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WHAT FACTORS PUSHED SHINTO WEDDINGS INTO THE FORM WE SEE TODAY?

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Abstract

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Introduction

Following the Meiji restoration, Japan found itself in a hostile dog-eat-dog world. The western powers were dominating the globe, while most nations in Asia had become their colonies or their vassals. As such, Japan needed to modernize if they were to survive in this world. They needed to adopt the ways of the west, in matters such as industry, mindset, and military power. One of the things that greatly helped the West in the eyes of the Japanese was the Christian religion, with its centralized structures and institutions. As such, the Japanese felt they needed something similar to help them advance in the hierarchy of nations.

The Japanese were unwilling to adopt Christianity as its power structures were centered in the West and it would thus give the European nations more control over Japan. So instead, they sought a domestic alternative. Buddhism would also not do, due to its origins in India and the fact that it had not helped India or China resist the westerners. So instead, they opted to craft the religion of Shinto out of folk beliefs that had existed in Japan for time immemorial.

The beliefs on which Shinto were based may have been ancient, with many dating back before recorded history, but they had never been part of any organized structure, and had over time become subservient to Buddhism. As such, the Japanese leadership had their work cut out for them. They had to set up the Emperor as a central figure akin to the pope, but they also had to craft all the rituals that go along with any organized religion.

State Shinto became the de facto state religion of Japan, with its national holidays being compulsory days off in places like schools. Much would go into setting up the Emperor as not just the father of the nation but also the descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu, and thus the leader of the Shinto faith. Shrines would serve as both administrative centers and as places of active worship, with many holidays involving school children being forced to attend these shrines. This would extend into the colonies; the same administrative functions carried out by the shrines at home were also carried out by shrines specifically built for that purpose in places like Korea.

Shinto would hold a privileged status in Japanese society, with other religions like Christianity or even Buddhism getting lesser treatment from the state. State Shinto was not considered a religion by the government, allowing it to maintain official freedom of religion while heavily promoting Shinto and allowing Shinto rituals to thrive and spread.

And so, in order to set this faith up as a legitimate one, the Japanese government set up various rituals taking place at shrines, most of which had some basis in tradition while also being vehicles of modernity.

One of those rituals that had to be crafted is of course marriage. Marriage was not a foreign concept of course, but it had never been a Shinto thing. Organized religions needed marriage rites though, so the Japanese government set out to create rites for Shinto marriages, drawing from a mix of native Japanese traditions and influences from the way Christian marriages were performed. Devising these rituals was not enough though; they needed to be popularized among the Japanese people. The best way to do this was by having a prominent figure marry according to the new traditions.

And thus we arrive at the wedding of the crown prince, the future Taisho Emperor. This was the first big imperial wedding since the start of the Meiji restoration, and thus it would draw the attention of people from all around Japan. This was of course the perfect opportunity to

popularize the new Shinto way of marrying, and as such, the Taisho emperor's wedding was the very first wedding conducted in this style. It was reported on by every news outlet of note in Japan, helping Shinto marriages spread throughout the land and become the norm for almost a century.

Shinto weddings derived in large part from Christian weddings, of which they sought to be the Japanese equivalent. They were also partly based on indigenous, irreligious wedding traditions, which they sought to replace. They were designed in such a way as to evoke Japanese tradition as well as a sense of modernity, which can clearly be seen in Imperial weddings from the prewar era.

Imperial weddings would continue to be used throughout the prewar period as a means to bolster national unity, with the wedding of the future Showa Emperor being about as massive an event as the Taisho emperor before him. Once again the event was carefully crafted to ensure that the crown prince would continue to be seen as the direct descendant of the sun goddess.

The government kept promoting this new form of marriage throughout the prewar years, but with the defeat at the hands of the Americans, they were forced to implement a policy of separation between church and state, or shrine and state in this case. Nevertheless, Shinto marriages continued to be the norm throughout Japan for the rest of the 20th century, only losing their prominence in the 2000s as Christian marriages started to take off. Most important marriages, including those of the Imperial family, continued to be done in the Shinto style, and the wedding of the Heisei emperor was the first Shinto marriage to be recorded and broadcasted on national television; more than half of all the video cameras in Japan at the time were present at this wedding.

Curiously, Shinto weddings increased in popularity after the second world war, in part because of urbanization and the uprooting of structures that kept old forms of marriage in place. So it was not until the institution lost its government support that it took hold in the hearts of the people and became a true tradition. It stayed this way for many more years, with all imperial weddings being held in the Shinto tradition and Shinto weddings making up well over half of the weddings conducted in Japan.

The continued popularity of Shinto weddings during the latter half of the 20th century owes to two main factors: the urbanization push in the postwar years uprooting previously established wedding traditions, and the financial incentives shrines felt to promote these weddings as traditional Shinto-style unions. The media also played a large part in maintaining this image, especially when it comes to their portrayal of the weddings of the Imperial family.

The media has been a constant factor in the popularity of Shinto weddings, both when the state was actively pushing them and after the state was forced to distance itself from matters of religion. In the prewar years, they created enthusiasm for the events surrounding the first Shinto wedding and allowed it to catch on among the general public. In the postwar years, the media helped portray Shinto marriages as the traditional way to get married, allowing it to gain popularity and become the dominant way people in Japan tied the knot.

Today though, Christianity has overtaken Shinto in the wedding market. More people now marry in churches than in shrines, although this does not mean that the Japanese population has become significantly more Christian in recent years. Less than 2 percent of Japanese people are Christians, (CIA World Factbook 2023) yet Christian weddings make up a larger portion of the wedding market than any other tradition.

If current trends persist, Shinto style weddings will continue to get rarer as other ways of getting married gain in popularity. Imperial and other culturally significant weddings will continue to be held in these traditions for the foreseeable future, but among regular people these practices may well diminish to a point where virtually no one still performs them.

My research question will be this: What factors pushed Shinto weddings to develop into the form we see today?

I will research this by going into three main factors that contributed to the prominence of Shinto marriages throughout the 1900s, those being the political push to make Shinto great, the urbanization trends of the 1950s and 1960s and the financial incentives the shrines felt to propagate these marriages. I will then briefly discuss why Shinto weddings are no longer the majority today, before concluding. My first chapter will be about the political push that propagated Shinto, followed by a chapter on the first Shinto wedding and how it was set up.

I will mainly be relying on primary material in the form of newspaper articles from throughout Japanese history, as well as images and video footage of various important weddings. Videos will generally be preferred over images, as they provide a better view of what went on than static images do, but I will rely on images for the decades in which video footage was not available. Special attention will be given to Imperial weddings, as those were generally the most important and thus the most publicized Shinto wedding ceremonies. Throughout this paper, I will refer to the various crown princes getting married by their future title as emperor, or I will refer to them as the crown prince. These terms will be used interchangeably. In addition to old newspapers and news reels, I will be making use of statistics wherever relevant to illustrate the developments I am talking about, and how they impacted Shinto weddings and their popularity. In this paper, the word "Shinto" generally refers to the organized religion that came to be from the Meiji period onward, not including the shrine practices that were used to craft said organized religion.

Literature Review

One interesting source for my research on the development of Shinto wedding rites is Helen Hardacre's "Shinto: A History" published in December 2016. She examines the history of Shinto from prehistoric times up until the present, and has several chapters on time periods that will be relevant to our studies. In her chapters on "Shinto and the Meiji State" and "Shinto in Imperial Japan", she discusses how Shinto was developed into an organized religion by the state and other actors, and was used to build the nation of Japan. (Hardacre 2016)

Another useful source is Takashi Fujitani's "Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan." This book goes into detail on the wedding of the Taisho Emperor, describing how it happened and to what extent it was authentic, describing how much of it was taken from western marriage practices. This book mainly looks at how the Imperial family was deployed throughout the years, and thus mainly looks at the wedding from that view. (Fujitani, Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan 1996)

A source that specifically talks about the invention of Shinto weddings and their popularization is "Religion in Commercialization: The Shinto Wedding Ritual (shinzenshiki) as an "Invented Tradition" in Japan" by Klaus Antoni, in "Japanese Religions" volume 26. This text describes the exact subject matter we will be dealing with, which is the way Shinto weddings were invented and popularized. The text does not specifically look into the Taisho Emperor's wedding and how it was used to popularize the concept of a Shinto wedding, but

it does provide insights into the rituals of a Shinto wedding, as well as where those rituals come from. (Antoni 2001)

Another relevant source would be the article “The Shintoist wedding ceremony in Japan: an invented tradition” by Kiyoshi Shida. It discusses much of the same things as the article by Antoni, but it puts more focus on who was responsible for inventing new wedding traditions and why these were accepted and used by the people. It also discusses the history of Japanese marriages before the introduction of the Shinto variant as we know it, by the late 1800s. It describes how the wedding of the Taisho emperor introduced new trends that the Japanese commoners would come to emulate in their own weddings. (Shida 1999)

A source that might be useful in establishing a background would be “State Shinto in the Lives of the People” by Shimazono Susumu. This article grants us some important information about the religious situation in the time period we will be discussing, and goes into detail about how state Shinto was formed and how it differentiated from Shrine Shinto. It is not about weddings and the wedding of the Taisho Emperor is only mentioned in passing, but providing an extensive background on the setting in which these developments took place will be important in our research. (Susumu 2009)

The Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions by Brill may also prove useful. This source can give us valuable information on the modern state of Shinto and its marriages, which can be important to contrast them with the historical situation. They also have a section on the history of Shinto and how it was used by those in power in the early 1900s, which may be relevant to our discussion there as it mainly delineates who the actors were that crafted state and shrine Shinto, setting it apart from Shimazono Susumu’s text. (Inken Prohl 2012)

Lastly, there’s “Rituale und ihre Urheber” by Klaus Antoni. This book is about invented traditions in Japan’s religious history, and pays special heed to the creation of Japan’s wedding rituals. It also provides much useful information about how the Japanese government invented other aspects of the Shinto faith, and how they were popularized among the public. (Antoni 1997) This will probably be the source I rely on the most with regards to background information.

The Political Push for Shinto and the Divine Emperor

During the late 1800s, Japan had rudely been awakened from its decades-long isolation. It found itself in a world where the Western powers were colonizing virtually every other part of the world, and Japan had to modernize otherwise it would fall victim to the same fate. As such, Japan sought to emulate the West in many ways. They saw what Christianity did for the western powers, but since they were unwilling to adopt the faith of the Europeans, they had to come up with their own equivalent.

This led to the birth of state Shinto. Shinto was based on old folk religions that had existed alongside Buddhism for a very long time, but which had never been formalized into an organized religion. Shinto shrines were often located on the grounds of Buddhist temples, serving an inferior role. During the Meiji Restoration however, Shinto would be separated from Buddhism, and Shinto shrines would rise in importance. They were also crafted into a hierarchy with the grand shrine of Ise on top. (Loo 2010)

Some people argue that the idea of a Shinto faith was entirely a new construction from the Meiji era, while others argue that it was largely based on the shrine practices that came before. Shinto shrines had existed all throughout recorded Japanese history, but for much of that time they were only a part of a larger Buddhist temple complex. Shinto deities were often seen as incarnations of various buddhas, and had a subservient role to the buddhas. (Kikuko 2024) Only a few sites like the Ise Grand Shrine were purely dedicated to what is now known as Shinto, with little to no Buddhist influences. Rites like the Imperial coronation ceremonies were not Buddhist in nature, but it might not make a lot of sense to describe them as Shinto either, considering there was no unifying idea of what Shinto was.

Antoni argues that many of the traditions practiced at Shinto shrines are in fact a mix of new and old practices. The shrines, even if they were now supported by the state, continued to perform the role they had always played in the lives of the local populace. The same rituals would take place, now with more money from the government. (Antoni 1997, 128-130) At the same time, the shrines were placed in a hierarchy rather than each being an independent institution. Hereditary appointment of shrine priests was also banned in this time, even though this had been the practice in many places for a long time. (Antoni 1997, 132)

The ancient books the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki were used as the primary basis for this new faith, as they documented the legends and myths of ancient Japan. That included the myth that the Japanese emperor was the descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami.

In this new faith, the Emperor would be the one at the top. The phrase “expel the barbarians, revere the emperor” had been popular during the Meiji restoration, and so the Emperor was placed at the center of this new faith and thus the nation-building process.

The Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religion states that Shinto was in fact created to serve in propping up the Emperor. When Shinto shrines were separated from Buddhism, many Shinto priests lost their traditional source of income and had to become evangelists for the new organized religion focused on the Emperor. (Inken Prohl 2012, 96)

According to old Shinto myths, the Imperial line were direct descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu. As such, it made sense to have this god-like being at the center of the faith, and to use this status to tie the people together and build the country into a nation. The view that the Emperor was a divine being was propagated by the state until the end of the second world war, when the Emperor was forced to state that he was in fact not divine. This is also when his prominence in the nationbuilding process would fall off, as the new constitution imposed by the Americans separated church and state and did not allow the Emperor to play a role in politics.

Before the Meiji era, few people knew of the emperor though, and those who knew of him did not show particular reverence for the man. In the Kodomo Asobi prints from around the time of the Boshin War, the Emperor is often depicted as a toddler while the warring samurai clans are depicted as children at play. For example, in the image below, we see the Emperor depicted as a small child standing among bigger children representing the Samurai. This irreverent depiction of the Emperor would be unthinkable in later times, which shows just how much changed over the course of the Meiji era.



(Hara Shobo n.d.)

The image is an anonymous print from the Boshin war; the children on the right represent the victorious Imperial-aligned samurai clans claiming Edo/Tokyo with the far younger child at the center-front being the Meiji Emperor. The children on the top left are the forces allied with the Shogun who still resist the Imperial forces.

The emperor and the Shinto faith were used in nation-building to great effect; when the Meiji emperor ascended to power in 1867, barely anyone in Japan was aware of him, yet his funeral in 1912 left the nation in mourning. On paper, he was the head of the government, and was the ultimate authority in many matters. In practice, the real power was in the hands of the Prime Minister for the entirety of the prewar era.

The emperor was utilized as a kind of panopticon, where everyone would always feel they were seen by the authorities. (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* 1996, 25) To this effect, the Meiji emperor would often tour through his domain in the early years of his rule and show himself in front of crowds of people. During wartime, he would often praise the soldiers fighting abroad or returning home to show his involvement in the war effort. (Keene 2002, 488) In these ways, the imperial family became the ceremonial head of a unified nation, whereas before Japan had never had a sense of nationhood.

During this time, the Ise Grand Shrine, which had always had a key role in the coronation of new emperors, became the center of a hierarchy of shrines. Every state Shinto shrine would have a place in his hierarchical network, and shrines often sought to become official for the monetary benefits this provided for the shrines and the priests. Thus the state spread its influence through the religious landscape.

State Shinto would pick up steam in the years after the wars against China and Russia, around the turn of the century. Gradually, shrine worship would be absorbed into the state

religion, with shrines serving as places where the Emperor was worshipped. Citizens were expected to attend festivals at the shrines in the Emperor's honour, which according to official sources was not an act of religiosity but rather just a patriotic act. (Inken Prohl 2012, 96)

Many citizens enthusiastically embraced State Shinto, according to Susumu. People accepted the claims that through State Shinto, they were serving the Emperor, who descended in an unbroken line from the sun goddess Amaterasu. (Susumu 2009) The modernizers from the Meiji Restoration had thus successfully planted the seed in the populace and used state Shinto as a tool to unify the nation behind the Imperial family. (Susumu 2009)

Schools played an important part in the establishment of state Shinto in the hearts of the people. Early on, they got children to celebrate holidays related to the Ise Shrine, and to the Emperor, treating him as a divine entity. Schools were increasingly seen as a place where students would learn ethics, which led to strong ties between schools and state Shinto, as religion was deemed to be an important factor in forging the youth into patriotic citizens. (Susumu 2009)

The prominence of state Shinto would extend into Japan's colonial era. Japan would often set up shrines in places they had taken over like Korea or Taiwan, which would carry out the same bureaucratic functions as the shrines back home. They served as population registries, and answered to the hierarchy of shrines back home. (L'Hérisson 2021)

Not all scholars believe it is fair to refer to all Shinto religious activity at this time as "State Shinto" and some even think the term should not be used at all, as many shrines received very little of their funding from the state. Helen Hardacre writes that while up to the early 2000s most western scholars adopted the view that Shinto at this time was mainly a product of the state, many people have since come to call that narrative into question, as it assumes that Shinto was the only thing propping the Emperor and the nation up even though sects of Buddhism and Christianity also played a major role. (Hardacre 2016, 355-357)

The more accepted term nowadays seems to be "state-managed Shinto". This term acknowledges the role of the state in supporting and promoting Shinto, but circumvents the issues associated with the term State Shinto, namely the association that Shinto was solely responsible for the role that Emperor worship played in Japanese society around this time. (Hardacre 2016, 357)

The state itself would even deny that Shinto had any doctrines, so as to uphold that Japan had no state religion and was a secular state. This was not the reality on the ground though, with worship of the Kami taking place at most if not all Shinto shrines. Many shrine priests however felt that Imperial regulations placed on them in the prewar years stifled them in how they could worship the Kami. (Hardacre 2016, 403)

Often the priests at Shinto shrines would use their funding and privileged status to push their practices on the people, more or less forcing them to install a kamidana (a place in the home for worshipping Kami) in their homes and making them partake in shrine rituals, or else their loyalty to Japan would be called into question. (Hardacre 2016, 404)

Shrines in the early-mid 1900s were generally built with a combination of government funds and private investors. Shrines would often attract businessmen into their management ranks because it benefited the shrine financially and allowed it to better execute its functions as a religious and civil center. (Hardacre 2016, 404-405)

Even Buddhism was targeted in those days. Not only were efforts made to separate Shinto and Buddhism where they had never been seen as wholly separate before, Buddhism was also labeled as a foreign influence diluting Japanese culture. As such, many Buddhist monasteries and temples throughout Japan were defaced, their symbols and statues destroyed. Shinto was to be the true religion of Japan, as it was the only one that had sprung up within Japan itself. (Deal and Ruppert 2015)

The prominent place of state Shinto in Japanese life would come to an end with the resolution of the second world war, when the constitution that was forced on Japan by the Americans mandated a separation of church and state, or shrine and state in this case. Shrines that had formerly been a part of the State Shinto hierarchy would now operate fully independently as places of worship. (Inken Prohl 2012, 98)

The Emperor was also forced to declare that he was not divine in nature, and thus Shinto was divorced from the Imperial family. The Emperor is still an important figure to the Japanese people, but his role in politics and religion was finished.

Today, Japan is largely a secular society. Only a minority of the people see themselves as religious, though the majority do go pray at Buddhist and Shinto shrines. Most people still use Shinto shrines for rituals related to birth and childhood, but the government is entirely unrelated to this and any government officials who attend shrines must do so on their personal title.

Thus, we see Shinto and its role in society change throughout time. Shinto was set up from pre-existing folklore and united into an organized religion by the Meiji government. It was used to counterbalance Christianity and to unify the nation behind the Emperor, though other faiths also played a role in that. State Shinto however would often get special treatment over other religions, even the widely-established Buddhism. It was popular among the people and its reach even spread to Japan's colonies like Taiwan and Korea. It especially became prominent after Japan's victories in the first Sino-Japanese war and the Russo-Japanese War.

This lasted until the end of the second world war, when following Japan's defeat, the Americans forced the Emperor to admit he was not divine in nature. Shinto was thus divorced from the state and became just one of the various faiths practiced in Japan, alongside Buddhism and Christianity.

Early Imperial Weddings

The Taisho Emperor's Wedding

Essential to the new faith was of course the establishment of the institution of marriage. Christianity had marriages, and so Shinto needed them too. The natural way to promote this new way to get married, and the Shinto faith as a whole, was by having an important Imperial figure engage in it. And so, when the time came for the wedding of the crown prince, who would later rule as the Taisho Emperor, the perfect opportunity presented itself.

A lot has been written on traditions and how they come into being. As a general rule, traditions are newer than one would think. It is accurate to say that the rituals the Shinto wedding was based on were in fact new inventions that were made to look old, so as to give the impression that this is how things have always been even though they have not. A lot of the symbolism was also taken from western weddings, further showing the manmade nature of the proceedings. (Fujitani 1996, 118)

Kiyoshi Shida writes that the Japanese at the time saw their traditional weddings as an expensive and time-intensive affair, which often took multiple days. The new way of getting married, set up as part of the Shinto faith, was much simpler by contrast, becoming a symbol of modernization in the eyes of the people. Shida writes that the Shinto wedding ceremony did not become a true tradition until after the second world war, when the state's promulgation of Shinto stopped, because urbanization fractured the structures that still kept the pre-Shinto marriage traditions in place. (Shida 1999)

The wedding of the Taisho emperor was met with a great media circus, with papers all across Japan making a big deal out of it.

Many foreign dignitaries were invited to attend the Taisho Emperor's wedding, and a bank holiday was called in celebration of the event. If the newspapers of the time are to be believed, the whole country was celebrating this new step in the crown prince's life. The media produced several volumes of poems and images in celebration of this grand event. (The Japan Times 1900) All this media attention would of course encourage commoners to emulate these weddings, and to thus adopt the new Shinto practices into their own weddings.

These weddings contained elements from western weddings such as exchanging rings, but they also borrowed many aspects from the way Japanese weddings were done before. The people who designed these new ceremonies were heavily invested in propping up the Emperor as the central figure of the state and of the Shinto faith, so they tied the events at the Imperial wedding heavily to how things had been done at the Ise Shrine before. (Shida 1999) The Ise Shrine was the shrine of the royal family, which had always played an important role in coronation ceremonies.

Previous Imperial weddings, however, had never been held at religious institutions. The wedding of the Meiji Emperor, for instance, was held in the palace in Kyoto, in a manner that did not resemble the proceedings of the Taisho Emperor's wedding. (Antoni 1997, 40) It wasn't until the turn of the century that Japan established laws regarding how and where the Imperial weddings should take place, establishing Kashikodokoro Shrine in Tokyo as the place where these ceremonies were performed. The institution responsible for developing the new marriage rites was led by none other than Ito Hirobumi, the prime minister himself. (Antoni 1997, 41)

However, the push to craft a Shinto wedding ritual was not new, with voices in the Japanese government voicing a need for something like this throughout the Meiji period. In the 1890s, the voices calling for the standardization of marriages got mixed with nationalistic voices, who after the wedding of the Taisho emperor would work to make this the standard way of marrying throughout Japan. (Antoni 1997, 42)

Below, we see an image of the clothing the Taisho emperor wore on the day of his wedding:



(Wikimedia Foundation 2011)

We can clearly see that this outfit was meant to resemble traditional Japanese garb, as opposed to the western military uniforms the Meiji Emperor was commonly photographed in. It does however bear a resemblance to the outfit worn by the Meiji Emperor in photographs from the early part of his reign, seen below :



(Nute 2024)

This image shows the Meiji emperor in formal Japanese attire. He is wearing a wide kimono in a dark colour and is holding what looks like a scroll. He is wearing the same kind of hat as the Taisho emperor is in the previous picture; the quality of the picture means that one can confuse the adornment in the background for part of his hat, but this is not the case.

These outfits seem to be an attempt to connect the Japanese royal house and the institute of Shinto weddings to Japanese tradition, obfuscating their connections to the Christian marriage practices that were present throughout the wedding ceremony.

However, when we compare the image to the painting depicted below, we see that the colour does not match up. In his official picture, the future Emperor is clearly wearing dark colours, yet in this painting he is wearing white. This may indicate that the artist was not present at the actual event, and that the public had little knowledge of what the crown prince and his bride actually wore.



(Kasai 1900)

This image shows the wedding of the Taisho Emperor, with the newlyweds in the center. In the background, we see what appears to be the reigning Meiji Emperor and his wife observing the ceremony. We see various retainers of the royal couple, one of which is holding a pan. This may well contain the sake the couple will ritualistically drink at this occasion. The Taisho Emperor is dressed in white here, whereas the bride is dressed in elaborate gowns in various different colours.

Below we see an image of the bride on this special day. Her elaborate dress does seem to match what is depicted in the painting; we can clearly see the many layers she was made to wear that would have taken many hours to put on. The bride was only 15 years old at the time of the wedding, which was considered an appropriate age to marry at the time. Japan has since then raised the legal age for marriage, to 16 post-war and to 18 in 2022. She came from the Fujiwara house, which had had a significant role in Japanese politics for over 900 years at that point, dominating the Imperial household. The Taisho emperor was however the last emperor to date to marry someone from this once-influential house.



Source: <https://www.unofficialroyalty.com/emperor-taisho-of-japan-yoshihito/> (Flantzer 2019)

Fujitani writes that the rites used during the wedding ceremony were specifically designed to mirror what goes on in western monarchies. Since western royal marriages are generally religious affairs, so too should the Japanese royal weddings be religious in nature. (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* 1996, 117) However, these new marriages were the source of much confusion for those directly involved, with even the Meiji emperor not fully understanding what this new western-style marriage entailed. (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* 1996, 119) The idea of an Emperor being in a monogamous relationship was entirely new to many Japanese people, so they did not understand that this wedding would be the only wedding the future Emperor would take part in, or that his wife would automatically become the Empress upon his ascension to the throne. (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* 1996, 119)

In the days after the wedding, the newlywed couple would then go on a pilgrimage to various important Shinto sites, including the Ise shrine and the grave of the mythical emperor Jimmu, the founder of Japan. This was done in order to strengthen the idea that the Imperial line descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu in an unbroken line. (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* 1996, 121)

Thus, the Imperial household was used to blend tradition and modernity, dressing in modern gear when mobilizing the country to modernize but dressing in traditional gear when doing so was more useful for unifying the country, such as when popularizing Shinto marriages. The clothing the Taisho emperor wore during the ceremony specifically harkens back to emperors from before the Meiji Restoration, thus crafting a continuity with emperors throughout time, going all the way back to the mythical founders of Japan. Meanwhile, at the public reception, he wore a western military style uniform, thus acting as a blend between

western modernity and a handcrafted version of supposedly-ancient rites. (Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* 1996, 116-121)

Following the wedding of the Taisho Emperor, Shinto weddings would gradually gain in popularity.

Klaus Antoni has a lot to say about the subject of Shinto weddings and where the rituals originated. In his paper, he argues that wedding ceremonies are often the main source of income for Shinto shrines, (Antoni 2001) and that the Izumo shrine plays a big role in the related traditions. He writes however that this has not always been the case, specifically it was propagated by the priests of Izumo from around the late Tokugawa period. (Antoni 2001)

Antoni also describes how the weddings generally are carried out. Food is offered to the gods on the central altar, with the groom's family standing on the left of the altar and the bride's family on the right. The priest then reads out a prayer to the newlyweds, the groom reads an oath, and the bride adds her name at the end of the oath. Both families then drink the Sake that was blessed by the gods. (Antoni 2001)

The traditions of Shinto weddings are similar to Shinto purification rites, with the couple cleansing themselves with the Sake to ensure a successful marriage. In Shinto shrines, similar rites of purification have been practiced since ancient times to purify oneself before entering holy ground. We can thus see that the rites were not just attempts to copy western religious marriages; there were elements traditionally rooted in Shinto rituals involved too.

The Taisho Emperor's wedding thus formed the building block on which future Shinto weddings would be built. The imperial family's prominent position in society presented the perfect opportunity for those looking to craft this new tradition and strengthen the Shinto hold on the nation, and it also provided an opportunity for the people to rally around the future Emperor, thus further strengthening his position.

The rites were made as a parallel to Christianity, copying many aspects of the weddings conducted in that tradition while also adding in things to make this tradition truly Shinto. Media coverage was extensive and solidified this as the new way people would get married in Japan, while also further reinforcing this figure's ties to the sun goddess. Much thought was put into how he would dress and act at this event, even if many prominent figures, including the Meiji Emperor himself, did not fully understand what was going on here.

All in all, the wedding of the Taisho emperor was a great success in establishing this new way of getting married. It would gain prominence in the years to come, and would eventually become the dominant way Japanese people got married.

The Showa Emperor's Wedding

After the Taisho Emperor's wedding, Shinto weddings would gain in popularity and eventually become the dominant way of getting married in Japan, in part due to the support from the state. The dominance of Shinto in Japan's religious landscape meant that shrines could set themselves up as the main place to get married, while other religions like Buddhism and Christianity could not compete, and secular weddings also could not compete because of a lack of institutions that propagated such weddings. The fact that prominent figures would continue to wed through these new invented traditions also did not hurt matters.

We see at Imperial weddings that they were generally accompanied by a drive through the city, in which the crown prince and his new spouse would drive through Tokyo to greet the

masses. Newspapers describe how the Showa emperor had to drive through a Tokyo that had been devastated by natural disaster. (The Japan Weekly Chronicle 1924) With the Heisei Emperor's wedding, we can see on film what this kind of procession would have looked like, and how he greeted the masses.

Such events where the newlywed couple greets the masses were however not necessarily a feature of Shinto weddings, but rather of royal weddings, as similar things tend to happen in the western world when a monarch or crown prince or princess gets married. These things tend to dominate the media in the country the monarch rules over, and thus the monarch would want to spread his or her joy with the people to increase his or her popularity among the populace. We see things like this at royal weddings in the Netherlands, the UK and Belgium, among other places.

An interesting midway point between the Taisho Emperor's wedding and the end of state Shinto would be the wedding of the Showa Emperor. His wedding took place in January 1924, mere months after a devastating earthquake hit Tokyo. The Japan Chronicle article from just before the wedding took place remarked that this was the first time in a very long time that the bride was not of the Fujiwara clan, the tribe that had dominated Japanese imperial politics since the Heian era, before the time of the Shoguns. (The Japan Weekly Chronicle 1924) That same article mentions that many in Japan saw the proceedings of the Taisho Emperor's wedding as a break with the earlier Imperial traditions, one that would continue with the wedding of the Showa Emperor. (The Japan Weekly Chronicle 1924) This break of course indicates that people realized these Shinto-style weddings were not how things had traditionally been done, but rather they were a modern invention influenced by the West. The article even remarks how the Emperor's experiences going abroad will help shape the event. (The Japan Weekly Chronicle 1924)

The Postwar Growth

The Move to the Cities

After the second world war, Shinto became untethered from the state, and the government no longer had an interest in promoting it or its marriage traditions. Thus, for the first time, Shinto weddings could grow organically, not pushed by the powers that be. It would become the most popular way to get married throughout the decades that followed, becoming a true tradition as opposed to the false history that was forged into the earlier weddings.

While the government push for Shinto marriages ended with the separation of church and state in 1945, Shinto weddings would undergo their most significant growth in popularity in the postwar years. This is because in those years, Japan underwent large-scale urbanization. In the big cities, people were cut off from their roots and from the marriage practices that they had followed there.

We can see from population censuses that during the years from 1955 to 1965, big population centers like Tokyo and Osaka grew by over 20%, while the amount of people living in the countryside in many places decreased significant amounts as well. (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2012) People were moving to the cities due to increased job opportunities as the economy recovered and boomed following the war. The quality of life in the cities was often better than that in the countryside, so many people saw little option than to move and start a new life far from their old homes and their old traditions.

Their homes in the cities were also generally smaller than the homes they previously occupied in the countryside, which made it impractical for most people to hold a wedding ceremony at home. This meant that a venue such as a Shinto shrine was generally preferred, allowing Shinto weddings to gain in influence and almost monopolize the wedding trade. Part of the reason why it was Shinto shrines in particular that gained popularity among the newly urbanized masses was because of all the attention the government had given it in the prewar years, though other factors were at play as well that we will discuss.

Today, one can see in the statistics that homes in cities tend to be considerably smaller than homes in rural parts of Japan. In Tokyo prefecture, the average size of a house is 64 square meters as of 2023. In comparison, a rural province like prefecture has an average house size of 140 square meters, more than double that of Tokyo. (Statista 2024) This shows that people living in rural areas are more easily able to accommodate large ceremonies at home, whereas people living in the cities are generally cramped for space and will have to take their weddings elsewhere.

Newspaper articles from the 1960s and 70s confirm that rapid urbanization was taking place. A news article from August 21 of 1960 reports on the problems Japanese cities are facing due to the amount of people moving there in recent years, to the point where UN city planners had to come in and help the Japanese people reshape their cities. (The Japan Times 1960) There were also concerns about the preservation of traditions, with an article from 1961 commenting about how because of the small spaces of Tokyo homes, children were often living separate from their parents, thus breaking age-old traditions of extended families living together. (The Japan Times 1961)

We also see the papers raising concerns about the size of living spaces in an urbanized society, with one article reporting on how the small houses and no parks led children to play on the streets. (The Japan Times 1963) An article from 1970 further talks about how urbanization has destroyed tradition and traditional values, even interfering with people finding meaning in their lives. (The Japan Times 1970) We can see from these various articles that urbanization was a real and pressing issue that affected many aspects of Japanese society .

Thus, with more people moving into smaller homes in the postwar era, it comes as no surprise that they started doing things like weddings at venues. Traditional pre-Shinto weddings in Japan generally took place in the home of the newlyweds, with many guests coming to their home for the celebration. As smaller homes could not house the amount of guests one might want to invite to one's wedding, people would head for the wedding venues that in years past had been propped up by the government as the way Japanese people should marry.

The Heisei Emperor's Wedding

Part of the reason why it was Shinto that gained dominance in the wedding industry was of course its dominance in the media. A major wedding that was widely publicized around this time was that of the future Heisei Emperor, whose wedding was one of the first televised events in Japan.

This wedding, which dominated the media for months, heavily shaped how these newly urbanized people would perform their own weddings. The wedding itself took 15 minutes and took place in Keshikodokoro Shrine, in the Imperial palace. In the television footage we have, we can see the bride wearing a white dress similar to what is often worn in European Christian marriages. This dress was only worn when greeting the public and for the family

photo though; in the actual ceremony, the bride and groom both wore traditional Japanese garb as seen in the images of the Taisho Emperor's wedding. After the wedding, the pair drove through Tokyo for several hours to greet the public. (British Pathé 2014)

Curiously, the commentator on the British news mentioned that nothing in this wedding resembled a traditional western wedding, contradicting most academic sources on the subject. (British Pathé 2014) There is no footage of the vows themselves, but the news does spend a lot of time discussing how the bridal couple were dressed for the event. Following the ceremony, the couple would drive around Tokyo in a much simpler outfit. During this drive however, they got attacked by a republican, who managed to throw a rock at the cart and tried to drag the bride out of the cart. (British Pathé 2014)

This republican sentiment however was not broadly carried by the Japanese public; the Emperor's wedding to a commoner had done a lot to heighten public enthusiasm for the marriage. (British Pathé 2014) It should of course be noted that the British news report used here was not made with a Japanese audience in mind, and may have simplified or embellished things for their western audience. The reporter may have been unaware of the real history of Shinto weddings and their invention.



When we compare the video footage of the Heisei Emperor's wedding with the above image of the Taisho Emperor's wedding, we see that the same kind of outfits were used. It was mentioned in the news reel that the clothing the bride wore to the event took several hours to put on, so we can assume similar time was spent on the fancy outfits of the individuals in this picture.

We can see in video footage from the Heisei Emperor's wedding that getting dressed for these events was a time-intensive affair, with the bride taking three hours to fully dress

herself in her traditional garb. (British Pathé 2014) We can see on old pictures that this same garb was worn at the time of the Taisho Emperor's wedding. Most commoners' weddings would probably have been less elaborate than that though, especially in the postwar years when money was tight.

The image below, taken from the website of the Imperial Household Agency, shows the clothing the Imperial couple wore in full colour. When comparing this to the colouring of the outfits worn in the painting of the first Imperial wedding, we see that the clothing worn is not consistent between the two weddings. In this image, the orange worn by the Emperor somewhat resembles the shade of orange a Buddhist monk would wear, though obviously much more fancy than the simple garb mandated by that faith. The bride's dress looks considerably more elaborate, with many layers in various colours and patterns.

This is the dress that took over 3 hours to fully put on according to the news footage of the wedding. The way these royals wedded was probably not how the regular postwar Japanese did it, considering the widespread poverty in Japan in these postwar, pre-boom years. However, the way this event was televised and promoted in the media would have shown the people the ideal of a Shinto wedding; this union in the Shinto traditions of the previous monarchs showed a continuity with the past through these rituals that were invented a mere 60 years prior.



(Imperial Household Agency n.d.)

At this time, the Japanese government no longer overtly supported Shinto or its wedding ceremonies. However, the way the government had promoted it in the prewar years had cemented these wedding ceremonies firmly in the minds of the Japanese people. As such, when smaller houses and an uprooting of traditional life meant that people would no longer perform traditional weddings at home, Shinto weddings were there to take their place.

The imperial wedding taking place around this time and dominating the news for many months would have further helped Shinto take the lead, and in combination with the factors mentioned earlier, allowed for Shinto to take up about 90% of the market share with regards to weddings.

Shrines' Financial Incentives

A reason why Shinto weddings continue to be popular is of course the fact that Shinto shrines keep pushing them, as a means to make money. Shinto shrines rely on weddings for a large portion of their income, alongside things like donations.

These financial incentives motivate the shrines to market this as an age-old way of getting married, rather than the 20th century invention it actually is. These incentives of course tie in

with the previously discussed factor of people no longer being in touch with their ancestral wedding traditions, so they instead resorted to the Shinto weddings they saw on TV from folks like the Imperial family. The media helped the shrines in this by portraying this as the traditional way Japanese people got married.

Before the second world war, shrines had relied in large part on government funding to keep afloat, but in postwar times this source of income had evaporated due to the separation of church and state. To compensate for this, shrines had to look for other ways to make money. Through their role in the wedding business, shrines could manage to stay afloat on their own and not go under from the lack of funding and the dismantling of the institutions surrounding shrine Shinto.

It should be noted that shrines already had financial incentives to push Shinto weddings before they were untethered from the state. Government stipends could not cover all the costs associated with running a shrine, so extra income from sources like donations or hosting events were always welcome. However, shrines did not rely on these things as much as they did postwar, and so they had less incentives to go out and promote themselves as the traditional way to get married, especially considering that most people were old enough to know how young this tradition was.

Exact stats on how much money they get from weddings versus other sources are hard to come by, as religious organizations in Japan do not have to disclose their finances, (Green Shinto n.d.) but from what can be gathered, Shinto shrines earn a large portion of their income from the ceremonies they perform. Weddings are a large source of this income from ceremonies, with the wedding itself often costing the couple 80000 yen or 500 euros, and the wedding gowns costing many times that. One can see from the way they advertise these weddings that they propagate that this is the traditional experience, rather than acknowledging that these rites have only existed for just over a hundred years. [Rokusho Jinja 日付不明]

In 1970, 10 marriages took place for every 1000 inhabitants of Japan. [Statistica 2023] Japan's population was 105.4 million in that year. [Macrotrends 日付不明] Multiplying these numbers shows us that in that year, roughly a million people got married in Japan. The majority of these were Shinto weddings, held in one of the 81 thousand shrines found throughout the country. [Rodsshinto 2017] Assuming the prices were the same accounting for inflation, we can see the money to be made by Shinto shrines off of hosting weddings. We unfortunately do not know the expenses of Shinto shrines, so no math can be done to see just how important the money from weddings was for them, but it is clear that there is a big financial incentive for shrines to conduct and promote Shinto weddings, and market them as the traditional way to tie the knot.

This idea that Shinto weddings are in fact the traditional way Japanese people got married has historically been reinforced by the media. At the wedding of the Heisei Emperor, this was described as the traditional way Japanese people got married. At earlier Imperial weddings, the media still acknowledged that this way of marrying was a novelty, that was entirely new in the case of the Taisho Emperor's wedding or created in the last thirty years as of the Showa Emperor's wedding.

By the time of the Heisei Emperor's wedding though, things had changed. The media reporting on this event portrayed it as being fully traditional, in line with how the Japanese had always done things.

This continued with the wedding of the reigning Reiwa Emperor in 1993. The event was once again widely discussed in the media, both in newspapers and on television. However, due to the media being far more omnipresent in 1993 than it was in the 1950s, coverage was far more extensive than for any previous imperial wedding. We see things like commemorative coins being printed, speculation on the event's economic impact and other things related to the wedding being discussed at length in the papers leading up to the event. Unlike previous royal weddings though, no foreign royalty was present at the event, nor any foreigners in general. (Barger 2023) No video footage exists of the vows themselves; all we can see is the royal couple emerging from the shrine together.

This was also the second time a Japanese crown prince married a commoner, with the bride being a diplomat working for the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There were some fears that extremists and republicans might plan something at the wedding, but due to increased security everything went according to plan. (The Japan Times 1993) This stands in contrast with the wedding of the Heisei Emperor, where a republican managed to throw a stone at the newlywed couple.

Shrines will have used this wedding as an opportunity to market themselves, trying to capitalize on the popularity of the Imperial couple and the dominance of their Shinto-style wedding in the media landscape.

The Decline of Shinto Marriages

The above factors allowed Shinto to remain dominant in the wedding market for much of the 1900s, but around the turn of the century, things started to change. Shinto weddings started to lose ground and would eventually be overtaken by their Christian equivalent. Christianity makes up less than 2 percent of Japan's population, so the explanation for this cannot be found in demographics.

Shinto weddings used to make up over 90% of all Japanese weddings, but have fallen well below 50% in recent years. This, in addition to the fact that fewer Japanese people are getting married at all, poses risks for the future of Shinto marriages in general.

Government propagation of Shinto marriages had long since stopped, and the other factors mentioned in this paper applied to Christian weddings as much as they did to Shinto, with one exception: the Media. This development took place amid a shifting media landscape, where the traditional media now had competition from computers and the internet. While it is difficult to determine a causal link between these events, there is a significant possibility that exposure to Christian weddings in the online space meant that more people considered Christian weddings over Shinto ones.

People still pray at Shinto shrines at roughly the same rate as in ages past, with roughly 70% regularly visiting Shinto shrines and saying their prayers there. (CIA World Factbook 2023) This shows that like how the change in the wedding market is not caused by an increase in Christian practitioners, it is also not caused by Shinto decreasing in popularity. This further shows that the change in preferred wedding ceremony stems from societal developments unrelated to the country's religious landscape. It should be noted however that while many people pray at Shinto shrines, only a small minority of Japanese people self-identify as religious, which may be part of the reason why they no longer marry where they pray.

The only plausible cause for this change was thus the degree of globalization. Japan had always been a key player in the global economy, but it was around this time that cultural globalization intensified due to many barriers for communication across the globe being

taken away. Many aspects of American culture would spread across the globe at this time, including the way Americans married spreading to Japan. With the Internet taking off around the turn of the millennium and social media becoming a factor in the early 2000s, globalization intensified and cultural practices across the globe became more uniform.

It should be noted that fewer Japanese people are getting married at all nowadays. Whereas in the past it was the norm for everyone to get married, today many people in Japan opt to stay single or to live together without a formal marriage. Where in 1970 there were 10 marriages per 1000 people, that number has been gradually decreasing since with only minor upticks; in 2022, the number sat at 4.1 marriages per 1000 people. (Statistica 2023) There are many interconnected reasons for this, including the lack of work-life balance and the state of the Japanese economy, but those are too complex for this paper to dive into in detail.

In today's world, no one still connects these weddings to the Emperors of old who started the traditions. It is now simply a traditional way of marrying, with no connections to the state or to any particular ideology. What had started as a tool to support the nationbuilding process has outlasted that project, and now Shinto and its weddings stand on their own as much as any other religious tradition, with freedom of religion guaranteeing that it no longer has a special place in society. The imperial family still marries according to Shinto traditions though, and will likely keep doing so, as that institution tends to be bound to tradition for longer than the rest of society.

If current trends persist, then Shinto weddings face an uncertain future. With Christian weddings gaining an ever bigger share of the wedding market and the decline in the amount of marriages in general, it could very well be that Shinto-style weddings will all but within the next few decades. Though the future is of course unknown and a lot of things can happen to change the course of events. A new resurgence of "traditional" ways of living might cause Shinto marriages to make a comeback, or some other reinvention of tradition may prevent Shinto marriages from being relegated to the dustbin of history. We have seen throughout this paper that a multitude of factors came together to cause Shinto weddings to boom in the 1900s, so if a similar course of events were to occur, the current trends may be turned around still.

Conclusions

Thus, we can see that a variety of factors have influenced the developments in the popularity of Shinto weddings throughout the years. In the beginning, it was mainly the government pushing the weddings, using the popularity of the Imperial house to push their state religion of Shinto and introduce a ceremony for its adherents to follow. The wedding of the Taisho Emperor was thus essential in setting everything up, creating an equivalent of Christian weddings that the people could then emulate. State Shinto, being a faith newly crafted from the various religious practices native to Japan, had never had wedding practices before the powers that be decided to invent them.

Various factors influenced the creation of state Shinto, including the drive to have something akin to Christianity and the desire to prop up the Emperor as the father of the nation. There was much interplay between the figure of the Emperor and the creation of state Shinto, with Shinto propping up the Emperor and the Emperor becoming an important figure in state Shinto. It thus stands to reason that when the powers that be decided they wanted their new religion to have wedding ceremonies, they should use the Imperial family to promote them.

Before the Meiji Restoration, the practices now known as Shinto were not considered all that separate from Buddhism, and in many cases Shinto shrines were just part of larger Buddhist religious complexes. Only a few shrines like the one at Ise were truly separate from the Buddhist religious order. However, with Japan looking to set itself up as an equal to the west, it needed an equivalent to what the westerners found in Christianity. That equivalent would be Shinto.

Opinions are divided on to what extent the Shinto of the Meiji era was a new thing and to what extent it was built on the shrine Shinto that came before. Some say that, while the shrines now received funding from the state, they largely continued doing what they had been doing before. Regardless, many new traditions were invented for this new faith, weddings being among them.

Japan officially had a policy of freedom of religion, but unofficially Shinto was given much support whereas other religions like Buddhism had it difficult under the new regime. State Shinto was officially separate from shrine Shinto and had no official doctrine, but in practice the two were heavily intertwined and many Shinto holidays saw the involvement of local schools in shrine festivities. As such, it was able to establish itself in the wedding market much easier than other religions.

The Emperor was to play an important part of the new faith, as an equivalent of the Christian Pope. Much effort was made to get the people to love their Imperial house, and to get them to feel like it was ever-present. This was not just in an effort to propagate the new faith; the Emperor was also a useful nationbuilding tool in and of himself, serving as a father of the nation.

The wedding of the Taisho Emperor was thus the perfect opportunity to tie the Imperial house to a new tradition within Shinto: religious marriages. Marriages before this time had been secular in nature, generally practiced within one's own home. This new type of marriage was thus something altogether new, and even many prominent figures in Japanese society did not fully understand the implications of what was being done here. The Meiji Emperor himself did not understand that these weddings were supposed to be monogamous, showing just how new the concept was to him.

The media circus around the Taisho Emperor's wedding of course played a big part in popularizing these new weddings among the masses. They could see pictures of the newlyweds in their papers and could read in detail about how the event went down, allowing them to gain enthusiasm for this and emulate the future Emperor in their own weddings. Because of this, we would see commoners getting married in Shinto shrines just a little while after their crown prince did so.

Much care was put into the Crown Prince's appearance during this event, with him dressing in traditional Japanese garb for the duration of the ceremony to symbolize these rites' connections to the ancient past. In the public reception that followed, he would don western-style military gear, thus combining tradition with Western modernity.

The events surrounding the wedding of the Taisho Emperor did not just serve to prop up Shinto marriages, they also had an important role in legitimizing the Imperial house as being divinely ordained to rule over Japan. This was reinforced by the religious pilgrimage the couple went on immediately after tying the knot, which was reported on by all the media. All of the Shinto elements in the wedding also served to reinforce this idea, tying the Imperial family to the gods who created Japan.

The media reporting around the wedding of the Showa Emperor similarly served to bolster this new way of getting married. It was no longer new at the time, with the public having already seen this kind of wedding already 20 years earlier when the Taisho Emperor did it, but the media coverage around it and the following drive through town did a lot to convince a disaster-stricken Tokyo that the way these emperors were marrying was the way they should get married.

After the end of the second world war, the government was forced to stop pushing Shinto, as well as craft a barrier between church and state. However, contrary to what one might expect, Shinto marriages did not suffer from this and in fact flourished in the postwar era. There are several reasons why this happened, not the least of which was the rate of urbanization that took place around this time.

Because of the rate at which Japanese society was urbanizing, people were cut off from their local traditions, including the ways in which they used to get married. So the new city folk had to create new traditions for themselves. The Shinto weddings they saw on television will have played a big part in this, with the wedding of the Heisei Emperor being broadcasted to their televisions at just the right time for this kind of wedding to catch on and become the hegemonic player in the Japanese wedding market.

The wedding of the Heisei Emperor was the first Shinto wedding to be broadcasted on national television, and one of the first things to be broadcasted on Japanese television at all. For many Japanese people, this was the first time they could see these events with their own eyes, even if the vows themselves were not broadcasted. They could see for themselves the bride and groom going through the ceremonies and then greeting the people of Tokyo, and even the attack on the couple by a republican. All of this came at a time when the marriage market was in upheaval, allowing the kind of marriage that was just seen on TV to grab a large share of the pie.

We can thus see that Imperial weddings have had a big impact on the popularity of Shinto weddings both before and after the war. Before the war, they were used by the state to promote Shinto weddings and set up the traditions, so as to supplement the Shinto faith and make it into a Japanese counter to Christianity. Postwar, this was no longer necessary, but the prominence of the Heisei Emperor's wedding in the media did play a role in guiding the Japanese people towards Shinto weddings in a time when their traditional ways of doing things were no longer feasible.

During this time, Shinto weddings would start to market themselves as the traditional way for Japanese people to get married, rather than being seen as a combination of old-fashioned Japanese culture and modernity, as they were presented in the prewar era. This way of presenting things would in a way become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as it helped shape Shinto weddings into a true tradition rather than just something that was invented by the regime.

The sizes of Japanese homes in the city were much smaller than they were in the countryside, making it impossible for city folk to host the kinds of elaborate weddings that were common in pre-Shinto Wedding times. So they instead sought to marry at venues, and Shinto shrines were right there, looking to make money now that the state was no longer financially supporting them.

Shrines had a big reason for promoting Shinto marriages as the traditional way to get married, as a significant portion of their income derived from them. Exact numbers are not available to us as shrines do not have to make their finances public, but given the costs of having such a wedding and the amount of weddings performed per shrine, one can deduce that they will have had a significant impact on the shrines' financial health post-state religion.

The most recent crown prince wedding was the wedding of the current Reiwa Emperor. This wedding was the second ever to have the Emperor marry a commoner, which was a big deal as the royal family used to only intermarry with the nobility. By the time of this wedding, there were no longer any hints that this was not how it had always been done, in the media or elsewhere. For once though, no foreign dignitaries were invited; this was not a government-controlled means of propagating the Imperial house. Like with other weddings, the vows were held in private without media present; these were a personal thing between the bride and the groom, not something for the world to feast their eyes on.

By the turn of the millennium however, things started to change. A new player was gaining significant ground in the Japanese wedding market: Christianity. Due to a variety of factors, Christianity would overtake Shinto weddings and became the biggest player in Japan's wedding scene. One of those factors was the prominence of Christian weddings in international media, allowing people to come to associate churches with weddings despite less than 2% of Japanese people actually being Christians. Most people still pray at Shinto and Buddhist shrines though, rather than in churches. The increase in globalization as a result of the new prominence of the Internet also did not hurt Christian weddings in their rise to the top of Japanese markets.

If things continue on their current course, the future is bleak for Shinto marriages. Christian weddings are on a continuous rise, and Shinto weddings have already fallen way behind. As more and more people get married in churches, people will associate marriage more with churches than with shrines, leading to even more people picking church over the shrine. In the coming decades, we may thus see this tradition that has existed for over 100 years virtually disappear from everyday life. The royal family will probably continue getting married in these traditions for some time as that institution tends to be more bound to tradition than the rest of society, but commoners might stop marrying at shrines altogether.

All in all, Shinto weddings have undergone many changes throughout the years. From their start in the early 1900s, there have been political incentives for pushing these marriages on the people. This push caused Shinto to become a big player, but Shinto would not become the majority in the Japanese wedding market until after the second world war, and after Japan was forced to separate church and state. Around this time, an increase in urbanization led to people living in smaller houses and being cut off from their traditional way of living, which led to them seeking out wedding venues outside their homes. Shinto shrines heavily promoted their weddings out of financial interest, and their previously-established prominence in society worked in their favour and allowed them to gain control of most of the wedding market. It stayed that way until the turn of the millennium, when church weddings took the upper hand. Only time will tell how things will go from here.

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