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Domain Shinto in Early Modern Mito Impacts on Village Populations and Rural Networks

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Brigitte Pickl-Kolaczia

Thursday
2025-03-13
18⁰⁰~19³⁰



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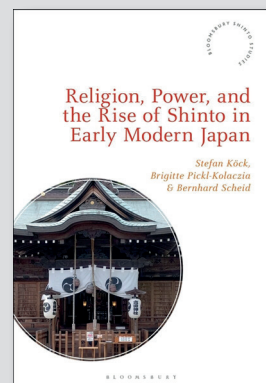
Tokugawa Mitsukuni's religious policies in Mito domain during the 1660s are famous for their radical retrenchment of Buddhist institutions but were also designed to promote a system of one shrine per village. Mitsukuni aimed at a complete separation of Shinto shrines from Buddhism. As such, I regard his measures as a typical case of Domain Shinto (*hanyrō shintō* 藩領神道).

Domain Shinto is an umbrella term that subsumes a cluster of religious policies and ideas beginning in the early Edo period that are related to Shinto. It is a terminus ex post that does not exist in any primary source and does not correspond to any of the Shinto schools in early modern Japan. Rather, Domain Shinto describes a set of policies that were based on an amalgamation of ideological thoughts. These include anti-Buddhist ideas, a neo-Confucian morality and historical interpretation, and the ideal of Japan as a divine country (*shinkoku* 神国) prior to the advent of Buddhism.

In the case of Mito, Domain Shinto measures included a drastic reduction of Buddhist temples, a severe curtailing of the Hachiman faith (a deity with particularly strong Buddhist connotations) and the strengthening of Shinto shrines and shrine priests. After Mitsukuni stepped down as lord of Mito in 1690, his nephew and successor Tsunaeda adopted his uncle's views and continued 'shintoizing' the domain. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Tokugawa Nariaki renewed Mitsukuni's and Tsunaeda's efforts. In contrast to his ancestors, his measures showed a stronger anti-Buddhist aspect and were implemented more aggressively. In my talk, I describe the measures by Mitsukuni and his successors Tsunaeda and Nariaki and their impact on the population through a case study of the village of Noguchi in northwestern Mito. I examine changes to the villagers' religious practice as well as to their networks that were influenced by religious traditions.



Brigitte Pickl-Kolaczia studied Japanese studies at the University of Vienna with a focus on the history of religion. Her research interests include the dynamics and interactions between Buddhism and Shintō. While her master's thesis of 2015 examined the development of a state cult around the imperial family through the restoration of imperial tombs in the 19th century, the focus of her research has since shifted to questions regarding religious practice of Japan's populace during the early modern period. She has recently finished her PhD thesis on religious policies in early modern Mito and the impact of these policies on the domain's population. She conducted her research for this thesis as part of two projects funded by the Austrian Science Fund at the Institute of the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia at the Austrian Academy of sciences. She is a co-editor of the 2021 volume *Religion, Power, and the Rise of Shinto*.



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