it is the Shintō understanding of man as embedded in a world alive with divinity and populated with human and divine others commanding his tremendous respect, which is the “ground bass.”<sup>20</sup> Immanence of divinity, and not anti-transcendent stubbornness,

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<sup>17</sup> Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” 479, citing Victor Koschmann, *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790-1864* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Cf., e.g., Bellah’s emphasis on the “repayment of . . . blessings” received in the course of one’s everyday life, such that “industriousness and devotion to a larger collective” were “regarded as ‘religious action’.” Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” 471–472, citing Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 21, 39, 41–42.

<sup>19</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1970), 119, cited in Tomoko Yoshida, “Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) on Jōdo Shinshū: Problems in Modern Historiography,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 2 (2006): 392.

<sup>20</sup> Yanagita Kunio’s views on the economic anthropology of Japan are instructive here. See, e.g., Chapter Eleven, “Seisei no masei no ijintachi: minzokugaku he no shiza,” in Kurimoto Shin’ichirō, *Keizai jinruigaku* (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinbunsha, 1979), 238–

is the “Japanese way” of economic life. If Japanese people by and large rejected the “great outpouring of transcendence” during the Kamakura Period, as Bellah alleges, then this was much more likely because they had no need of it, being already steeped in transcendent thought in their day-to-day life. In other words, Bellah assumes worldliness as the default habit of Japanese people. I, by contrast, assume otherworldliness, with this world included under that rubric. This makes all the difference when it comes to considerations of economic activity.

Another, more sociological and historico-anthropological way to put this comes from renowned scholar of Japanese religion, Masaharu Anesaki (1873-1949). Anesaki sees a tension between “monotheistic and polytheistic tendencies” in early Japan, with devotion to the sun goddess, Amaterasu-no-Ōmikami, existing parallel to the multitude of clan deities scattered throughout the archipelago.<sup>21</sup> “The clan deity was usually represented by a symbol and enshrined in a simple sanctuary erected at a spot commanding the best view of the locality, and in many cases occupying a strategic point,” Anesaki writes. He continues:

The sanctified spot was carefully guarded and kept scrupulously clean. The simple, sober-looking shrine standing in the dim light of the woods inspired the people with the presence of a divine spirit. The sacred grove furnished a prominent landmark in every locality and was associated with the legendary lore of the community, its ancestors and heroes, or genii and fairies. The communal sanctuary was also the place where periodical celebrations and social gatherings were held, all connected with various phases of social life as well as with the change of the seasons and the associated festivities. Thus the Shinto religion was deeply rooted in the soil of the national spirit, patriotism in the narrower but original sense. Just as men lived in communion with the gods and they together made up the communal life, so nature and the phys-

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253. See also “Edoki no takai ganbō,” in Komatsu Kazuhiko and Kurimoto Shin’ichirō, *Keizai no tanjō* (Tokyo: Kōsakusha, 1982), 197–202.

<sup>21</sup> Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion: With Special Reference to the Social and Moral Life of the Nation* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963), 34.

ical surroundings played a no less important part in moulding religious sentiment.<sup>22</sup>

The Shintō shrine in a local village was not just a clan deity’s dwelling place, but the symbol of the unity of the spirit, natural, and human realms, and of the harmony which that unity was supposed to engender. This produced not only an external, *pro forma* moral order, but an internalized, organic, personal moral order in which the individual was deeply invested.<sup>23</sup> Anesaki continues:

Thus morality, religious observances, laws and customs were interwoven, and their inculcation rested upon the shoulders of the community, represented by an assembly of priests and elders. Grave offences on the part of any member of the community were believed to draw divine wrath upon the whole community, and therefore propitiation was required from the community as well as from the individual.<sup>24</sup>

This virtual identity of the human with the spiritual world, and of the individual with the community under the watchful eye of higher deities, is perhaps also why Japan seems to have avoided human sacrifice much more than in other societies, such as in primitive Europe or Latin America.<sup>25</sup> Not only was the human world suffused with deity, but in many cases the human person him- or herself could be deified.<sup>26</sup> The border between the human and the divine was porous, if not nonexistent.<sup>27</sup> The individual human person, although existing within a strongly

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35.

<sup>23</sup> Katō Genchi, *Ajiagaku sōsho 14: Shintō no shūkyō hattatsushiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ōzorasha Shuppan, 1997), 852.

<sup>24</sup> Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 36.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> See generally Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Kami ni natta Nihonjin: watashitachi no kokoro no oku ni hisomu mono* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2020), and Uematsu Tadahiro, *Shinkō to bijinesu* (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1998), 30–35.

<sup>27</sup> Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Kamigami no seishinshi* (Tokyo: Dentō to Gendaisha, 1978), 49–82. See also Komatsu Kazuhiko, “Ikai to temō,” in *Iwanami kōza temō to ōken wo kangaeru*, vol. 9, *seikatsu sekai to fōkuroa*, ed. Amino Yoshihito, *et al.* (Tokyo: Iwa-

vertical society of authority and submission, was valued as an integral part of the community.<sup>28</sup> My argument here is that economics is an extension of this local-Shintōist, cultural-baseline religious prioritizing of the human person as an end.

The Shintō approach to shared life (including economic life) is a particularly Japanese way of being in the world, of course. But it need not be thought that, therefore, the Shintō approach, generalized, must be alien to other societies. In fact, Emile Durkheim, whom Bellah esteemed, writes of religious practice (and not necessarily religious practice in Japan):

The theorists who have undertaken to explain religion in rational terms have generally seen in it before all else a system of ideas, corresponding to some determined object. . . . But the believers, the men who lead the religious life and have a direct sensation of what it really is, object to this way of regarding it, saying that it does not correspond to their daily experience. In fact, they feel that the real function of religion is not to make us think, to enrich our knowledge, nor to add to the conceptions which we owe to science others of another origin and another character, but rather, it is to make us act, to aid us to live.<sup>29</sup>

From the inside, adopting the Durkheimian view outlined above, Japan appears not a desacralized or this-worldly workaday realm, but a place suffused by divinity, subsisting in Shintō ideas and ideals in a way so pervasive as to be nearly invisible to casual observers.

Let us turn first to a group of merchants who, although ostensibly Buddhist in their orientation, nevertheless exemplify the Shintō realities

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nami, 2003), 229–248, Mark Teeuwen, “Attaining Union with the Gods: The Secret Books of Watarai Shinto,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 227–228, 234, 236, and Doris G. Bargen, “Spirit Possession in the Context of Dramatic Expressions of Gender Conflict: The Aoi Episode of the *Genji Monogatari*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, no. 1 (June 1988): 95–130.

<sup>28</sup> Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society: Selected Writings*, ed. Robert N. Bellah (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 188–189.

of Japan (and, I think, challenge by this very measure the “Buddhist” motives often imputed to them).

### **Ōmi Merchants: Pure Land Buddhism, Shintō Economic Ethics, and the Commercial Pursuit of the Social Good**

The Ōmi Merchants were traders active mainly in central Japan, with a home base along the southeastern shore of Lake Biwa in the Kin-ki region near the ancient capital of Kyoto. Working within a family network and under an ethos of mercantile activity for the social good, the Ōmi Merchants present a prominent and enduring example of the basic economic paradigm in Japan of buying and selling as subordinate to a much broader vision of society than just a single transaction or a single opportunity for illicit gain.<sup>30</sup> This paradigm is one of the clearest signals of Shintō economic personalism in action, and is in fact widespread throughout Japanese economic thought and practice.

The particular Ōmi ethic of bearing in mind the social responsibilities of the merchant when engaging in trade is often referred to as a “sanpō yoshi” arrangement.<sup>31</sup> “Sanpō yoshi” means, roughly, “triangularly good” or “works out well in three directions,” which is to say that a transaction, according to the Ōmi ideal, should benefit the seller, the buyer, and society as a whole—a “win-win-win” situation.<sup>32</sup> But *sanpō*

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<sup>30</sup> Although this does not mean that all Ōmi merchants shared exactly the same views. See J. Mark Ramseyer, “Thrift and Diligence: House Codes of Tokugawa Merchant Families,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 34, no. 2 (Summer, 1979): 209. On Ōmi networks, see briefly Sydney Crawcour, “Documentary Sources of Tokugawa Economic and Social History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (May 1961): 351.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Yamamoto Masahito, *Ōmi shōnin no tetsugaku: ‘taneya’ ni manabu akinai no kihon* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2019), 155–158.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Japan Knowledge, “Sanbō yoshi,” available online at: <https://japanknowledge.com/lib/display/?lid=2001023498500>, accessed Nov. 21, 2021, and “A WIN for EVERY-ONE: ima koso ‘sanpō yoshi’ keiei: Ei Bei ryū yori Ōmi no chie,” *Nikkei Business*, no. 2084 (March 29, 2021): 30–47. It seems to me that scholars in Japan and elsewhere

*yoshi* may not be quite as “*Ōmi*” as at first appears. *Ōmi* researcher Ogura Ei’ichirō finds the origin of the “*sanpō yoshi*” phrase in the history of the *Ōmi* merchants, in particular among the writings of Nakamura Jihei (1685-1757).<sup>33</sup> However, Ōno Masahide at the philosophical research institute The Moralogy Foundation in Kashiwa, Japan, argues convincingly, and contra Ogura directly, that it was the moral philosopher Hiroike Chikurō (1866-1938) who began using the phrase from as early as 1931.<sup>34</sup> To be sure, *Ōmi* merchant Nakamura Jihei, who in 1754, at the age of 70, left as a passage in his “house code” (*kakun*) an admonition to carry out commerce for the benefit of “the seller, the buyer, and the world around [*seken*].”<sup>35</sup> But the words *sanpō yoshi* are missing. The debate over who originated the *sanpō yoshi* ideal and terminology continues.

What is important for our purposes is not who was first to use the term “*sanpō yoshi*,” however, but the fact that the underlying concept is pervasive in Japanese society and economic and social history. The debate itself in a way proves this larger point. Ōno notes, for example, that “this concept [*i.e.*, *sanpō yoshi*] can be interpreted as a Japanese style stakeholder approach,” foregrounding a common way (*i.e.*, “stake-

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have not made a sufficient distinction between *sanpō yoshi* thinking and the “delayed gratification” which some, such as Daniel Bell, find in the Protestant work ethic. See, *e.g.*, Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1976), 75.

<sup>33</sup> Ogura Ei’ichirō, *Ōmi shōnin no rinen: Ōmi shōnin kakun senshū* (Hikone, Shiga, Japan: Sanraizu Shuppan, 2020), 39–41. See also Part Three, Chapter Seven, “Nakamura Jihei ke,” in Serikawa Hiromichi, *Shūkyōteki keizai rinri no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Taiga Shuppan, 1987), 461–465.

<sup>34</sup> Ōno Masahide, “‘*Sanpō yoshi*’ no kotoba no yurai to sono gendaiteki imi,” *Nihon Keiei Rinri Gakkai Shi* 19 (January 2012): 241.

<sup>35</sup> Suenaga Kunitoshi, *Ōmi shōnin: sanpō yoshi keiei ni manabu* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobo, 2011), 20–23. See also Suenaga Kunitoshi, “*Ōmi shōnin Nakamura Jihei Sōgan no ‘kakioki’ to ‘kakun’ ni tsuite: ‘sanpō yoshi’ no genten kōshō*,” *Dōshisha Shōgaku* 40, nos. 5–6 (March 1999): 25–56.

holding”) to speak of the *sanpō yoshi* concept in modern terminology.<sup>36</sup> The Ōmi merchants referenced by Ogura may not have used “*sanpō yoshi*” in so many words, but they did speak of the necessity of aligning the interests of both parties to a transaction and the wider social whole when engaging in trade. As Dōshisha University professor emeritus and specialist in Ōmi history Suenaga Kunitoshi points out, the Ōmi merchants were not the only punctiliously upright and honest merchants in Japan. For example, Tōyama peddlers of medicinal products “prized sincerity and trust” and took as their business motto, “First make it useful, and only second concern yourself with making a profit” (*sen’yō kō-ri*).<sup>37</sup>

Another testament to the *sanpō yoshi* ideal in action is the longevity of so many Japanese firms, regardless of religious affiliation (or having no religious coloring at all). Japan is home to the oldest companies in the world, and of the 7,212 oldest firms worldwide, Japan boasts 3,113 of them.<sup>38</sup> (Second place belongs to Germany, which has just over half Japan’s total at 1,563.)<sup>39</sup> While the oldest company in Japan is a temple construction firm, which would seem to indicate that Buddhism has more resilience than Shintō and also more influence on

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<sup>36</sup> Ōno Masahide, “‘Sanpō yoshi’ no kotoba no yurai to sono gendaiteki imi,” 241.

<sup>37</sup> Suenaga Kunitoshi, *Ōmi shōnin to sanpō yoshi: gendai bijinesu ni ikiru chie* (Kashiwa, Japan: Institute of Moralogy, 2014), 46–47.

<sup>38</sup> See also Keiei to Dōtoku Editors, “‘Dōkei ittai shisō’ kiso kōza 6: yoki kōkeisha zukuri wo,” *Keiei to Dōtoku*, no. 171 (February 1999): 4–7, and Tahara Michio, “Han’ei to eizoku,” *Dōkeijuku*, no. 111 (November 2017): 54–56.

<sup>39</sup> *Dōkei ittai no keiei ga eizoku e no michi wo kirihiraku*, ed. Morarōji Kenkyūjo (Kashiwa, Japan: The Institute of Moralogy, 2017), 16–20; see also Alex Coad, “Investigating the Exponential Age Distribution of Firms,” *Economics* 4, 2010-17 (May 21, 2010): 20, Joseph Toschik, “Review of Ron Yates, *The Kikkoman Chronicles: A Global Company with a Japanese Soul* (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1998),” *Library Journal* 123, no. 9 (May 15, 1998): 94–95, “In the Club,” *Country Life* (December 16/23, 2015): 114, Alex Coad, “Firm Age: A Survey,” *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* 28 (2018): 13–43, “The Business of Survival: The World’s Oldest Companies,” *The Economist* 373, no. 8406 (December 18, 2004): 135.

business ethics (as apparently proven by the longevity of the firm), it must be remembered that there are no comparable Buddhist construction firms elsewhere in the world. What is unique to Japan, and what enables companies to survive over long centuries, is not Buddhism, but Shintō mentality. The diligence and forthrightness which Bellah identified as hallmarks of Japanese life in the Tokugawa period are not religious, as in doctrinal, but are cultural mainstays, inculcated by the basic Shintō understanding of the world as suffused with deity.<sup>40</sup>

As with the temple construction firm of ancient vintage, at first glance the Buddhist roots of Ōmi marketplace morality also stand out. To begin from circumstantial evidence, the Rokkaku clan, which for four hundred years produced the *shugo daimyō* which ruled the southern part of Ōmi province, built their castle stronghold on Kannonji Mountain—“Kannonji” meaning “Kannon Temple,” Kannon being the Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. It was in the shadow of this “Kannon Temple” castle that the first free market (*rakuichi*) in Japan was held, seeming further to link Buddhism and economic activity.<sup>41</sup> Shinshū (Pure Land) Buddhist monks were active in proselytizing in the Ōmi area from the fifteenth century, and the Shinshū creed became widespread in Ōmi in the Edo Period (1600-1868). In the heavily Buddhist region where Ōmi merchants first plied their trade, Pure Land and

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<sup>40</sup> On Tokugawa businesses, see, e.g., Yasukazu Takenaka, “Endogenous Formation and Development of Capitalism in Japan,” *The Journal of Economic History* 29, no. 1 (March 1969): 153–156.

<sup>41</sup> Yamamoto Masahito, *Ōmi shōnin no tetsugaku*, 150. On the Ōmi origins see also Kanno Watarō, *Ōmi shōnin no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1972), 17–21, Egashira Tsuneharu, *Ōmi shōnin* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1959), 23–25, and Tsujii Seigo, “Ōmi shōnin no keizai rinri to shinkō no igi: Matsui Yūken to Jōdo Shinshū sō Kōjuin Tokuryū to no kankei wo omo ni shite,” *Bukkyō Keizai Kenkyū* 45 (May 2016): 127–129. On *rakuichi*, see Yoshihiko Amino, “Medieval Japanese Constructions of Peace and Liberty: *Muen*, *Kugai*, and *Raku*,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2007): 3–14.

True Pure Land sects traditionally accounted for some two-thirds of all temples.<sup>42</sup>

What’s more, Buddhists in Japan had been involved in trade, even international trade, long before the rise of the Ōmi merchant houses, so there is certainly precedent for Buddhism to inform mercantile practices.<sup>43</sup> And Buddhist influence is obvious in Ōmi house codes. Famed Ōmi merchant Itō Chūbei (1842-1903), for example, went so far as to say that “commerce is the bodhisattva way” (*shōbai wa bosatsu no michi*).<sup>44</sup> Researcher Kubota Kazumi states that “One of the factors in Ōmi’s having produced a long line of Ōmi merchants lies in Ōmi’s particular religious environment,” meaning Buddhism.<sup>45</sup> This seems obvious at first glance. Reading the “house codes” of many Ōmi merchants, one finds sayings such as “Follow the Law of the Buddha and listen carefully to sermons,”<sup>46</sup> and “You may follow only the Pure Land or Zen Buddhist faiths, and you must have absolutely nothing to do with the Christian religion.”<sup>47</sup> Buddhist studies scholar Ōtani Ei’ichi writes of “engaged Buddhism,” borrowing fellow scholar Ueda Noriyuki’s term to describe the way that Buddhist sensibilities have guided Ōmi practice.<sup>48</sup> The Ōmi ethos would appear, on a close historical read-

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<sup>42</sup> Serikawa Hiromichi, *Shūkyōteki keizai rinri no kenkyū*, 565.

<sup>43</sup> Chapter Four, “Doing Business with Your Fellow Buddhists: The Credit System Underlying Sino-Japanese Trade, 1000-1270,” in Yiwen Li, “Networks of Profit and Faith: Spanning the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea, 838-1403” (Doctoral dissertation, Yale University, May 2017), 119–162.

<sup>44</sup> Tsujii Seigo, “Ōmi shōnin no keizai rinri to shinkō no igi,” 132, see also 134, citing *Itō Chūbei okina kaisōroku*, ed. Itō Chūbei Okina Kaisōroku Henshū Jimukyoku (Tokyo: Itōchū Shōji, n.d.), 150. The ITOCHU corporation derives from the legacy of Itō Chūbei and has as its company motto “Sanpō Yoshi.”

<sup>45</sup> Kubota Kazumi, *Ōmi shōnin no seikatsu taido: kakun, rinri, shinkō* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2020), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ramseyer, “Thrift and Diligence,” 211–212.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>48</sup> Ōtani Ei’ichi, “Gendai ni okeru shūkyō no shakai undō: Shiga kyōku Jōshū seinenkai no Ōmi kome issō undō no jirei,” *Honge Bukkyō Kiyō* 3 (2015): 92, citing Ueda Nori-

ing, to be steeped in Pure Land Buddhism, with the current corporate ethics of firms which evolved out of the Ōmi beginning practicing a secularized form of Pure Land teachings.<sup>49</sup>

But these bracing pre- and proscriptions in favor of the Buddhist way belie the universality of what the house codes teach. Let us think bigger, and go farther back in time. Long before the triumph of Buddhism in the Ōmi region, the area was home to a wealth of Shintō shrines and produced many prominent Shintō clans.<sup>50</sup> Also, True Pure Land Buddhism is an anomaly within the Buddhist panoply, an “absolutely other-reliant” (*zettai tariki*) faith developed out of the Tiantai (Tendai) sect by Hōnen (1133-1212) and his disciple Shinran (1173-1263), the latter of whom stressed the recitation of the *nenbutsu* prayer calling on the name of celestial Buddha Amida (Amitābha) for salvation.<sup>51</sup> As Max Weber pointed out, True Pure Land Buddhism, unlike other Buddhist creeds and sects, stresses a kind of *sola fide* approach (indeed, Shinran is sometimes compared to Martin Luther<sup>52</sup>), a reliance on the other and a radical minimization of the self.<sup>53</sup> In doing this, it is

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yuki, *Ganbare Bukkyō! o-tera runessansu no jidai* (Tokyo: NHK Books, 2004), 312. The “kome isshō” eleemosynary campaign continues today. See, e.g., <https://www.chion-in.or.jp/kacho/429/>, accessed Dec. 11, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., Tsujii Seigo, “Ōmi shōnin no keizai rinri to shinkō no igi,” 139, 146, 147.

<sup>50</sup> Serikawa Hiromichi, *Shūkyōteki keizai rinri no kenkyū*, 563.

<sup>51</sup> Taniguchi Noriko, “Nihon ni okeru shihonshugi seishin no keisei ni kansuru josetsu-teki kōsatsu: Ue-ba- to Ōmi shōnin, Jōdo Shinshū to no kankei wo tōshite,” *Higashi Nippon Kokusai Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō* 2, no. 1 (December 1996): 18.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Milliner, “Evangelicals and Zen Masters,” *First Things*, no. 292 (April 2019): 1–11, Randall Collins, “An Asian Route to Capitalism: Religious Economy and the Origins of Self-Transforming Growth in Japan,” *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 6 (December 1997): 851, Tomoko Yoshida, “Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) on Jōdo Shinshū,” 387, citing Hattori Shisō, *Shinran no-to* (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1967), 68. Hattori finds another monk, Rennyō (1415-1499), to be closer to Luther than Shinran was, but the parallels between Shinran and Luther remain clear even on Hattori’s reading.

<sup>53</sup> Taniguchi Noriko, “Nihon ni okeru shihonshugi seishin no keisei ni kansuru josetsu-teki kōsatsu,” 18.

arguable that Shinran and Hōnen were surfacing the latent other-directedness and self-reflective personality present in Japan’s Shintōist culture. Tiantai Buddhism was imported from China, of course. But it took root in Ōmi, where, before the arrival of Buddhism, Shintō had once been the state religious norm.

We must note yet other sour notes spoiling the swelling Buddhist refrain on the Ōmi front. For instance, there is Japanese sociologist Kawamura Nozomu’s 1998 essay about a virtually ignored 1941 work by fellow sociologist Naitō Kanji (1916-2020), “Shūkyō to keizai rinri: Jōdo Shinshū to Ōmi shōnin” (“Religion and economic ethics: True Pure Land [Buddhism] and the Ōmi merchants”).<sup>54</sup> Naitō follows Weber and sees Pure Land Buddhism as having provided the ethical grounding for the development of the Ōmi devotion to honesty and fair-dealing in the merchant trade.<sup>55</sup> Bellah knew the Naitō essay well. Naitō’s work, Kawamura argues, was so crucial to Bellah’s doctoral dissertation (the basis for Bellah’s first book, the 1957 work on Tokugawa religion cited above) that, had Naitō’s essay not been translated into English, thus enabling Bellah easily to read it, Bellah’s work on the Tokugawa milieu would probably never have gotten underway.<sup>56</sup>

But, *pace* Bellah and Naitō, Kawamura is very skeptical of Naitō’s insistence on seeing the “at first blush passive” (*ikken shōkyokuteki*

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<sup>54</sup> Kawamura Nozomu, “Ōmi shōnin to Jōdo Shinshū,” *Tōkyō Joshi Daigaku Shakai Gakkai Kiyō* 26 (February 1998): 1. See also Kubota Kazumi, *Ōmi shōnin no seikatsu taido: kakun, rinri, shinkō*, 10–12, and Serikawa Hiromichi, *Nihon no kindaika to shūkyō rinri: kinsei Ōmi shōninron* (Tokyo: Taiga Shuppan, 1997), 32–49.

<sup>55</sup> Serikawa Hiromichi, *Shūkyōteki keizai rinri no kenkyū*, 565–566, see also 292–302. For another Weberian interpretation of Jōdo Shinshū, see, e.g., Ōtani Teruhiro, “Bukkyō to keizai rinri: Jōdo Shinshū to Ōmi shōnin wo megutte,” *Ryūkyoku Daigaku Daigakuin Kenkyū Kiyō*, Jinbun Kagaku 8 (March 22, 1987): 47–49.

<sup>56</sup> Kawamura Nozomu, “Ōmi shōnin to Jōdo Shinshū,” 1, citing Naitō Kanji, “Shūkyō to keizai rinri: Jōdo Shinshū to Ōmi shōnin,” *Shakaigaku*, no. 8 (1941). Bellah follows Naitō explicitly on 117–118, and implicitly from 117 to 126. On the Naitō-Bellah thesis generally, see Uematsu Tadahiro, *Shinkō to bijinesu*, 35–37.

*ni mieru*) concept of *hōon* (repayment of blessings)—which Bellah, following Naitō, emphasizes—as applicable broadly to Japanese society or even to Ōmi discipline more narrowly.<sup>57</sup> *Hōon* is a Buddhist precept, but in fact the idea is found throughout Japan, and is probably not so much explicitly Buddhist as deeply cultural. (Confer, for example, the Japanese saying “*ongaeshi*,” or the repayment of munificence in kind.) Kawamura also takes exception to Naitō’s deployment of the Mahayana/Hinayana distinction in his analysis of the Ōmi spiritual roots.<sup>58</sup> And Bellah, Kawamura avers, also focuses too much on Weber’s arguments, and on trying to shoehorn Japan into those arguments, following Naitō too closely as well.<sup>59</sup> Naitō, says Kawamura, goes too far down the Weber path, too, in trying to link the afterlife of the True Pure Land paradise with the this-worldly concerns of business.<sup>60</sup> (Bellah, of course, followed Naitō very far down that same path.) And in a larger sense we must also bear in mind that, just because the name “True Pure Land” remains the same now as in the past, it does not mean that the faith and teachings have remained unchanged across the centuries. In fact, they have not.<sup>61</sup> Taken all together, there is little to support the theory of Buddhist underpinnings of the Ōmi ethos, despite this theory being very attractive at first pass.

The underlying Ōmi ethos, rather, is traceable in my view to the Shintō-rooted understanding of the human person as transcendent and always an end in him- or herself.<sup>62</sup> Seen from this angle, the Shintō roots of economic order in Japan would seem to complicate, if not at-

<sup>57</sup> Kawamura Nozomu, “Ōmi shōnin to Jōdo Shinshū,” 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5, citing Naitō Kanji, “Shūkyō to keizai rinri,” 285.

<sup>59</sup> Kawamura Nozomu, “Ōmi shōnin to Jōdo Shinshū,” 10–11, 14.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Itō Shinshō, “Kinsei Jōdoshū jūin ni okeru honmatsu-jidan kankei to jūshoku no idō: Ōmi Konan chiiki wo sozai ni shite,” *Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyū* 55 (2011): 105.

<sup>62</sup> Katō Genchi, *Ajiagaku sōsho* 14, 334–356.

tenuate, the effect of Pure Land Buddhism which many who study Ōmi merchant culture say was a vital component of the merchants’ marketplace morality.

Take another example, one much closer to our own time. Students of the military history of the twentieth century sometimes point to the *arahitogami*, or “living god,” interpretation of the Japanese Emperor.<sup>63</sup> This notion of *arahitogami* was put to political use in modernity during the run-up to the Second World War, but it is much, much older than that. It is among the most ancient of Shintō beliefs. The “Deus-Homo” understanding of the Japanese Emperor is, for most of us today, the most visible instantiation of “anthropolatry,” but the notion did not originate with emperor worship, but rather appears to have culminated in it.<sup>64</sup> And it was in the past not even just emperors who were divinized. In Shintō, the door to kamihood is open to all. Non-imperial rulers such as Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) have flirted with living godhood, and Ieyasu certainly encouraged belief in his own postmortem apotheosis.<sup>65</sup> Famed cultural figure Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) is just one of many Japanese historical personages to have been deified.<sup>66</sup> In casual speech and in advertisements, Japanese people often speak of someone’s being the “kami” of a certain skill or sport. I have even heard the word “kami” used to describe the taste of alcoholic drinks or the preparation of dumplings. “Kami” means “above” on another reading,

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<sup>63</sup> Okuyama Michiaki, “‘State Shinto’ in Recent Japanese Scholarship,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 66, no. 1 (2011): 123–145, and Christopher Ives, “Review of Walter Skya, *Japan’s Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shintō* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009),” *Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (August 2010): 918–920.

<sup>64</sup> Katō Genchi, *Ajiagaku sōsho* 14, 107–121.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Matsuzaki Kenzō, *Hitogami shinkō no rekishiminzokugakuteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwata Shoin, 2014), 75–99, and Mark Ravina, “State-Building and Political Economy in Early-Modern Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 4 (November 1995): 1003.

<sup>66</sup> Kawasaki Tsuyoshi, “The Invention and Reception of the *Mino’odera engi*,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 42, no. 1 (2015): 140.

and its dual use to mean both “above” and “divine” suggests how the gods are understood. It is common parlance in Japan to speak of the *kami*, the gods, as being just a little ways above the usual world, or just a step outside of the human world—perhaps even in groves of trees or in special rocks. People can become *kami* fairly easily. It is not that the bar is low, but that the door to divinity is wide open.

So immanentist is the Japanese religious landscape, in fact, that even the Buddhist Pure Land paradise was, in some cases, pulled down to earth, made chthonic, while the Buddhist saints were equated to local Shintō *kami* according to the practice known as *honji suijaku* (or, more appropriately, *han-* (anti-)*honji suijaku*).<sup>67</sup> Meri Arichi, for example, writes that:

[T]he term *jōdo* [or “Pure Land”] encompassed larger spatial and transhistorical dimensions [than the traditional Buddhist conception of the Western Paradise lying beyond the human, earthly realm]. The rationale behind the identification of certain geographical area[s] of Japan with Buddhist paradises was intimately connected to the *honji suijaku* theory. As Allan Grapard explains, “if a shrine and the area in which it was located were conceived of as the residence of the *kami*, and if those *kami* were thought to be hypostases of buddhas and bodhisattvas enshrined in the adjacent temples, then those areas came to be seen as the abodes of those buddhas and bodhisattvas, as Pure Land in this World (*gen-se jōdo*).<sup>68</sup>

Going even farther, famed religious history scholar Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) argued, as Arichi reminds us, that the medieval Japanese royalist Kitabatake Chikafusa’s (1293-1354) declaration that “Great Japan is *shinkoku*,” or “the land of the *kami*,” meant not “land” in a political sense, as in a kingdom or an imperial holding, but land as in the

<sup>67</sup> Katō Genchi, *Ajiagaku sōsho* 14, 310.

<sup>68</sup> Meri Arichi, “*Sannō Miya Mandara*: The Iconography of Pure Land on this Earth,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 2 (2006): 324, citing Allan G. Grapard, *The Protocol of Gods* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 209.

place where people (and gods) dwell. The gods do not control “Japan,” they *live* in Japan, the place where Japanese humans also happen to live. Even Buddhists in Japan began to refer to the archipelago as *shin-koku*, a reference, Arichi suggests, to Japan’s being a place infused with immanent deities.<sup>69</sup> So identified was Japan with the gods that mountains have often been referred to as *shintaisan*, “the mountain as the kami’s body” (with other natural features receiving similar designations).<sup>70</sup>

### **Ishida Baigan, Shingaku, and the Economics of Brotherly Love**

The Ōmi merchants were not the only business ethicists of the Tokugawa period. Nor were the Ōmi merchants the only subject of Bellah’s book on Tokugawa religion. In Chapter Six of Bellah’s famous book, the author focuses on Ishida Baigan and his body of teachings known as Shingaku.<sup>71</sup> Ishida Baigan was a singular figure of great moral seriousness and intense practice. After studying under a teacher in Kyoto learned in “Sung nature philosophy, . . . Buddhist and Taoist teachings as well,” Baigan had a profound spiritual experience and

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<sup>69</sup> Meri Arichi, “*Sannō Miya Mandara*,” 326, citing Kuroda Toshio, “Shinkoku shisō to senju nenbutsu,” in *Kuroda Toshio chosakushū*, vol. 4 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1995), 44, and Kuroda Toshio, *Mōkō shūrai, Nihon no rekishi*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1965), 123. Kuroda advanced a theory of Japanese religious and institutional history, *kenmon taisei* (“gates of power”), which privileges older religious orders over newly arrived ones like Pure Land Buddhism. This reinforces my argument for the endurance of old Shintō sensibilities over time. See Tomoko Yoshida, “Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) on Jōdo Shinshū,” 381.

<sup>70</sup> Meri Arichi, “*Sannō Miya Mandara*,” 333, 340. See also Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” 478, for a deeper political consideration of *kami*.

<sup>71</sup> The term “Shingaku” was not used by Baigan himself, but was applied by later followers due to Ishida’s teachings’ searching for the “heart” (*shin, kokoro*) of men and matters in the world. Shibata Minoru, “Ishida Baigan to Shintō,” *Shintōgaku*, no. 14 (August 1957): 14.

awakened to the identity “between his self and his nature.”<sup>72</sup> Baigan, like his teacher, was influenced by Chinese philosophy (e.g., “Sung nature philosophy”), and placed particular emphasis on *jin* (Ch.: *ren*, benevolence, idealized humanity), a key element of classical Confucianism.<sup>73</sup> Ishida’s thought was thus syncretic, but he went beyond his teacher’s scope to make the teachings practical, as well. Shingaku, as Baigan’s thought was later called, taught that human commerce must be selfless.<sup>74</sup> No matter one’s station in life, Baigan held the ideal to be that, “Each exhausts himself for the sake of all.”<sup>75</sup> Merchants, typically despised under the Confucian order then prevailing among samurai-ruled Japan, were lauded by Baigan as essential to the flow of goods and services around the realm.<sup>76</sup>

But while Baigan’s Shingaku was certainly syncretic, and while Ishida himself was certainly conversant with a variety of teachings from abroad (such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism), there is much about Shingaku which is closer to the general culture of Japan than derivative of a particular foreign idea.<sup>77</sup> Take, for example, honesty (*shōjiki*), which Baigan placed at the center of his merchant ethics.<sup>78</sup> As scholar of Japanese law and legal history J. Mark Ramseyer notes, “The self-confidence of the merchant code writers suggests that Baigan may have found an audience predisposed to accept such ideas [e.g., that “the virtues of diligence and frugality lead to wealth” and that “the Tokugawa economic system is a just system and that they them-

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<sup>72</sup> Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 136.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–141, see also 143.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>77</sup> On Ishida’s syncretism, see, e.g., Asayama Masashi, “Ishida Baigan no Shintō shisō no keisei: yōin to shite no Masaho Nokoguchi,” *Shintō Koten Kenkyūjo Kiyō* 9 (March 2003): 24–25.

<sup>78</sup> Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 161–164.

selves [*i.e.*, the merchants], the beneficiaries of it, are necessarily righteous men”]. That audience may even have already heard much of Baigan’s message from other sources,” Ramseyer continues, such as “the Shimai code,” which was “written over a century before Baigan’s principal book appeared.”<sup>79</sup> Later in life, Ishida directed his focus to the Japanese household (*ie*), and deepened his Japan-centered philosophy which many authors have remarked was inseparable from daily life in Japan.<sup>80</sup> Given all this, it is much more reasonable to argue that Baigan appropriated and expanded *shōjiki* than to argue that he invented or introduced it. People work with what they have, and Baigan, for all his influence, did not transform the fundamentals of Japanese life, such as business ethics or the household. Nor did he want to.

Not only this, but Baigan himself privileged a Shintō approach to the supernatural above all other modes of thought.<sup>81</sup> Consider, for instance, this passage from Baigan, quoted also in Bellah:

The gods of our land have received it [*i.e.*, the nature of Japanese society] from Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto [the god and goddess, respectively, who created the Japanese archipelago]. From the sun, moon, and stars to the ten thousand things, they rule over all. Since nothing is omitted, it is a unity and we call it the land of the gods. Here is a matter which should be meditated on. In China it is indeed different.<sup>82</sup>

For Baigan, then, China was not only different, but the nature of Japanese society was a gift from the creator god and goddess of the Japanese islands. Baigan’s teachings later came to be known as Shingaku,

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<sup>79</sup> Ramseyer, “Thrift and Diligence,” 219. Ramseyer notes that “diligence and frugality are also, in the codes, considered religious virtues.” *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>80</sup> Tada Akira, “Ishida Baigan no kyōgaku to Shintō,” *Shintōgaku* 96 (February 1978): 14–15.

<sup>81</sup> Shibata Minoru, “Ishida Baigan to Shintō,” 20–21.

<sup>82</sup> Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 155, citing Ishida Baigan, *Shingaku sōsho*, vol. 3, 121–122.

but one could be forgiven for thinking that “Shintōgaku” was closer to the heart of the Heart Learning.

Beyond even this chthonic view of the Japanese gods as being in intimate union with the land and people of Japan, Baigan gave primacy to Shintō in his syncretism. For example, Baigan thought that the self-heart (*gashin*, *wagakokoro*) of the three teachings of Shintō, Buddhism, and Confucianism was to be found by the latter two receiving the assistance of the *shinkoku*, land of the gods (*i.e.*, Japan—recall here Kitabatake Chikafusa) and giving birth to *kami* in their own inner beings. The gods are therefore superior to Confucianism and Buddhism, revealing the Shintōist underpinnings of Ishida’s syncretic ethics.<sup>83</sup> Not everyone was convinced, and not everyone was impressed. Postwar scholar and liberal apologist Maruyama Masao (1914–1996), for example, wrote dismissively of Shingaku, averring of it that:

A mere broadmindedness without any consistency of principle does not deserve the name of scholarly tolerance. Shingaku may have prided itself on its broad dissemination as a popular moral philosophy, but in theoretical value it did not even rise to the level of the Eclectic school [a loose grouping of anti-orthodoxy scholars active mainly in the eighteenth century in Japan].<sup>84</sup>

But in this very refusal to isolate and elevate one teaching above the rest—in the very “mere broadmindedness without any consistency of principle” that Maruyama disdained—we can see a very Shintōist regard for all human life.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Asayama Masashi, “Ishida Baigan no Shintō shisō no keisei,” 24, 25–27.

<sup>84</sup> Masao Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, trans. Mikiso Hane (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974), 142.

<sup>85</sup> On the primacy of Ishida’s Japaneseness, see, *e.g.*, “(2) Nihonjin toshite no ‘katachi,’” in Huang Haiwang, “Ishida Baigan no Shin Ju Butsu shūgō shisō ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu,” *Bukkyō Daigaku Daigakuin Kiyō*, no. 39 (March 2011): 25–26. See also *ibid.*, 27–28. On the deep Shintō roots of Ishida’s thought, especially on Ishida’s understanding of the gods being unified beneath the diversity of the Shintō pantheon, see Asayama Masashi, “Ishida Baigan no kami kannen no tokushoku,” *Shintō Shūkyō*, no. 178 (April 2000): 72–74, and Asayama Masashi, “3: tashin soku isshin ron: shinmeiron,” in “Ishi-

## Shibusawa Eiichi’s Confucian Model of Business Ethics

The March 20, 2021, issue of the *Economist* magazine announced that “Shibusawa Eiichi is having a moment.” Thanks to a new television series in Japan dramatizing his life, the *Economist* notes, and the Bank of Japan’s plan to put Shibusawa’s portrait on the 10,000 yen bill, “Shibusawa’s business philosophy, ‘the *Analects* and the abacus’, is in vogue.”<sup>86</sup> But while the *Economist* correctly gives credit to the Confucian classic the *Analects* as a source of Shibusawa’s business ethics, the magazine makes the important qualifier that “Shibusawa fused Confucianism’s collectivist morality with market logic” in a way that “echo[es] the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Edo-era precept of *sanpo-yoshi*, or ‘three-way good’—namely for buyers, sellers and society.”<sup>87</sup>

Shibusawa is indeed known in Japan for having espoused a “philosophy of the unity of morality and the economy” (*dōtoku keizai gō-ichi setsu*).<sup>88</sup> This philosophy, according to Shibusawa, was drawn from his studies of Confucius, in particular the *Analects*.<sup>89</sup> For example, in June of 1923 one of Shibusawa’s speeches was published in the *Meishi*

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da Baigan no kami kannen ni tsuite,” *Shintō Shūkyō*, no. 177 (January 2000): 111–113. Tetsuo Najita, who was an expert on the *kō* or mutual aid societies in Tokugawa Japan, writes of Ishida’s ideals: “All individuals regardless of status are endowed with a universal essence that is sagely and . . . goodness is to be acted out in the everyday world of work.” Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 96.

<sup>86</sup> “Japanese Business: *Analects* and Abacus,” *The Economist* 373, no. 8406 (December 18, 2004): 51. See also Kuroda Haruhiko, “Hopes for the Japanese and U.S. Business Communities: Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis and Efforts to Address Climate Change,” Speech at the 58<sup>th</sup> Japan-U.S. Business Conference (October 6, 2021). Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>87</sup> “Japanese Business: *Analects* and Abacus,” *The Economist*, 51.

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Ōno Masahide, “Shibusawa Eiichi to Hiroike Chikurō no ‘dōtoku keizai shisō’ no hikaku kenkyū,” *Moraroji Kenkyū Happyōkai Yōshishū* (2016): 69.

<sup>89</sup> Tsuchiya Takao, “Dōkei ittai shisō no shiteki kōsatsu,” *Dai Ni Kai Moraroji Kenkyū Happyōkai ni Okeru Kōza Yōshi* (March 17, 1973): 2.

*Record*. In this speech, Shibusawa introduces the notion that a firm sense of “right reason” (*dōri*) must be the basis for business activities, and that the standard for right reason is to be found in the *Analects* of Confucius. If Confucian right reason, or morality, prevails in business, Shibusawa argues, then the business will benefit the entire country.<sup>90</sup> This sounds about as Confucian as one can get. Confucius himself could hardly have argued with Shibusawa’s wise words.

However, while it is certainly true that Shibusawa was a devotee of the *Analects*, he probably turned down the explicitly philosophical path of equating business with morality much later in life than is commonly believed. Many today associate Shibusawa with Confucian business ethics, and for good reason, but several scholars in Japan, such as Mizuno Hirota and Miyamoto Matao, argue that Shibusawa was responding to rising nationalism, a lingering disdain for merchants, and other social pressures in formulating a logical link among good business practices and the economic and overall health of the country as a whole.<sup>91</sup> What appears to us as Confucian, and what Shibusawa insisted was *Analects* chapter and verse, may have been more impromptu rationalizing than wisdom learned at the feet of Master Kung.<sup>92</sup> Further, Mizuno argues that, prior to his formulating an ethical approach to busi-

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<sup>90</sup> Mizuno Hirota, “Shibusawa Eiichi ni okeru ‘dōtoku keizai gōichi setsu’ no keisei katei: sōnenki no ‘gakumon’ no kankei ni taisuru kōsatsu wo chūshin ni,” *Shisōshi Kenkyū* 20 (October 2014): 41. Shibusawa called this idea *gapponshugi*. John H. Sagers, *Confucian Capitalism: Shibusawa Eiichi, Business Ethics, and Economic Development in Meiji Japan* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 196–197.

<sup>91</sup> Mizuno Hirota, “Shibusawa Eiichi ni okeru ‘dōtoku keizai gōichi setsu’ no keisei katei,” 51, citing Miyamoto Matao, *Nihon no kindai 11: kigyōka tachi no chosen* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 1999), 293. See also Jason Morgan, *Equity under Empire: Suehiro Izutarō and the Law-and-Society Movement in Japan* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria, 2020), 126–127.

<sup>92</sup> On reinterpretations of Confucianism in light of spiritual realities, see Jason Morgan, “Greatness of Character as the Great Idea of Religion and Freedom in Classical Confucianism,” in *Great Ideas of Religion and Freedom*, ed. Peter Redpath, Imelda Chłodna-Błach, and Artur Mamcarz-Plisiecki (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2021), 210–236.

ness in Confucianist terms, Shibusawa’s business ethics were much more of a continuation of Edo Period market morality. This morality could be found, for example, in Ishida Baigan’s Sekimon Shingaku and in the foundational Japanese socio-economic unit of the *ie*, or household, which encouraged diachronic, honest dealing and corporatist responsibility, something obviously resonant with Anesaki’s description of the village Shintō shrine and accompanying social and moral practices.<sup>93</sup> In his earlier pronouncements on the virtues of learning, too, Shibusawa echoed traditional Japanese “sanpō yoshi” ideas when he exhorts students to study hard because doing so will redound to the benefit of their school and of Japan, as well as to the students themselves.<sup>94</sup> Confucian-sounding, to be sure. But scratch the paint a little bit and the Shintō chassis shines through.

Shibusawa’s *ad hoc* Confucian turn suggests that the much more substantial Shibusawan business ethic was not derived from the Chinese classics, but from the deeper cultural tissue of Shibusawa’s home country of Japan.<sup>95</sup> The *Economist* article cited above quotes Waseda University Faculty of Commerce professor Miyajima Hideaki as arguing that “Japan has long been evolving a ‘hybrid form of governance’ that seeks to balance shareholders’ focus on performance and management’s concern for stakeholders,” for instance.<sup>96</sup> Now we are hewing much closer to Japanese-style than Chinese-style philosophy. The cor-

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<sup>93</sup> Mizuno Hirota, “Shibusawa Eiichi ni okeru ‘dōtoku keizai gōichi setsu’ no keisei katei,” 44, citing Watanabe Hiroshi, *Nihon seiji shisōshi: jūnana kara jūkyū seiki* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010), 85–86.

<sup>94</sup> Mizuno Hirota, “Shibusawa Eiichi ni okeru ‘dōtoku keizai gōichi setsu’ no keisei katei,” 46, citing *Shibusawa Eiichi denki shiryō*, vol. 26, ed. Shibusawa Seien Ki’nen Zaidan Ryūmonsha (today: Kōeki Zaidan Hōjin Shibusawa Eiichi Ki’nen Zaidan) (Tokyo: Shibusawa Eiichi Denki Shiryō Kankōkai, 1959), 579. See also Mizuno Hirota, “Shibusawa Eiichi ni okeru ‘dōtoku keizai gōichi setsu’ no keisei katei,” 48.

<sup>95</sup> But for a dissenting view, see Miura Noriko, “Higashi Ajia ni okeru borantarizumu no seiki to tenkai,” *Yamaguchi Chūki Shakai Kenkyū* 10 (2012): 3–4.

<sup>96</sup> “Japanese Business: Analects and Abacus,” *The Economist*, 52.

poratist model of “Japan, Inc.,” often derided by Western management scholars, businessmen, and politicians in the postwar, was not just good for Japan, it was often argued, but also prioritized economic stability and long-term financial and employment predictability for individual workers.<sup>97</sup> Shibusawa would surely have recognized it—and might have been hard-put to explain how it was Confucian and not just “Japanese.” Today, when Kyocera founder and later Japan Airlines (JAL) CEO Inamori Kazuo asserts that Kyocera must do what is good for society as a whole, he is drinking from the same river that flows from deep in the Japanese past, the harmonious merging of the individual and the community which Masaharu Anesaki noted was a defining feature of Shintō village life in prehistoric Japan.<sup>98</sup>

### ***Dōkei Ittai: A Secular Reprisal of an Ancient Anthropology***

The above-mentioned argument over whether moral philosopher Hiroike Chikurō’s articulation of “sanpō yoshi” predated that of a member of an Ōmi merchant household is not just a semantic detail, but reflective of a much broader pattern in Japanese culture of calculating far-reaching economic effects across the social spectrum and over a long period of time, much broader and longer than a single economic transaction. What the Ōmi merchants and the moral philosopher Hiroike, and many others who have worked in or thought about the Japanese moral universe, seem to be participating in or referring to in their eco-

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<sup>97</sup> But on the origins of the “lifetime employment” trope, see J. Mark Ramseyer, *et al.*, *An American Perspective on Japanese Law: Amerika kara mita Nihon hō* (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 2019), 256, fn. 22 (on page 257), and “Case 21: Yoshikawa v. Shuhoku Bus, K.K.: 22 Saihan Minshu 3459 (Sup. Ct. Dec. 25, 1968),” 262–274.

<sup>98</sup> “A Zen Monk on the Board,” *Newsweek International Edition* (March 1, 1999): 50, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hiroataka Takeuchi, “Strategy as a Way of Life,” *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Fall 2021): 56–63, and George Taninecz, “Kazuo Inamori: ‘Respect the Divine and Love People,’” *Industry Week* (June 5, 1995): 47–51.

conomic actions and teachings is what Hiroike came to refer to as “dōkei ittai,” or the unity (or identity) (*ittai*) of morality (*dō*) and economics (*kei*). This is not an abstract concept, but an array of concrete behaviors and approaches to shared life which coincides, in many ways, with the deep-seated Shintōist view of the human person in Japan.

Among the key elements of this approach to shared life, life seen as embedded in a moral and even spiritual context, are things which are so common in Japan as to be almost afterthoughts to daily life. For example, we find on the *dōkei ittai* moral menu: sincerity (*magokoro*, lit. “true-hearted”),<sup>99</sup> trust (*shin’yō*),<sup>100</sup> a heart of compassion and deference to life (*inochi wo itsukushimu kokoro*),<sup>101</sup> obeying the dictates of Heaven and of nature (*tenchi no hōsoku ni shitagatte*),<sup>102</sup> seeking the long term (*sue hirogari wo mezashite*),<sup>103</sup> building up the human person (*hitozukuri*),<sup>104</sup> and acting with utmost responsibility in mind, behavior, word, and intention (*shinkui icchi*).<sup>105</sup> These in turn are reflected in such things as “placing a premium on quality and relegating quantity to the second rank” (*shitsu wo tōtobi ryō wo tsugi to su*).<sup>106</sup>

<sup>99</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 43 (October 2021), 11, *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 39 (June 2021), 10.

<sup>100</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 42 (September 2021), 11.

<sup>101</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 41 (August 2021), 10. This is of course also a Buddhist precept. Cf., e.g., Barbara R. Ambros, “Tracing the Influence of Ming-Qing Buddhism in Early Modern Japan: Yunqi Zhuhong’s *Tract on Refraining from Killing and on Releasing Life* and Ritual Animal Releases,” *Religions* 12 (2021): 1–31.

<sup>102</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 41 (August 2021), 11. Cf. also Keiei to Dōtoku Editors, “‘Dōkei ittai shisō’ kiso kōza 2: dōtoku keizai ittai no jissen,” *Keiei to Dōtoku*, no. 167 (June 1998): 7.

<sup>103</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 40 (July 2021), 10. Cf. also “devote your whole life [to whatever you do],” *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 44 (November 2021): 10–11.

<sup>104</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 36 (March 2021), 12–13, and *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 37 (April 2021), 10.

<sup>105</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 38 (May 2021), 11.

<sup>106</sup> *Moraru Biz Premia*, no. 42 (September 2021), 10.

The Ōmi merchants also took the long view of business and life, reflecting the long-term view espoused by Hiroike.<sup>107</sup> The Ōmi merchants also valued trust and sincerity, and also sought quality first and quantity second. The Ōmi merchants also strove to obey Heaven and nature and not to cheat the moral fabric by cheating their fellow human beings. There is not a competition between the Ōmi legacy and the moral philosopher Hiroike Chikurō—the resonance of the two strands of Japanese economics and morality suggests a much deeper harmony, rooted in history. As former student of Hiroike and founder of a machine oil and automotive parts firm Kagawa Keizaburō (1884-1974) wrote, “Think in human terms in everything you do, and make it your heart’s purpose to conduct your business affairs for the salvation of the human soul.”<sup>108</sup> This is not Buddhist or Confucian. This is just how things are supposed to be done in Japan.

Immanent spirituality, the Shintō hallmark, is stamped all over the *dōkei ittai* philosophy. For example, one of the keys to *dōkei ittai* is Hiroike’s definition of capital as not just physical goods such as money or plant, but also spiritual or mental goods such as “labor capacity, know-how, ability, and, in particular, the fruits which accrue when morality is put into action.”<sup>109</sup> This kind of moral or spiritual capital is to other, physical capital, according to some moral philosophers associated with the Moralogy research center specializing in Hiroike’s ideals, as “life-force [*seimei*] is to the flesh.”<sup>110</sup> *Dōkei ittai* practitioners see the physical world as the property of the gods (*kami no shoyūbutsu*), which is only held for a time by human beings (*kami kara no azukari mo-*

<sup>107</sup> See Yamamoto Masahito, *Ōmi shōnin no tetsugaku*, 158–160.

<sup>108</sup> *Dōkei ittai e no michishirube*, ed. Moralogy Kenkyujo Shuppanbu (Kashiwa, Japan: Moralogy Kenkyujo Shuppanbu, 2013), 20.

<sup>109</sup> Tajima Masayoshi, *Dōkei ittai to sanpō yoshi no keiei: jissen Morarōjī keiei Q&A* (Kashiwa, Japan: Hiroike Gakuen Shuppanbu, 1989), 35.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

no).<sup>111</sup> Labor is to be performed in a spirit of sacrifice (*giseiteki seishin*) and for the advancement of Heaven’s good purposes (*tenkō wo tasukeru*).<sup>112</sup> *Dōkei ittai* philosophers, and especially Hiroike, stress *hōon*, as did the True Pure Land Buddhists said to have exerted a formative influence on the Ōmi merchants and their ethos of diligence and honesty. But for *dōkei ittai* philosophers and practitioners, the repayment of blessings (*hōon*) is carried out toward tradition, and not to a particular Buddha or saint or transcendent deity.<sup>113</sup> While Hiroike’s moral philosophy has no overt religious dimension, and is catholic and pluralistic in its acceptance of religious and moral teachings from around the world (Jesus of Nazareth, Socrates, Shakyamuni, and others are honored as great “sages”), the association of repaying blessings with tradition arises, I think, from the basic Shintō moral paradigm of Japan. The watermark is Shintō, not Buddhism or Christianity or anything else.

If Ōno Masahide is correct that *sanpō yoshi* is a term coined by Hiroike Chikurō, then the identification of *sanpō yoshi* as the “highest morality” by Hiroike’s followers in moral philosophy lends additional support to the argument that *sanpō yoshi* grows out of the Shintōist soil of traditional Japan.<sup>114</sup> Under *sanpō yoshi* thinking, for example, businessmen are exhorted to think not just of their own benefit, or even of their and their business counterpart’s benefit, when conducting a trans-

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<sup>111</sup> The word “*azukari*” means that someone is holding something for someone else. The sense is much closer to “keeping something (for someone)” than to “owning” something. The distinction here is very important.

<sup>112</sup> Tajima Masayoshi, *Dōkei ittai to sanpō yoshi no keiei*, 37. See also Uematsu Tadahiro, *Shinkō to bijinesu*, 230–232.

<sup>113</sup> Tajima Masayoshi, *Dōkei ittai to sanpō yoshi no keiei*, 39–44. See also *Genten basui shiryōshū dōkei ittairon*, vol. 2, ed. Morarōjī Kenkyūjo (Kashiwa, Japan: The Institute of Moralogy, 1978), 320–321, and “Tradition and Some Other Forms of Order,” in *H.B. Acton: The Morals of Markets and Related Essays*, ed. David Gordon and Jeremy Shearmur (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 1993), 157–189.

<sup>114</sup> See in general Keiei to Dōtoku Editors, “‘Dōkei ittai shisō’ kiso kōza 3: ‘sanpō yoshi’ no keiei,” *Keiei to Dōtoku*, no. 168 (August 1998): 4–7.

action. Instead, businessmen must think of society as a whole—and not just society, but the happiness of society—and then act in such a way as to bring about a better world through even the smallest aspect of one’s business dealings.<sup>115</sup> All of the “stakeholders” to a deal—including of course the parties to the deal, but extending all the way out to society, the nation, the market as a whole, and even the international community—are to be brought into consideration (within a net of gratitude<sup>116</sup>), and in this way a firm is to be thought of as an “open system” benefiting, ideally, everyone in the world.<sup>117</sup>

Under this broadly cast perspective, *sanpō yoshi* thought has quite naturally expanded, for example to become, in one work by Hiroike Chikurō, a six-way beneficial arrangement: for “self, user, supplier, client, general society, and nation.”<sup>118</sup> This virtually unlimited regard for the social fabric within which a product or service is produced and consumed leads, in turn, to a high emphasis on character, which is even elevated in Hiroikean thought to the level of *hinsei shihon* (“moral character capital”).<sup>119</sup> Character and society are the systolic and diastolic of the human person-centric economy in Japan. Body and mind are taken to be in a mutually-reinforcing relationship,<sup>120</sup> and the spiritual is privileged on the premise that attention to the moral good will bring naturally the physical order needed to sustain human life and human society.<sup>121</sup> The “ultimate” (*kyūkyoku*) in *dōkei ittai* thinking is the formation of the human person (*hitozukuri*), a process which Hiroike defines as

<sup>115</sup> Tajima Masayoshi, *Dōkei ittai to sanpō yoshi no keiei*, 62–64, 69–71.

<sup>116</sup> *Dōkei ittai keiei genron: Hiroike Chikurō no keieiron to sono gendaiteki tenkai*, ed. Morarōji Kenkyūjo (Kashiwa, Japan: The Institute of Moralogy, 2019), 155–159.

<sup>117</sup> *Sanpō yoshi no keiei*, ed. Morarōji Kenkyūjo (Kashiwa, Japan: The Institute of Moralogy, 2001), 35.

<sup>118</sup> *Dōkei ittai keiei genron*, 173.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–95.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 100–105.

much bigger than merely training a worker.<sup>122</sup> Rather, *hitozukuri* is the cultivation of the moral character, the elevation of the human person to a greater regard for his situation and his obligation to serve others.<sup>123</sup> To become truly compassionate, Hiroike writes, is to obtain to the heart of God (*kami no kokorotaru jihishin*), which in turn brings the human person into possession of his faculties, into true humanity as a member of society.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, the individual human person is to recognize his limits, and is not to overexert himself beyond his natural capacity.<sup>125</sup> The human person under Hiroikean moral philosophy retains, then, almost perfectly the ancient Shintōist balance between the divinity of man, and his individual nature within a much larger array of other men and of forces beyond his ken and control, the gods with which he completes a dynamic whole.

### Religious Human Personalism in Japan Today

The practices outlined above are diverse. While many of them are informed by a religion or spiritual practice (Buddhism, Shintō) or a philosophy (Confucianism) which is often understood to possess the possibility for spiritual coloring (neo-Confucianism), the last practice detailed, *dōkei ittai*, has no particular religious dimension. *Dōkei ittai* is simply a secular best-practice for carrying out business transactions in an ethical, socially responsible manner. And yet, even this secular approach would be much less likely in a milieu in which the human person was not valued beyond material gain. It is the *yaoyorozu no kami*,

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<sup>122</sup> Keiei to Dōtoku Editors, “‘Dōkei ittai shisō’ kiso kōza: hitozukuri no keiei 5,” *Keiei to Dōtoku*, no. 170 (December 1998): 4–7.

<sup>123</sup> *Dōkei ittai keiei genron*, 148–150. See also Tahara Michio, “Hitozukuri,” *Dōkeijuku*, no. 107 (March 2017): 50–52.

<sup>124</sup> *Genten bassui shiryōshū dōkei ittairon*, vol. 3, ed. Morarōjī Kenkyūjo (Kashiwa, Japan: The Institute of Moralogy, 1978), 65–68.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

pantheist, human person-centered religious foundation of Japan which “animates” and engenders the religious and ethical practices described in this article.<sup>126</sup> The word for “economy” in Japanese, *keizai*, confesses this truth: *keizai* is a contraction of *keisei saimin*, which means “governing for the salvation of the people.”<sup>127</sup> By viewing the human person as an end and never as a means—an anthropology which is ultimately Shintōist, although broadly compatible with other beliefs—the standard economic actor in Japan works for the betterment of his counterpart and of society as a whole. This human person-centered approach can and should be replicated in other countries around the world.

This human person-centered approach, which also sees the human person as nested in a cosmos alive with divinity, need hardly be limited to Japan. The examples given here are from the Japanese archipelago, but the cosmic is, of course, universal. As Mircea Eliade writes:

What we find as soon as we place ourselves in the perspective of religious man of the archaic societies is that *the world exists because it was created by the gods*, and that the existence of the world itself ‘means’ something, ‘wants to say’ something, that the world is neither mute nor opaque, that it is not an inert thing without purpose or significance. For religious man, the cosmos ‘lives’ and ‘speaks’. The mere life of the cosmos is proof of its sanctity, since the cosmos was created by the gods and the gods show themselves to men through cosmic life. This is why, beginning at a certain stage of culture, man conceives of himself as a microcosm. He forms part of the gods’ creation; in other words, he finds in himself the same sanctity that he recognizes in the cosmos. It follows that his life is homologized to cosmic life; as a

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<sup>126</sup> On the persistence of the deep past in the present in Japan, see, *e.g.*, Kurita Isamu, *Kami yadoru Yamato* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1986), 264.

<sup>127</sup> Taniguchi Noriko, “Nihon ni okeru shihonshugi seishin no keisei ni kansuru jose-tsuteki kōsatsu,” 24.

divine work, the cosmos becomes the paradigmatic image of human existence.<sup>128</sup>

It is often remarked that Japan did not experience the “twilight of the gods” or the desacralization (“disenchantment”) of the world that many thinkers in Western Europe and North America have stressed.<sup>129</sup> I do not mean to imply, though, by quoting Eliade and by arguing against the high-modernist Wagnerian mode, that Japan is a primitive country. Quite the opposite, in fact. What I mean is that Japan never lost the primordial sense of man as a religious being, as embedded (to go far beyond what Karl Polanyi meant by the term) in a cosmic panoply in which honesty and good business practice, sincerity and thrift, are the dues owed to the creators, progenitors, and divine co-inhabitants of human life.<sup>130</sup>

Perhaps this is why the spirit of the Ōmi merchants, and of Ishida Baigan, and of Shibusawa Eiichi and Hiroike Chikurō, remains strong in Japan:<sup>131</sup> not just because these are examples of Japanese religiously-grounded business ethics, but examples of how the religiously considered human person should be treated in any society.<sup>132</sup> In March of

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<sup>128</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1957), 165 (emphasis in original).

<sup>129</sup> A discussion germane to the theme of this chapter can be found at Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 2 (June 2008): 497–528.

<sup>130</sup> See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York, N.Y.: Farrar and Rhinehart, 1944), and Daniel Immerwahr, “Polanyi in the United States: Peter Drucker, Karl Polanyi, and the Midcentury Critique of Economic Society,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 3 (July 2009): 445–466.

<sup>131</sup> See Nagayasu Yukimasa, “Dōtoku keizai ittai no genre no teishō: Hiroike Chikurō no seiji keizai shisō,” *Keiei to Dōtoku* 20, no. 5 (110) (December 1988): 13–14.

<sup>132</sup> For a comparative East Asian approach, see Rebecca Chunghee Kim, “Can Creating Shared Value (CSV) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) Collaborate for a Better World? Insights from East Asia,” *Sustainability* 10, no. 4128 (November 9, 2018): 13, 15, 21. See also Mikita Hisami, “‘Sanpō yoshi’ no ruike-

2021, for example, the popular glossy magazine *Nikkei Business* ran a special feature (*tokushū*) on “‘*sanpō yoshi*’ management (*keiei*),” arguing that it was time for a return to “Ōmi wisdom (*chie*)” and a turning aside from the “English and American way (*Ei Bei ryū*)” of doing business.<sup>133</sup> The CEO of ITOCHU, which traces its roots to the Ōmi merchants, advocates using *sanpō yoshi* management to increase productivity (*seisansei*) and raise stock prices (*kabuka wa shinchō*).<sup>134</sup> In the same issue of *Nikkei Business*, management philosopher Ikujiro Nonaka explains his “human-centric management philosophy” (*ningen chūshin keiei riron*), trying to put the human person at the heart of the economy and of management strategy.<sup>135</sup> These things hang together naturally in Japan, and just as naturally flow from the tongues and pens of Japanese people who think about business ethics and the ways in which commerce can benefit the social good.

The same spirit can be found even when there is no explicit reference to Ōmi or *sanpō yoshi*.<sup>136</sup> For instance, there is the September 18, 2020, issue of another glossy business magazine, *President*. Inamori Kauzo is featured on the cover and his business philosophy is introduced throughout. The proper approach to business, Inamori teaches, is to remember that the person you are today is the same person who was

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ika: Shimbun kiji de-ta wo kinishita naiyō bunseki,” *Shōhisha Seisaku Kenkyū*, vol. 1 (August 2019).

<sup>133</sup> “Tokushū: ima koso ‘sanpō yoshi’ keiei: Ei Bei ryū yori Ōmi no chie,” *Nikkei Business*, no. 2084 (March 29, 2021): 30–47.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>135</sup> “Bei Chū ni makenai ‘shin kokufuron’: ‘chitoku kokka’ Nippon no jifu wo,” *Nikkei Business*, no. 2084 (March 29, 2021): 138–139. See also [https://www.ics.hub.hit-u.ac.jp/faculty/profile/nonaka\\_ikujiro.html](https://www.ics.hub.hit-u.ac.jp/faculty/profile/nonaka_ikujiro.html), last accessed November 27, 2021.

<sup>136</sup> One example is “Mujin kaisha,” in Tetsuo Najita, *Sōgo fujo no keizai: mujin kō, hōtoku no minshū shisōshi*, trans. Igarashi Akio and Fukui Shōko (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 2015), 243–289. See also Chapter Six, “Establishing a Firm Foundation for Economic Development,” in John H. Sagers, *Origins of Japanese Wealth and Power: Reconciling Confucianism and Capitalism, 1830-1885* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 115–134.

helped along the way by others, to decide to work with all your might for those who have supported and continue to support you, and to “honor heaven and love other people” (*kyō ten ai jin*).<sup>137</sup> The Inamori-funded Inamori Foundation’s Kyoto Prize is also featured in this issue of *President*. The prize is awarded based on the ideal that “being of service to others and to the whole world is the highest action of a human being,” and the article introducing the 2020 prizewinners is titled, “‘A Heart Devoted to Benefiting the Other’ Will Save the Human Race.”<sup>138</sup> By the same token, in a 2017 book economic thinker Uzawa Hirofumi (1928-2014) and medical researcher Watanabe Itaru (1916-2007) challenge the idea of *homo economicus*, arguing instead for a human-centered, whole-person approach to economics.<sup>139</sup> Hakuhodo, the second-largest advertising firm in Japan, “has [since 1980] been one step ahead in defining the public not as mere consumers but ‘Sei-Katsu-Sha (living person)’ a more holistic definition of individuals with lifestyle, aspirations, and dreams.”<sup>140</sup> This now commonized [sic] term takes consumption not as an economical but a cultural act and interpret [sic] consumers in such context.”<sup>141</sup>

The above examples could be easily multiplied. While very few modern entrepreneurs or organizational or management philosophers reference a particular religious teaching or philosophy in their human-centric management and CSR ideals, there is a deep harmony among the various strands of social-conscious and human-person-over-profit mentality in Japan. This is not Buddhist or Confucian, or the trace of

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<sup>137</sup> Murata Hirofumi, “Jiri rita,” *President* 58, no. 18 (September 18, 2020): 28.

<sup>138</sup> “‘Rita no kokoro’ wa jinrui wo sukuu,” *President*, 52–55.

<sup>139</sup> Uzawa Hirofumi and Watanabe Itaru, *Seimei, ningen, keizaigaku: kagakusha no gimon* (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbun Shuppansha, 2017).

<sup>140</sup> See <https://www.hakuhodo-global.com/about/history/index.html>, last accessed November 27, 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Yasuhiko Kobayashi, “The Concept of Engagement: State of the Art and Developments in Japan,” *Communicative Business*, no. 1 (2008): 117.

any other non-Japanese teaching or creed. It is Shintō, in its most pervasive cultural iteration of honesty, respect, and diligence, rooted in a divine understanding of man and his cosmos.

## Conclusion

I have argued above for an immanentist interpretation of Japanese business ethics and economic paradigms. My argument is in the spirit of Robert N. Bellah's book on Tokugawa religion, but it goes deeper, getting to the living quick of economic morality in Japan: Shintō. Not the Shintō of myths or of more recent political theology, but the Shintō which inculcates virtue by teaching that everyone is a living part of a much larger and sacred interplay of forces both human and divine. As such, the human person is to be valued and never used as a means to an end. When this is achieved, economic practice is harmonized with social life, and the human person, seen as a recipient of and participant in the life of the gods, is carried forward in the moral calculus as the one element which trumps all else in commerce.



**The “Unity of Economic and Moral Practice”:  
Japanese Religious Sensibility and  
the Person-Centered Economic Tradition of Japan**

SUMMARY

In Japan, the ideal of economic practice has long been rooted in a native Shintō-inspired religious sensibility according to which the world is populated by a myriad of deities (*yaoyorozu no kami*; lit., “the eight million gods”). This engenders an understanding of the other in an economic transaction as having a transcendent nature, and of the household and wider society as a fortiori transcending (both spiritually and diachronically) the individual economic actor. In turn, the transcendent view of the human person has nurtured a person-centered approach to economic activity in Japan.

The author examines three iterations of Japanese spiritually-influenced economic activity—the Ōmi merchants, the Shingaku teachings of Ishida Baigan, and the “unity of economic and moral practice” views of Shibusawa Eiichi and later business ethics thinkers—to show that, regardless of specific creed, Japanese economic thinking tends to reproduce the understanding of economic activity as ideally beneficial for human persons. By viewing the human person as an end and never as a means—an anthropology which is ultimately Shintōist, although broadly compatible with other beliefs—the standard economic actor in Japan works for the betterment of his counterpart and of society as a whole. This human-centered approach should and can be replicated in other countries around the world.

## KEYWORDS

Ōmi merchants, Ishida Baigan, Shibusawa Eiichi, Pure Land Buddhism, Shintō, Hiroike Chikurō, Moralogy, *sanpō yoshi*, *dōkei ittai*.

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