



SHINTO

GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT

Shinto has strong sustainable guiding principles, learned from nature, and some of these are guiding forces in how companies invest and create their business strategies. It is on these that this paper concentrates.

Shinto is the origin and fundament that is unique to the Japanese way of life as well as the way of Japanese thinking since ancient times. This indigenous faith has about 400,000 Shinto shrines, large and small, throughout the country. These shrines are built largely of wood and form the heart of the villages and local communities of Japan. Often the only extensive areas where trees and greenery flourish in Japanese cities and towns are around shrines.

Shinto regards the land and its environment as Kami. In other words, Shinto sees nature as the divinity itself. People today often say, “Be gentle to nature” or “Be gentle to the earth.” But these expressions seem to Shinto like humanity’s arrogance, assuming humans can dominate nature and then ultimately “repair” it using technical-scientific means.

Environmental and investment guidelines in Shinto

The Shinto long-term environment plan in 2009 focused on managing religious forests and other assets in ways which are:

- Religiously compatible, based on values, beliefs, heritage and traditions.
- Environmentally appropriate, ensures that the harvesting of timber and care of sacred areas maintain the forest's biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes. Also, that those who manage the forest pay attention

- to environmental concerns, including recycling and non-use of pollutants.
- Socially beneficial, helping both local people and society at large to enjoy long-term benefits and providing incentives to local people to sustain the forest resources and adhere to long-term management plans.
 - Economically viable, means that forest operations are structured and managed to be sufficiently profitable, without generating financial profit at the expense of the forest resources, the ecosystem or affected communities. The tension between the need to generate adequate financial returns and the principles of responsible operations can be reduced through efforts to market forest products for their best value.

We often say that things look different depending upon where you are standing. Shinto suggests we should shift our point of view and look at our environment with a spirit of “reverence and gratitude.” And if we can extend this spirit to our neighbours, to people of Japan, to peoples of the world, and then to nature, transcending differences of thought, ethics, and religion, then it will serve to foster the criteria and morals indispensable for keeping our human life healthy.

Kiyoraka and Sunao: two key principles for economic (and all) decision-making

I. Kiyoraka

Each Shrine, or Jinja has its own ceremonies that vary with the seasons. Most have a very long history and are key to the maintenance of the tacit values inherent in Shinto. Yabuhara Jinja (in Nagano province, Japan), the shrine that has been handed down through my family, was founded in 680 AD and ceremonies have been held without change or break since then.

The most fundamental value is “Kiyoraka”, normally translated as ‘purity’. The location of a Jinja where the ceremonies take place, the ceremonies themselves, the officiants, and any other people involved follow the idea of Kiyoraka. In other words, everything in Shinto has to be Kiyoraka.

Kiyoraka plays an essential role in the decision making process in Japan – in private life as well as in business. Its significance stems from how Shinto regards human beings as part of nature and with the same roots. This idea is still very recognizable in contemporary Japan.

There is a saying among Shinto officiants that “first is cleaning a Jinja, second is cleaning it, there are no third and fourth points but the fifth is cleaning”.... Many purification ceremonies are held to make the place, space, the officiants and also the attendees “clean” and pure.

II. Sunao

In order to achieve the state of purity required of “Kiyoraka”, a person first needs to be mentally “Sunao”, which is another fundamental idea of Shinto. “Sunao” is typically translated as “honest” in English though what it rather more accurately means in Shinto is to make certain feelings “empty” coming from one’s unconscious and then being able to follow the principle of nature. The feelings which have to be empty in one’s unconscious to be Sunao are, for example, anger and regret because they represent negative influences from the past, and are a kind of delusion which doesn’t exist in the present. The feelings of fear, being afraid, doubt, and ambivalence are negative influence from the future and are also a kind of delusion. The feelings of conceit, pride, over-confidence and avarice are also kinds of delusion.

If people are Sunao and follow the principle of the vital force in nature, things are automatically successful and sustainable. However, it is not easy, because we humans are too easily caught up by our own emotions, social status and pride. Consequently our effort often goes in the wrong direction without us realizing, and the result is not sustainable. Shinto believe that being Sunao makes humans live in harmony and it brings sustainable prosperity, peace and happiness to the human world.

Shinto principles in Japanese companies

As of 2017, there are still 33,069 companies in Japan that were founded more than 100 years ago. Seven companies are more than 1,000 years old. Although it is not widely known, almost all these companies have a company-owned Jinja (Shinto shrine). Even the Tokyo Stock Exchange has a “Kabuto Jinja” where ceremonies are held every season.

For Shinto investors the notions “Kiyoraka” and “Sunao” could be the key driving force for people to construct the way to be sustainable from fundamental principles, and how to invest to achieve the goals of the SDGs.

These guidelines were created in collaboration with Masatsugu Okutani, a hereditary Shinto officiant and a businessman. He is the 25th successor to the Chief Officiant of Yabuhara Jinja (Nagano Prefecture), which was founded in 680 and spent many years working for Jinja Honcho. He has an MBA from the University of Wales, and now lives in France, helping international companies introduce Shinto values to their strategies.