

# PRESS RELEASE

## **Between ancient traditions and modern Japan: New standard work on Shinto published**

"Shinto: The Way of the Gods II – The Soul of Japan between Tradition and the Present" offers profound insights into Japan's spiritual foundations

Interest in Japanese culture is steadily growing worldwide. Therefore, with "Shinto: The Way of the Gods II – The Soul of Japan between Tradition and the Present," an important work has been published at the right time. The revised version of this standard work combines historical analysis with current developments, creating an indispensable compendium for anyone seeking to understand the Japanese soul.

Shinto, often only superficially referred to as the "Japanese nature religion," is far more than a folkloric relic. It has formed the foundation of Japanese identity for millennia and continues to shape politics, society, and everyday life in modern Japan. This religion, without a founder, without sacred scriptures, and with an astonishing adaptability to social changes, presents Western observers with particular challenges. Author Hermann Candahashi masters this challenge with remarkable expertise and analytical depth. His work unfolds a comprehensive account that offers valuable insights for Japanologists and religious scholars, as well as for readers interested in culture.

This powerful work covers, among other things, the central rites and festivals of Shinto, its symbolism, the ambivalent role of

religion during Japan's imperial expansion, and its renaissance in postwar Japan. Particularly insightful are the discussions on the integration of Shinto elements into Japanese popular culture—from anime and manga to contemporary art.

One of the strengths of the book lies in its exploration of the complex relationship between Shinto and the major social questions of our time: How does a religion based on a connection to nature relate to environmental protection? What role can Shinto play in an increasingly secularized society? To what extent do Shinto values influence Japanese business ethics?

The author Hermann Candahashi, who spent several years in Japan and conducted intensive studies at traditional sites, combines scholarly precision with accessible language. In addition to extensive literature research, the results of numerous interviews with Shinto priests, believers, and religious scholars are incorporated into the presentation.

The in-depth examination of the relationship between Shinto and Japanese modernity makes the book a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand Japan beyond common stereotypes. It impressively demonstrates how a millennia-old spiritual tradition can remain alive and even gain new relevance in a highly technological society.

"Shinto: The Way of the Gods II – The Soul of Japan Between Tradition and the Present" is conceived as both a sequel and a standalone work, thus appealing to both those familiar with the first volume and new readers. It is a valuable contribution to intercultural understanding and the study of religious phenomena in modern societies.

The book is published at a time when cultural exchange between Japan and the West is more intense than ever before. Japanese pop culture, literature, and aesthetics are finding increasing resonance worldwide, while at the same time, understanding of the deeper cultural roots of these phenomena is often lacking. This work impressively fills this gap.

Shintoism, the "Way of the Gods" (the literal translation), is one of the oldest spiritual traditions still practiced by humanity. Its animistic worldview, which locates countless deities (*kami*) in natural phenomena, forms a fascinating contrast to the monotheistic religions of the West. At the same time, the author shows how this ancient polytheistic form of belief exhibits astonishing parallels to modern ecological approaches and potentially offers answers to pressing contemporary questions.

The explanations on the coexistence of various religious traditions in Japan are particularly illuminating. Unlike in the West, where religious affiliations are often understood exclusively, many Japanese practice both Shinto and Buddhist rituals – depending on their life situation and the occasion. This religious pragmatism, which is inherent in Shintoism, is discussed in the book as a possible model for dealing with religious plurality in globalized societies.

The historical development of Shinto, from its animistic origins through its intertwining with Buddhism in the Middle Ages, its problematic instrumentalization in State Shinto during the imperial period, and its reorientation after 1945, is traced in detail and critically. The author succeeds in highlighting both the timeless elements and the historical transformations of this religious tradition.

A central chapter is devoted to the structure and function of Shinto shrines in Japanese society. From world-famous sanctuaries such as the Ise Shrine to small village shrines, these sacred sites form a dense network that permeates everyday Japanese life. The diverse social functions of these institutions—from community building and the cultivation of traditions to the preservation of ecological niches in urban spaces—are expertly analyzed.

The insights into the psychological dimension of Shinto are also fascinating. Ritual purification, ancestor veneration, and the cyclical conception of time profoundly shape Japanese self-understanding. The author demonstrates how these religious concepts influence Japanese aesthetics, ethics, and social interaction, and how they are reflected in literary works from classical poetry to modern prose.

The revised version of the book also incorporates recent research on the internationalization of Shinto. In recent decades, this originally ethnically bound religion has also gained followers outside of Japan. The discussions on Shinto communities in North America and Europe, as well as on the reception of Shinto concepts in the global spirituality scene, offer an insightful perspective on the transcultural dynamics of religious traditions.

An important part of the work deals with the theological and philosophical foundations of Shinto. Unlike many other religions, Shinto has no systematic theology or binding articles of faith. Nevertheless, the author identifies specific basic attitudes such as the appreciation of harmony (*wa*), the veneration of nature and a worldly spirituality, which together form a coherent worldview.

The relationship between Shinto and politics is examined in a nuanced and critical manner. Following the problematic

intertwining of religion and state ideology in the early 20th century, the separation of state and religion was enshrined in Japan's postwar constitution. Nevertheless, subtle connections persist, such as the controversial visits of high-ranking politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine. The author places these controversies in a historical context and highlights the diverse perspectives of the actors involved.

The depictions of Shinto festivals (*matsuri*), which function as living bearers of religious tradition in modern Japan, are particularly vivid. From local village festivals to major national events, these ritual celebrations form an important part of Japanese identity. The detailed descriptions convey a vivid impression of the sensual and emotional dimension of Shinto practice, which is often neglected in abstract religious studies.

The role of women in Shinto is addressed in a separate chapter. The spectrum ranges from high-ranking female deities such as the sun goddess Amaterasu and historical priestesses to the current situation in which women hold important offices in many shrines, while certain areas remain closed to them in other traditional contexts. The author analyzes this ambivalence as a reflection of the position of women in Japanese society as a whole.

Another fascinating topic is the relationship between Shinto and nature conservation. The religious veneration of sacred mountains, trees, and bodies of water has contributed to the preservation of many ecologically valuable areas for centuries. In a time of increasing environmental problems, this aspect of Shinto tradition is gaining new relevance and is being rediscovered by environmental activists and Shinto priests alike as a resource for a sustainable understanding of nature.

The concluding chapter looks to the future and examines the role of Shinto in the 21st century. In an increasingly urbanized, digitalized, and globalized Japanese society, traditional religious practices face major challenges. Nevertheless, the author identifies vital developments and creative reinterpretations that point to the continued relevance of this ancient tradition.

"Shinto: The Way of the Gods II – The Soul of Japan Between Tradition and the Present" is thus far more than a treatise on religious studies. It is a key to understanding Japanese culture in all its facets – from aesthetics and ethics to everyday life. The revised version takes recent developments into account and opens new perspectives on one of humanity's most fascinating spiritual traditions.

The book is now available in bookstores and is aimed at a broad audience of Japan enthusiasts, religious scholars, cultural researchers, and travelers who wish to get to know Japan beyond the tourist surface. With its combination of scholarly foundation and accessible presentation, it sets new standards in German-language literature on Shinto and Japanese culture.

The book closes an important gap in Western literature on the subject. It is a successful example of how scholarly expertise can be translated into a form that is accessible and enriching for a broader audience.

With "Shinto: The Way of the Gods II – The Soul of Japan Between Tradition and the Present," a standard work is now available that explores the spiritual dimension of Japan in all its depth and complexity, offering even non-specialists fascinating insights into a strange, yet in some respects familiar, world.

## **About the Author**

The author Hermann Candahashi is an expert on Japanese culture and religion, known for his books, and has published numerous publications on these topics. He spent several years, with interruptions, in Japan, where he intensified his knowledge in various places and cities. His field research took him to numerous regions of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and gave him deep insights into local traditions and customs. In addition to his travels, he also sees himself as a cultural mediator and has authored numerous books on Japanese spirituality and folklore. His particular interest lies in the connection between traditional ideas and modern society, as well as the intercultural dialogue between Japan and Western culture.

## **Availability**

"Shinto: The Way of the Gods II – The Soul of Japan Between Tradition and the Present" is now available in three languages ??(German, English, and French) in bookstores, as a hardcover, paperback, e-book, and audiobook.

Further information, excerpts, and event information can be found on the publisher's website.

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The Soul of Japan between  
Tradition and Present



Hermann Candahashi

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