

## Response to Discursive Formation around “Shinto” in Colonial Korea

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Shinto, which has been repeatedly positioned today as a ‘national’ religion, was positioned as a ‘world religion’ as well as a ‘regional religion’ during the Japanese imperial period. During the prewar period, Shinto was constructed as an ‘imperial religion’ in order for the imperial Japanese empire to legitimize control over its Korean colony. Isomae emphasizes how Shinto became related to ‘Shamanism’, thereby sharing the same origin as local Korean religions. This process was based on the discourse of ‘the common ancestry’ of Japan–Korea, asserted by Ryuzo Torii, an anthropologist from the Imperial University of Tokyo. In contrast, Korean intellectuals adapted this discourse strategically in order to assert that Korean religion, which is also the origin of Shamanism in Northeast Asia, shares the same origin as Japan’s Shinto. Choe Nam-seon, taking the risk of being assimilated, employs the mythology of Tan’gun to support the discourse. However, during the war period, some Japanese intellectuals noticed that the concept of Shinto as an imperial religion was inconsistent with the discourse on the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, in which cultural and religious differences existed. Subsequently, the counter-discourse toward Western religion appeared. The religious philosopher Keiji Nishitani, from the Kyoto School, emphasized that Eastern religion could cover what the Western religion lacked. This discourse, according to Isomae, could reinforce Japan’s official propaganda of ‘overcoming modernity’ during the war period.

It was also suggested by Isomae that Nishitani’s assertion of the theory of ‘the self-identity of absolute contradiction’ might form Japan’s ideological discourse by which to resist the West, but was fraught with the possibility of eroding and overthrowing Japan’s colonial rules within the empire. Isomae particularly emphasizes that the religious concept of ‘overcoming modernity’ raised by Keiji Nishitani could become the logic of those subjugated within the

Japanese empire, including the people of the Korean Peninsula, in their resistance to Japanese colonial rule.

By examining the connections between the prewar discourses on Shinto and Korean religions, Isomae indicates the transformation of Shinto from the prewar to postwar periods, from 'imperial religion' to 'national religion'. Isomae asserts that the change of Shinto's concept as 'imperial religion' occurred because Japanese intellectuals noticed that this discourse could not fit the situation in which the various ethnic groups co-existed in the Greater East Co-prosperity Sphere in the 1940s.

I would like to explore the converse example of Taiwan: in Taiwan, which had been incorporated into the Japanese empire in 1895, we find that the discourse of Shinto did not function as it did in the Korean Peninsula. As a result, the discourse of 'common ancestry' never interfered with Taiwan's local religions under Japanese colonial policy. In the 1940s, the Movement of the Imperial Subject (皇民化運動) included intensive assimilation efforts designed to mobilize the colonized Taiwanese to participate in the war, even though the Japanese regime had forced the Taiwanese to convert from their original religious beliefs to Shinto. In Taiwanese writer Zhou Jin-po's "The Climate, Belief and Illness" (気候と信仰と持病と), we see how the Taiwanese protagonist failed to convert to Shinto because it lacked a connection with him, both in spiritual and native spheres. In colonial Taiwan, Shinto was seen only as a medium by which to approach the spiritual or cultural sphere of Japan. In terms of colonial Taiwan's situation, the way in which the concept of Shinto functioned as an 'imperial religion' or 'regional religion' is debatable. Can we say that the religious discourse between the colonial Korean Peninsula and Japan is an exception?

Another interesting question raised by Isomae in the end of this essay surrounds Keiji Nishitani's religious discourse of 'overcoming modernity.' Isomae sharply criticizes the imbalance and contradiction in Nishitani's 'self-identity' assertion, and suggests it might also be co-opted by the colonized to resist assimilation by the Japanese. However, how did the discourse of

'self-identity' of the Kyoto School, which enclosed the possibility to emphasize the importance of the co-existed ethnic groups in the colonies, circulate in Japanese colonies, especially in the Greater East Co-prosperity Circle? Further development and additional evidence is required in order to determine how this discourse transformed into an active and effective concept for anti-colonial resistance. Using colonial Taiwan as an example, the Kyoto School's concept of 'self-identity' was not prominent in the 1940s; instead, the concept of local/native culture became a counter-discourse of 'overcoming modernity' in colonial Taiwan. Can we say that it represents a transformation from the assertion of 'self-identity'? This question awaits further comparative studies of the former Japanese colonies in order to better our understanding.