Sofist 11 (2025): 27-59
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article
Geliş Tarihi /Received: 05.02.2025 -Kabul Tarihi /Accepted: 18.10.2025

Amongst Kami [神] and Tengri
A Preliminary Investigation into Japanese and Turkic Religiosities

Kami [神] ve Tengri Arasında
Japon ve Türk Dinselliklerinde Bir Ön Araştırma

Engin Enzaki

Abstract

In this article, it is aimed to make a comparative investigation between Shinto and Tengrism, to see if there is a historical similarity or a cultural link between them. The scope here is determined with a focus on two elements: (I) experience of sacredness and (II) notion of supernaturality of nature. Throughout the article, first, a framework which deals with a mythic sense of thinking is constructed around the concepts of hierophany and monomyth. Then it is continued to present some similar elements between Japanese and Turkic cultures which help deepening the investigation. With various linguistic, socio-cultural and historical similarities in these two seemingly separate semiospheres, it is aimed to find a viable path that will direct the investigation towards a resourceful and insightful comprehension regarding religiosities of Japanese and Turkic people. These two religiosities (Shinto and Tengrism) are not handled through religious essentialism or

Özet

Bu makalede, aralarında tarihsel bir benzerlik ya da kültürel bir bağ olup olmadığının görülmesi için Şinto ve Tengrizm arasında karşılaştırmalı bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yazının kapsamı, özellikle hem Japon hem de Türk dinselliklerinde ortaya çıktığı hâliyle doğaüstülük ve kutsallık deneyimiyle belirlenmiştir. Makalede öncelikle kutsalın açığa çıkışı (hierophany) ve monomit (monomyth) kavramları merkezinde mitsel düşünme ile ilişkili olan bir çerçeve kurulmuştur. Daha sonra gerçekleştirilen araştırmayı derinleştirecek Japon ve Türk kültürlerinde birkaç benzer öğenin sunumu yapılmıştır. Birbirinden görünüşte ayrı iki semiosferdeki çeşitli dilsel, sosyokültürel ve tarihsel benzerlikler ile, Japon ve Türk halklarının dinselliklerine yönelik derin ve zengin bir kavrayışa doğru araştırmayı yönlendirecek uygun bir yol bulunması amaçlanmıştır. Burada Japon kültürüne özgü yerel dinsel tavır olarak Şinto'ya; Türk kültürüne özgü yerel dinsel tavır

✉ enzaki.engin@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1687-1068

ideological fundamentalism, but rather through historical and cultural research which aims to surface possible parallels between them without taking these parallels at face value. After this, some of the problems these similarities have are laid down in further details, since one of the aims is to eliminate the similarities which are too general or too superficial, meaning not particular enough and exclusive only for Shinto and Tengrism. After dealing with these problems, some cultural observations which would enable the article to go further in its investigation are shared for further possible considerations. In the end, with some concluding arguments, the article embraces the narrative that, though the historical data in hand is insufficient, there is indeed a considerable amount of parallels between Shinto and Tengrism which gives ground to speculate that, these two, in their proto forms, might have derived from same sense of archaic Asian religiosity, or at least it might be philosophically feasible and advisable to go on a more detailed research on the matter in future.

Keywords: Asia, Culture, Mythology, Religion, Sacred, Spirituality, Supernatural.

olarak da Tengrizm'e odaklanılmıştır. Bu kısımdaki amaç Şinto ve Tengrizm arasındaki benzer karakteristik özelliklerin sunulup bu benzerliklerin kültürel ve tarihsel köklerinin keşfedilmesidir. Bu bağlamda, bahsi geçen bu dinselliklere dinsel özcülük ya da ideolojik kökencilik paradigmalarından yaklaşılmamış ama Şinto ve Tengrizm arasındaki benzerlikleri daha iyi anlamak adına, bu benzerlikleri yüzeysel bir şekilde ele almadan, tarihsel-kültürel bir araştırma yapılması amaçlanmıştır. Bunun ardından, özellikle aşırı genel ya da aşırı yüzeysel olarak benzerlikleri elemek için bu benzerliklerin sahip olduğu bazı problemler ile uğraşılmıştır. Bu kısımdaki amaç, sadece Şinto ve Tengrizm için geçerli olan ve sadece bu iki dinsel tavra özgü olan benzerlikleri ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu problemler giderildikten sonra, gerçekleştirilen araştırmada daha da ileri gidilmesini sağlayacak olan birkaç kültürel gözleme yer verilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, makale boyunca geliştirilen felsefi tutumla birlikte makale, eldeki tarihsel veriler yetersiz olsa da, Şinto ve Tengrizm arasında önemli ölçüde paralellikler olduğundan dolayı bu iki dinselliğin, en azından tarihsel olarak ilk formlarında, aynı arkaik Asya dininden türemiş olabileceği ya da en azından bu konuda gelecekte daha ayrıntılı bir araştırma gerçekleştirmenin felsefi olarak uygun ve tavsiye edilebilir olduğu görüşünü benimsemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Asya, Kültür, Mitoloji, Din, Kutsal, Tinsellik, Doğaüstü.

Introduction

Nature always expresses something that transcends it

Mircea Eliade, when explaining how there is a close connection between the experience of supernatural and the understanding of nature for the religious human, uses this expression above (Eliade 1987, 118). The religious human derives the sense of supernatural from what is natural itself; as the natural is, in its essence, the very manifestation of the supernatural, almost to the point where there is no distinction between natural and supernatural in the sacred reality of religious human. Namely, the very presence of nature can be seen as the divine proof of cosmos where existence has a sense of supernatural reality, in contrast to chaos which is profane and wherein not even a reality can be constructed.

> "When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world" (Eliade 1987, 21).

In cosmos, which is sacred, there is meaning, vitality, value, realness, life and a sense of existence; whereas in chaos, which is ultimately profane, it is not only that there are not any of those elements, but it is also altogether impossible for them to occur to begin with. According to Eliade, this is how the sacred works for the religious man. Experience of the sacred builds a reality and this is different than the profane, not only qualitatively but also ontologically. The duality of sacred and profane might indeed come in handy when we want to understand the essence of religious experience as a phenomenon (Eliade 1958, 28–30), since without the experience of sacred, there would not be any kind of religiosity at all. But this duality might also carry within at least two dangers which can cause a misunderstanding on the nature of religiosity.

First is the danger of losing the ability to recognize the different phenomenological layers of religiosity. We might lose this ability to recognize solely because of our choice to examine religiosity with this prede-

termined, dualistic framework. Whenever a contextless structure is valued more over content in a hierarchical way, there rises the possibility of missing out on something important. When something is forced to fit the mold, there might be some residues or deformity at the end of the process. This does not mean that one should continue without frames, as they are surely needed for things to make sense, but rather it means that one should be very careful about being improperly strict regarding the elasticity of these frames. It is probably better for these frames to be thought non-dogmatically (and in a non-essentialist way), just like any other formative products of human thought. These frames should never be taken as something fixed, constant, and static, no matter how convincingly they seem unchanging, transhistorical, transcultural, and transtemporal. Because even seemingly transhistorical and transcultural elements need history and culture contextually to spring forth in the first place. This was true for the first primitive humans who lived in prehistoric eras of the world, and it will be true for the last humans who will ever live. To exist means to be in a context; to be in a context means to belong to a paradigm; and to belong to a paradigm means to be bound to time in meaning. Therefore, even the ultimate state of being completely without a context (if such thing is possible) might act as some kind of context which enables any meaning to be. This is also true for sacred and profane. This means, it would not be proper to conduct the investigation here in an attitude of religious essentialism or ideological fundamentalism. Moreover, within mythic thinking, sanctity and profanity can be more intertwined and interchangeable than Eliade had thought of them to be (Enzaki 2025, 74–117). So, to avoid the first danger, it is just better to know when to use these contextually changing frames as formative factors, and when to abandon them altogether. Because there are times where the differentiation between sacred and profane is not enough or suitable to understand the phenomenality of religious experience.

The second danger is about the dogmatic presumption that the usage of this dualistic structure gets its power from. Based on both the formal and content-wise similarities in mythologic data between culturally non-related

societies which have no historical interaction or encounter, some researchers tend to see a common origin in prehistoric existence of primitive humans which constitutes a sense of psychic unity for whole humankind. Eliade shows this tendency through his theory of *eternal return* (Eliade 2005, 141–146) and J. Campbell does it with his borrowed idea of *monomyth* (Campbell 2004, 3–23). When one sees the striking similarities between not only the myths from different regions of the world which did not have any contact with each other, but also between the ideational mentalities and cognitive environments which those myths were born from, one really wonders if there is (or was) a common underlying set of mental themes and experiences, before starting to differentiate from one another culturally, historically, intellectually etc. This wondering assumes there must be an experience, just at the origin of all primitive humans, which must be phenomenologically same and one, for everyone, everywhere around the world. When Eliade says "it is possible that man's earliest prayers were addressed to the same heavenly father" (Eliade 1958, 38), he is talking from this presumption about an underlying pattern in human psyche which acts as a unifying unconscious structure for all individual humans. Or this is at least for all individual primitive humans who had lived in prehistoric era. The same assumption makes it possible for Campbell to read the myths through the lenses of archetypes and archetypal patterns (Campbell 1960, 30–38; Campbell 2004, 30–36) which are the building blocks of whole mythic structure in primitive human mind.

> "One explanation is that the human psyche is essentially the same all over the world. The psyche is the inward experience of the human body, which is essentially the same in all human beings, with the same organs, the same instincts, the same impulses, the same conflicts, the same fears [..] All over the world and at different times of human history, these archetypes, or elementary ideas, have appeared in different costumes. The differences in the costumes are the results of environment and historical conditions" (Campbell 1988, 60–61).

In this assumption, the common psychic ground is as universal as it gets. It goes beyond local, ethnological attributes and unifies the whole

reality of primitive humans together. Just like an understanding of abiogenesis unifies all living entities biologically, like how the theory of Big Bang unifies everything cosmologically, this assumption unifies the whole mythic reality of primitive humans together through these archetypes and archetypal patterns. For example, one can remember that both in the Greek myth of Orpheus (with his wife Eurydice) and in the Japanese myth of Izanami (with his wife Izanagi), there is a similar part which deals with the forbidden act of "looking back to wife as leaving the underworld" and this taboo's dire consequences (Shchepetunina 2017, 32–35). These kinds of similar motifs between mythological works of historically unrelated societies can be found in catalogues and indexes such as Motif-Index of Folk-Literature and Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index (ATU).

Here, the issue is about the meaning of the assumption, made from these kinds of similarities, regarding the concept of common origin. Can it be said that, just because Greeks and Japanese have some similar mythological themes, they share a common origin? Can these similarities be taken as clear-cut, indisputable proof for a common origin of mythic structure of primitive human psyche rooted in prehistoric times? Or should they be seen just as some similarities by chance in the prehistoric process of human's mythic way of thinking? Or somewhere between these two options? If so, then until how much similarity is attained, does this idea of common origin, even if it is an antinomy in its core, sound far-fetched?[1]

[1] We need to pay attention to this same problem also when we investigate the similarities between mythologies of cultures that are geographically in the same semiosphere. Therefore, we must be very cautious about how to interpret the similarities we find, for example, even in neighboring cultures, no matter how "deeply related" they may seem. And on the other end of the spectrum, we also need to be cautious about seeing general elements of world mythologies as if they were some exclusive elements which belong to only specific cultures. The problem of overgeneralization and improper particularization might be one of the main obstacles which throw us off the track in our endeavors to understand mythic thinking and mentalities which created the mythological sense of the world. Unfortunately, this cautious approach is also something that sociologists and anthropologists, who've been conducting their comparative research between Turkic and Japanese mythologies and cultures, sometimes mistakenly overlook or completely lack of (for an oblivious example of this mistake, see Kara & Teres 2014). Here, we will try to avoid and overcome

Though this idea of common origin is speculative and probably unlikely, it is still worth considering that finding correlations between non-related societies might help us understand better the different layers of the cultures taken into consideration. Here, while minding these two dangers, we will investigate a possible correlation between Shinto and Tengrism, focusing on the nature of religiosity, through examining some similarities between them.

Between Turkic and Japanese Cultures

If we want to think about Shinto and Tengrism, it means that we will think about the Japanese and Turkic cultural environments. This is because these two religious attitudes are generally associated with these two cultures. Shinto, being indigenous religion of Japanese people (Ono 2003, 111) and Tengrism mainly referring to the historical belief in Tengri which is considered as the primary deity of early Turkic peoples (Roux 2011, 128).[2] Regarding these cultural environments (Japanese and Turkic), two common, rather superficial, features come to mind first. One is that, obviously, both cultures belong to Asian semiosphere. This means we can find general characteristic elements of Asian world both in Japanese and Turkic cultures, such as ancestral worship and cosmological understanding of three realms (heavens, earth and the underworld). Surely, though they are both in Asia, they are relatively non-related. While one is on western and central Asia (with Turkish culture representing the western side of Turkic environment which covers a vast area in central Asia including societies such as Altai

these issues by embracing a philosophical perspective which emphasizes on understanding mythological elements in their own historical contextuality, without trying to force these elements into implausible narratives.

[2] Surely, it is also possible to talk about, particularly, for example, Mongolian Tengrism (which dates to 13th and 14th century) as well. But the notion of Tengrism generally refers to the Turkic Tengrism (which dates to 4th and 5th century) with relation to the Göktürks, the First Turkic Khaganate. Though the historical-chronological origins of Turkic and Mongolic mythologies related to Tengrism might be different, these mythologies are deeply intertwined and fused with each other (Toyşanulı 2020, 17–23). Of course, this does not mean that there are not any essential differences between Turkic Tengrism and Mongolic one, because there definitely are, and we will mention these differences in the following pages.

people, Azerbaijanis, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz people, Turkmens, Uyghurs, Uzbeks, Yakuts etc.), the other (Japanese environment) is on the Northeastern end of Asia. They are relatively non-related because of the second common feature that came to mind. It is that they both are historically two big cultural basins neighbouring Chinese culture (which they both affected and are affected by), again on different frontiers. Not only geographically, but also culturally, there was a very big, influential Chinese world between them, kind of blocking Turkic and Japanese cultures to interact more with each other. And their interactions with this Chinese world (especially the effects of Taoism and Buddhism coming from China) were decisive at different points in the historical progress of these two cultural basins.

When we want to find more common features between Turkic and Japanese cultural environments, we need to look further from different aspects. For example, from a linguistic perspective, Turkic and Japanese were once thought to be part of same Altaic language family (see, Miller 1971), but this hypothesis does not get many supports at least for the last forty years (even its Macro-Altic form of Transeurasian language family is subjected to heavy criticism). But surely, the current consensus is that, though the familial origin of these languages might be different, the linguistic similarities result from them being within the same diffusion area (see, Tekin 1993). Therefore, though they do not belong to the same language family, they still share a common linguistic field (*sprachbund*) where their languages have been historically in interaction with each other. One can find the results of this interaction on the similarities within vocabulary and grammatical features of these languages (see, Şener & Takahashi 2010; Özbek & Kira, 2019).

Another common feature between Turkic and Japanese cultural environments might come from their interactions with Altai shamanism, around 4th century in Japan (Drury 1996, 50; Harva 2015, 69–70)[3] and

[3] Though Harva's narratives and interpretation regarding early Turkic people's cosmogony understanding is faulty (because these narratives and interpretation are too Eurocentric and lack of the comprehension regarding some folk mentalities of early Turkic people),

around 5th century in early Göktürks (İnan 1986, 4).[4] Though weakly, this interaction with shamanism also indirectly relates ancient religious reality of both Japanese and Turkic cultures.[5] Surely, more common and relating features between these two cultures can be found, but there is one correlation which is most intriguing and surprisingly least examined in anthropological and socio-religious studies in comparative fields. It is the correlation between Shinto and Tengrism in early ages (approximately between 4th and 9th centuries), especially in the context of religiosity, understanding of nature and experience of the supernatural (Kalmanson 2017, 29; Bayat 2022, 194). It seems that, Shinto, before being heavily affected by Buddhist and Daoist elements [especially before the continuous occurrence of 神仏習合 (Shinbutsushūgō) in history] and Tengrism, before being affected by the metaphysical values of Buddhism, Daoism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity etc. (and especially before being significantly suppressed by the acceptance of Islam as a religion in steppes of central and western Asia), might have more core similarities than one might expect of them to. Now, to understand how deep these similarities go, it is necessary to look at the general correlations between Shinto and Tengrism in that early era first.

---

his work is a rich and fundamental source for Altai/Turan mythological-cultural world and this world's historical effects to cultures in proximity (see Harva 2015, 21 and 151).

[4] While Japanese and Turkic cultural environments were affected by Altai shamanic practices, this interaction opens a further question regarding the relation (I) between shamanism and Shinto; and (II) shamanism and Tengrism, in general. In early periods, was a kannushi (神主) a shaman? Is Shinto a shamanic religious attitude? Was Tengrism a shamanic religious attitude? If yes, to what degree and in which context? As we will deal with these questions later, it is obvious that they will help us problematize the different layers of the relation between Shinto and Tengrism in a more detailed way.

[5] Though the full historical extent of shamanism in Japan is not our main concern here, it still must be mentioned that Altai shamanism is not the sole aspect of shamanism in Japan. There actually were two main sources; one was Altai influence coming down from North, through Korea and Hokkaido, and the other was coming from South, from Polynesia or Melanesia (Blacker 2005, 9). An investigation of this southern influence might also help us understand the differences between the shamanic factors of Japanese and Turkic cultural basins further.

Shinto and Tengrism

It is generally known that if one wants to deal with the history of Shinto, it is possible to go back to the earliest texts such as *Kojiki* (8th century), *Nihon Shoki* (8th century), *Man'yōshū* (8th century), *Kogo Shūi* (9th century), *Engishiki* (10th century) and *The Tale of Genji* (11th century). The same goes for the Tengrism as well with the earliest texts such as *Orkhon Inscriptions* (8th century), *Tonyukuk Inscriptions* (8th century), *Irk Bitig* (9th century), and later some more such as *The Secret History of the Mongols* (13th century), *Book of Dede Korkut* (14th century), *Altan Tobchi* (17th century) and *Erdeniin Tobchi* (17th century). These texts give us some crucial information about the mythological and religious details of Shinto and Tengrism. And these details further enable us to have some insights into the underlying understandings and mentalities that Shinto and Tengrism had.

Some of these details and insights might be obvious generalizations. Though a generalization always carries the danger of overgeneralization, therefore the danger of missing some central determinations, it can also be functional in hinting where to look and dig deeper (and where to stay away from and not dig at all). Therefore, it is always better to be aware of these generalized similarities, while keeping in mind not to take them at face value. For example, it can be said that both Shinto and Tengrism are animistic and polytheistic (Ponsonby-Fane 2004, 1–5; Aliyev 2020, 12) religious attitudes. Or both Shinto and Tengrism can be called "nature religion" in the broader sense of the word religion (Scheid 2013, 19; Kasulis 2004, 92; Taşağıl 2015, 84–85). They both do not have a founding figure, like Buddha in Buddhism or Moses in Judaism, and their texts are not canonical (Yamakage 2006, 51–52; Gültepe 2015, 37–44) in the strict sense. They can both be regarded as shamanic or non-shamanic, depending on the same definition of shaman applied to them (Hardacre 2017, 22; Bayat 2006, 21–27). They do not have a definitive character of preaching by a religious authority figure (Herbert 2011, 108; Radloff 2008, 34–39). They both have a direct historical interaction with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, as they were indigenous religious attitudes neighbouring Chinese world (Reader 1991,

29; Tanyu 1978, 17–30). They can both be regarded as relatively non-dogmatic about the metaphysical character of nature and reality compared to major religions such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism (Rankin 2010, 28).[6] They are both closely associated with myths and legends, as their roots go deeper within pre-historic eras (Jun'ichi 2014, 159–162; Çoruhlu 2000, 16). They are both associated with national identity and national origin of a nation (Ono 2003, 111; Uslu 2014, 75). They both have nature-oriented and nature-loving characters which emphasize a harmony between humans and nature on a deeper level (Holtom 1938, 5–6; Rots 2019, 55; Taşağıl 2015, 36–37). They are both life-affirming regarding the life compared to attitude of Abrahamic religions which cherishes the afterlife more in a hierarchical way. And they both are optimistic regarding existence and reality, compared to Buddhism which has a rather pessimistic take in general (Rankin 2010, 12; Yörükan 2005, 92). They also are not morality-oriented, which means

[6] As a proof for this non-dogmatic character of Tengrism, we can consider two historical conditions. One is the nomadic or semi-nomadic character of Turkic people in the historical era that we focus on. Being dogmatic is rather a feature of mentality which thrives on within settled or non-migrating people, as being dogmatic can be useful in building power relations between different sections of social structures through legitimizing and de-legitimizing different elements which try to establish themselves in a fixed manner. Being dogmatic can serve to the process of justifying the social mentality which gives authority to some institutions (or take that authority away from them). In this sense, being dogmatic can be even functional in the social reality of settled people. But for nomadic or semi-nomadic people, being dogmatic would be rather meaningless, since it would have no use or place in a nomadic society. This is not only because there is not any sufficient redirectable wealth accumulation, but also because nomadic societies usually do not have social institutions which deal with some form of abstract conceptualization or theorization (York 2003, 11–12). The second condition is that, though we can group the ancient people lived in central and Western Asia under the term "Turkic people" through some common religious features, it is an indisputable fact that those folkloric societies living in that region and era had more differences than similarities between them regarding their folk beliefs and rituals (Harva 2015, 14–15). It would be impossible for these divergences and diversities to exist if Tengrism had a dogmatic character. If Tengrism had a dogmatic disposition, we would have encountered with a Turkic group of societies which had more uniformed and unified character, since a dogmatic attitude usually singularizes and monopolizes through eliminating most of the diversifying elements. The historical condition of Turkic people having very diverse religious attitudes towards nature and reality tells us that Tengrism had more of a non-dogmatic character.

they do not really have a core moral theory which would have given them a moralistic character, unlike Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism etc. which have fundamental moral and ethical codes that are inseparably inscribed to these religions' creeds (Nelson 2000, 7–8; Toyşanulı 2020, 70). Surely, if we take a closer look at Shinto and Tengrism, we can find out other general similarities as well. And some of these generalized similarities between Shinto and Tengrism might be the starting points for us to search for deeper correlations between them.

But once we start to take a closer look at Shinto and Tengrism, to find some other similarities, we inescapably encounter the fact that these generalizations about them are true only to a certain point. A certain point where these generalizations are almost on the brink of being wrong. Moreover, this point shows us that these generalized similarities are not only almost wrong, but they are also completely useless in reaching a deeper understanding of what Shinto and Tengrism are or were. The generalized similarities that were supposed to trailblaze our path are now the very obstacles that we need to overcome first, if we want to continue.

Problems of Similarities

We say Shinto and Tengrism are nature religions in the "broader sense" of the word religion. We say this because we know that neither Shinto nor Tengrism are religion in the sense that Christianity, Islam and even Buddhism are (Picken 1994, xxiv–xxv; Eriş 1997, 199). In the "narrow" sense of the word "religion", we usually think of a conceptualized doctrine and a religious creed which have a centralized, organized, systematized and institutionalized structure. And surely, despite some exceptions, neither Shinto nor Tengrism fit well with this description between 4th and 9th century. For Shinto, this kind of structuration came much later, approximately starting in 17th century with the establishment of early modern state in Edo period, continuing stronger with Shinto Revival (復古神道) in 18th century especially through Kokugaku (国学) scholars, and peaking in the second half of the 19th century with Meiji restoration until Second World

War (Breen & Teeuwen 2010, 52–65). For Tengrism, this kind of structuration has never happened, at least to not same extent, as it was already repressed (almost into oblivion) in Turkic societies by religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Manichaeism etc. as early as 11th century (Taşağıl 2015, 212; Gömeç 2011, 7–18). Therefore, Tengrism has never accomplished being an organized, institutionalized system of religion at all.[7] This means that when we consider Shinto and Tengrism, with their historical situation between 4th and 9th century, neither of them was a "religion" in the narrow sense of the word, as neither of them was associated with the idea of religion in that sense.[8]

---

[7] This surely does not mean that Tengrism then just refers to a collection of a few non-associated tribal rituals and proto-religious practices without a sophisticated understanding of nature. On the contrary, for example, one of the main reasons why the religious attitude of early Turkic people was more than just shamanic practices was that this religious attitude was already attuned and integrated to the complex social structure of those people and the wide extent of that structure. We should keep in mind the fact that even before the first unification of early Turkic people, i.e. the First Turkic Khaganate (Göktürks), Tengrism was the main religious attitude of most of the societies in central and western Asia. Shamanic practices and rituals might be enough to provide a sense of religious fulfillment and attunement for groups of people in small local areas, but when we consider the vast geographical regions that early Turkic people and Göktürks had covered, it is obvious that shamanic features were never be able to enough to create a sense of religious commonality that binds and bears of that social structure (İnan 1986, 1–2). Therefore, even though Tengrism did not have the historical chance to be an organized, institutionalized system of religion, like Shinto did, it was never an unimportant, non-influential, irrelevant, small-time religiosity that affected only a few people. After all, Tengrism was the dominant religious attitude in central Asia for so long, with peaking in Göktürks between 6th – 8th century, and later, in Mongol Empire between 13th – 14th century (Akgün 2008, ix–xiv).

[8] Even today in Japan, with all its institutionalized shrines and organized religious structure in Japanese society, especially senior Japanese people still tend to think Shinto not as a religion, but more as a folk way of believing in and paying respects to kami. The clear proof for this is that when they are casually talking about Shinto elements such as jinjas (神社) and customs of clapping, bowing (二礼二拍手一礼) etc. in friendly conversations, as soon as they hear the word "religion", shūkyō (宗教), they, rather unconsciously, start to steer the conversation immediately towards Buddhist terminologies and elements (see, Isomae 2014, 29–36). And as for Tengrism, though now most of the Turkic societies have already embraced religions like Buddhism, Islam, Christianity etc., many elements of Tengrism manifest themselves in these people's folkloric customs, traditions, cultural mentalities, historical conventions, nationalistic heritages etc., almost always in a way that is deeply inscribed into their collective unconscious (see, Akpınar 1999, 59–81).

Another generalization that we encountered was that both Shinto and Tengrism are polytheistic. We say this mainly because of two reasons. First is that on one side, we know about *kami* in Shinto which are more than one can count (Picken 1994, 121); and on other side, we know about *iye* and *tengri* (or *tngri*) in Tengrism, again countless in number (Bayat 2022, 43–192). Second reason is that we are culturally inclined to think of the term polytheistic in contrast to monotheistic. And we say, since it is obvious that Shinto and Tengrism are not monotheistic, then they must be polytheistic. We say they must be polytheistic, but we are already aware that this adjective "polytheistic" is problematic, because when we think of *kami* or *tengri*, we already feel that we are not thinking about gods, goddesses or deities who have the power of absolute creation (out of nothing) whose origins are outside nature and who belong to a sense of transcendent pantheon. This awareness clearly shows itself in the linguistic fact that we do not translate *kami* or *tengri* into English directly as "gods" or "deities" but keep the original terms.

> "Kami is often translated as 'god' with a small 'g.' This is usually taken as grounds for claiming that the religious culture of the Japanese is polytheistic. However, in the Japanese language, singular and plural are not distinguished as they are in Indo-European languages; and although there may be many kami, they all share the same character. Kami thus refers to the essence of many phenomena that the Japanese believed were endowed with an aura of divinity. Rocks, rivers, animals, trees, places, and even people can be said to possess the nature of kami. Anything that can inspire a sense of wonder and awe in the beholder, in a way that testifies to the divinity of its origin or being, can be called kami" (Picken 2008, xxii).

The same problem occurs when we try to understand the hierophanies of Tengrism where there are not really gods or deities but sacred "spirits" of nature (Cihangir 2015, xxiii–xxv) which were not ontologically distinctive or different from the forces or elements of nature itself. When early Turkic people were talking about *tengri* and *iye* (such as Ülgen, Kayra, Umay, Erlik, spirits of Earth-Water etc.), they were expressing the experience of dif-

ferent elements of nature (such as sky, mountain, river, tree, sea, soil etc.) as sacred manifestations, i.e. hierophanies. Those names and words did not designate gods and goddesses which were something other than those elements of nature. These names were not for otherworldly, personified supreme beings with sense of agency or deific, metaphysical beings with a strict, unearthly individuality whose beings (or origin of their beings) were outside nature. On the contrary, when early Turkic people talked about, for example Kök-Tengri, they were talking about sky as a sacred phenomenon (Ögel 1995, 146–151). When they were talking about the *iye* (spirit) of a mountain or a river, they were talking about that mountain or that river as a hierophany (Radloff 2008, 249–253). That was how these early people saw and experienced the world around them.[9] But some scholars, deliberately

[9] Experiencing the phenomenality of nature (or reality) in this way is one of the most misunderstood aspects within studies and research focusing on Tengrism or religious attitude of early Turkic people. For us, it is obvious that this misunderstanding is not only due to lack of proper comprehension of this early religious reality, but it is also due to the narratives that the researchers or scholars tried to embrace regarding Tengrism or this early religious attitude. The reasons for this misunderstanding can be gathered under three categories. First one is about the indoctrination and assimilation. Especially first in 13th century and then after 19th century, some Islamic researchers coming from Turkic societies, through their opinionated and partial interpretations, tried to place a sense of monotheism in this Tengri belief to deliberately create a false narrative which sees "a primitive and early form of monotheism which was suitable to the one supreme god belief in Abrahamic religions". As they tended to reformulate these spirits of nature as "angels" in Abrahamic religions, these Islamic scholars deliberately and willingly tried to see Tengri belief as something like "Turkic monotheism before Islamic Era in Turkic culture" which was not only wrong and corrupted but also disrespectful to the Tengri belief itself. These scholars aimed to historically justify the presence of Islam in Turkic religious reality. They tend to see the acceptance of Islam into Turkic culture by Turkic societies as some kind of smooth historical transitions, whereas historical records show that neither "one supreme god belief" nor the Islamic values coming from Arabian and Persian cultures were suitable for the Turkic societies (see, İnan 1986, 27–29; Tanyu 1978, 30–32). The same assimilation happens between Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity etc. and Tengrism as well (Gömeç 2011, 11–18). Especially The assimilation of Tengrism with Buddhism can be seen in a somewhat similar character with Shinbutsushūgō (神仏習合) in Japanese society between Buddhism and Shinto. Second category is about the lack of familiarity. Researchers and scholars who focus on Tengrism, especially the ones from Soviet Union and Russia, were simply not familiar with the historically and locally shaped elements of Turkic religious culture, so they mistakenly interpreted Tengri belief

or mistakenly, still saw some form of "monotheism" in ancient Tengri belief, especially attributing a special condition to the *Kök-Tengri* (sky tengri or tengri of sky).[10] Since Kök-Tengri was also related to the experience of

either as another form of shamanism which belongs to primitive tribes, or as some form of a polytheistic spirituality (similar to the one in Ancient Greece or like in Hinduism). Because of the lack of familiarity of these scholars and researchers with Turkic culture, they misread the Tengri belief which (1) does not have deities or gods (as in Ancient Greece) but have spirits of nature, and (2) does not have a metaphysical understanding which undervalues the current life through a conception of reincarnation of one's "self" (ātman) or soul (as in Hinduism). These early research by scholars from non-Turkic societies therefore unfortunately, inescapably tend to miss some essential aspects of Tengri belief, because of their lack of familiarity with Turkic cultures (see, Cihangir 2015, xiii–xxv). Third category is mainly related to time for needed research. Though the word "tengri" is older than Orkhon Inscriptions itself, the term "tengrism" is relatively newly coined term which only dates to the second half of 19th century, first used by Kazakh ethnographer Shoqan Walikhanov. Therefore, understanding the religious reality of early Turkic people through the Tengri belief still needs a proper comprehension to overcome lots of false conceptualizations and ideas regarding what this Tengri belief is. This proper comprehension can come only through extensive research which take time.

[10] First half of the special condition of Kök-Tengri lies in a simple misunderstanding regarding this word. Some scholars mistakenly understand this word as a proper noun, whereas it was a common noun. It is simply a mix-up. Kök-Tengri is not a proper noun for a tengri. Kök-Tengri means "tengri of sky" or "sky tengri". It is true that in Tengrism, there are proper nouns for some tengri, such as Umay, Kayra, Ülgen, Mergen, Erlik etc., but Kök-Tengri is not one of them. It is like the difference between the proper noun "Amaterasu" and common noun "goddess of the sun" for the same kami. Kök-Tengri is the common noun, and historical records are not clear about the proper noun for this tengri. Second half of the special condition of Kök-Tengri is that it was mentioned by khans and khagans such as Bumin Qaghan or Genghis Khan in a highly exalted way (Gültepe 2015, 404). These sovereigns mention Kök-Tengri to implicitly justify their authority as Kök-Tengri was a special tengri whose features and cultural associations were perfectly suitable to legitimize the power of the sovereign. But all this surely should not be enough to think that Tengrism was monotheistic. To put this into perspective, one can imagine how absurd and wrong it would be to claim that "Shinto is a monotheistic religion because Izanagi is a special kami who has a different place among other kami". In a very similar way, suggesting that "Tengrism was a monotheistic attitude because Kök-Tengri was a special Tengri who had a different place among other Tengri" has the same sense of absurdity, since it completely misses the essential character of early Turkic people's religious reality. That is why, even though these Islamic scholars' extensive works regarding Tengri belief of early Turkic societies are important history-wise; their opinionated assumptions, intentionally partial deductions and deliberately false claims in these works are usually malicious and felonious, because their motivations do not care reaching to a proper comprehension of

universe as a hierophany, (because the sky covered everywhere around), it was open for false interpretations, especially for some Islamic and Christian scholars who were deliberately seeking chances to put some form of "one supreme god" belief into cultures without Abrahamic religions. These scholars found it easy to interpret this "sky tengri" as an early form of "one true god" belief, and to understand the acceptance of Abrahamic religions by Turkic societies through this false narrative (Gültepe 2015, 523; Ayaz 2020, 223; Aliyev 2020, 13–14), whereas the religious reality of early Turkic people was different. Some scholars already made their critiques about this false "early Turkic monotheism" narrative, pinpointing towards the historical and cultural features that make this narrative impossible (Akpınar 1999, 11–25; Roux 2011, 21–25; Çoruhlu 2000, 16–20). These critiques have two main stances: (1) Tengrism was not a monotheistic belief; (2) it is impossible to decide whether Tengrism was a monotheistic or polytheistic belief. From the first point, scholars tend to see tengri belief as polytheistic, from the second point, scholars stop themselves from making a clear judgment about the religious character of tengri belief and they start to hover around the possible philosophical interpretations of concepts like *urmonotheism* and *henotheism*, but even these concepts are not suitable to understand the religious reality of early Turkic people. In the end, consensus is that the framework "monotheism–polytheism" is not applicable to tengri belief. From a certain perspective, the same "monotheism" narrative is also problematic for Shinto as well.

> "All these peculiarities make it easier to understand the statement made by quite a few Shintoists that, to a certain extent, their religion is essentially monotheistic. It might be more accurate, however, to accept Mason's qualified description: 'Shintô shows a strongly felt subconscious intuition that beside the individual expressions of Divine spirit there is a coordination of Divinity.' (523) This would be consistent with a more precise explanation by a contem-

this Tengri belief, but they care about interpreting the historical reality of Tengri belief in a way (even if this interpretation is dead-wrong) that would justify their ideological stance and religious agenda. Therefore, their interpretations and remarks on this matter are not worthy of being taken seriously at all.

> porary Japanese author: 'The eight myriads of Kami of our country are not separate; they are unified into one centre, [..] It should be noted, however, that this belief in one 'centre', in which all Kami are 'unified' should not be taken too literally. One other and no less authoritative Shinto writer declared recently: 'Shinto does not preach a monistic God behind these Kami, underlying and comprehending them.' (417) A classification of Kami proposed by Aston (325) into 'individual objects' [..] 'classes' [..] and 'abstract qualities' [..] does not seem justified by anything in Japanese tradition" (Herbert 2011, 15).

So, even Shinto, which is famous with its various kami, is open for an interpretation where a monotheism narrative can find itself a place within. This problematic openness to both monotheism and polytheism is something that both Shinto and Tengrism have in common. Moreover, this common problem is also because of, more or less, same reason. To overcome this problematic, what needs to be done is to abandon the "monotheism–polytheism" framework completely, as it is obvious that this dualistic frame is rather useless to understand both Tengrism and Shinto to begin with.

> "The monotheism versus polytheism typology is another potential framework of misunderstanding. The kami of Japan tended early on to be geographically limited in their spheres of influence; therefore, concepts of universality or the power of a kami outside a certain area were late in developing. If kami is equated with 'god,' the case for Shinto being classified as polytheistic seems closed. But the kami of Japan all share the nature of kami, even though they have many manifestations. Polytheism and monotheism are Western terms that were designed to contrast phenomena from totally different religious worlds" (Picken 1994, xxix).

Therefore, it is now obvious that, claiming that both Shinto and Tengrism[11] are polytheistic is also problematic, though it is true in a gener-

[11] Here, it would also be necessary to remind that the term "Tengrism" and other suggested terms such as Tenrism, Tengriism, Tangrism, Tengrianity, Tengrianism, Toyunism, Nom (see Gömeç 2011, 5) are historically and philosophically problematic, since early Turkic people did not have a religious belief system called "Tengrism". Creating the term "tengrism" through using the generic word "tengri" (tengri-ism) is like creating the term "kamism" (kami-ism) to designate Shinto itself. Although the sentimentality behind us-

alized and reductive sense. This situation leads us to question the overall correctness and truth of other generalizations we made in the beginning of our article here. And moreover, we have also just realized that two points we have been talking about (that the word religion is not perfectly suitable for neither of them and that the "monotheism–polytheism" framework is not suitable, again for neither of them), are not just problematic for Shinto and Tengrism, but probably also for all the early forms of other polytheistic nature religions of the world as well. This means that the similarities we have been talking so far were not particular for just Shinto and Tengrism. They were not exclusive situations that only Shinto and Tengrism specifically have.

Now we must ask: "what then, are the similarities that happen only between Shinto and Tengrism?" Surely, it is impossible to answer this question, because one simply cannot have an extensive comprehension of all nature religions of the world. But still, if we make some local and historical observations that Shinto and Tengrism both had taken place in, we might find some unexpected resemblances and associative links between. These observations on a smaller scope might also develop a deeper understanding regarding the rest of the generalizations that we now consider suspicious. Since some observations more than others might indeed bring an insightful clarification to the problem at hand.

Focusing on Some Main Elements

As we try to find particular and exclusive resemblance between Shinto and Tengrism, we continue to encounter general but intriguing similarities. One we see now is the sanctity of water. The water (lakes, rivers, seas etc. but especially running water or water in motion) is sacred in Tengrism (Uslu

ing the term "tengrism" is supportable, it is still philosophically a problematic word and moreover, aesthetically a bad taste. We use the term "tengrism" here only for its practical function, since for early Turkic people, there was not any name to designate "tengri belief", unlike early Japanese people who already had the word "Shinto" to designate the "kami belief".

2014, 54; Akpınar 1999, 59–81). A similar sense of sanctity of water is also found in Shinto, not only for its usage in purification process (Zhong 2018, 33–36). Moreover, an instance where we can find the traces of another level of similarity regarding water is within the astonishing resemblances in the way origin myths of Shinto and Tengrism think of the element of sea (Rambelli 2018, xvi; Gömeç 2011, 25). Other than this, early Turkic people were bowing to majestic and awe-inspiring trees (İnan 1986, 12; Uslu 2014, 121) in the same way Japanese people are bowing in front of torii gates when they are about to enter sacred shrine area. Similar exalted sense of trees can be found, alongside elsewhere, within the religious difference between *mori* and *hayashi* (Rots 2019, 92–96), as depicted related to shrine areas. Though the sanctity of natural elements such as mountains, rivers, trees etc. is probably common for all nature religions, it is still quite fascinating to encounter that there is a deeper sense of similarity in the specific way these natural elements are experienced as hierophanies in both Shinto and Tengrism.

Another similarity that we encounter is that both in Japanese and Turkic mythologies, we find "coupling" or "pairing" hierophanies, such as Izanagi – Izanami in Shinto and Kök-Tengri – Umay in Tengrism, in a representation of sky and earth (Holtom 1938, 109; Beydili 2004, 2019; Roux 2011, 134). These couplings or pairings might occur in different themes such as "husband and wife", "brother and sister", "competing rivals", "human and animal" etc. In Shinto, these couplings are usually more obvious in the sibling stories that centralize Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi or Amaterasu and Susanoo. In Tengrism, we encounter with this sense of pairing through khagans and khatuns (wife of khagan) dually representing specific tengri as a couple.[12] Or, we encounter with this pairing, again, in sibling stories in Turkic mythologies (Boratav 2012, 95). But still, this theme of "pairing

[12] One must pay attention to the small detail that, though there are several, different tengri in Tengri belief; there is no need to use plural suffix for the sense of multiplicity in Turkish language (if this way of usage does not cause too big of a misunderstanding), as it naturally feels like this word is an uncountable noun. This also can be count as one of the similarities way early Turkic people and Japanese people thought about, respectively, tenrgi and kami.

hierophanies" might not be specific or particular enough for Shinto and Tengrism, as one can also find the presence of this kind of "matching deities" in other mythologies of the world.[13]

Another similar feature that we find both in Shinto and Tengrism is the special importance of the place of woman in both Japanese and Turkic societies in early periods (approximately between 2nd and 9th century). Both in Shinto and Tengrism, women emerge as authoritative figures, especially with being a determining figure in the religious reality and experience of the sacred (Eliade 2004, 464–465; Yörükan 2005, 48; Şener 2003, 15–17). One can find the living proof of this in the historical importance of *miko* as female "shaman" in Shinto (Walthall 2021, 204); and folkloric effects of being nomadic to the tengri belief (Belek 2015, 139–146).[14] In early Turkic people who were nomadic or semi-nomadic, women had the same level of status with men, as the social division of labour was more or less same for men and women in nomadic societies.[15] And for Japanese people, Amaterat-

[13] The first one comes to mind, because of its proximity, are the 神荼鬱壘 (Shēn Shū and Yù Lǜ) and the 門神 (Menshen; gate deities) in Chinese mythology. But surely, one must be aware of that the contexts in Chinese mythology are different, since these deities are more about punishing the evil spirits and protection of the household.

[14] This common feature where women are importance religious figures in Shinto and Tengrism does not come from Altai shamanism, as Altai shamanism is male-oriented or male-dominant religious attitude, because in Altai culture, a shaman could never be a woman, but shaman always had to be a male. But in Tengrism and Shinto, sometimes women were more powerful authority figures in religious reality of these two ways of beliefs. Moreover, there is another historical argument that, one of the main differences between Turkic Tengrism and Mongolian Tengrism is that Turkic Tengrism does not have a dominant and decisive shaman character, therefore its relation with shamanism is rather weak, unlike Mongolian Tengrism which always had a prominent male shaman figure (Aliyev 2020, 65; Kalafat 2004, 21; Bayat 2022, 82). This argument follows the socio-historical condition that Turkic societies did not really need a shaman figure (Eliade 2004, 198) as Tengrism depicts a more direct relation between human and nature as an experience of a hierophany. And the presence of a "middleman" or "mediator figure" would be a direct violation of this directness and immediacy. We tend to consider a similar situation for the presence of shaman in Shinto as well in early historical periods of Japanese religiosity, especially before the emergence of shrines in a localized, materialized way as built structures.

[15] The place of woman in society was one of the main problems when early Turkic people first met with the religion of Islam and Arabic cultures. Early Turkic people were accustomed to a sense of equality and egalite between man and woman, because of the

su and Himiko always are revered and exalted as special and dominant figures in Japanese religiosity (Okano 1993, 27–29). But again, this similarity also might not be specific and particular enough that takes place only within Shinto and Tengrism, though it is becoming clearer that we are closing in. These similarities make us think about the circumstances of the cultural sensitivity of Kokugaku scholars, who had the idea of a "purer" sense of Shinto (or of being Japanese) as the true original religious attitude of Japanese people. And this "purer" sense of Shinto, no matter from which perspective it is handled, included a necessary bracketing for all religious and cultural influences from Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism in Japanese society.

> "The new intellectual movement known as Kokugaku (National Learning) advocated an ethnocentric Shintoist revival. It was founded in the eighteenth century by scholars who wished to de-emphasize China's historical influence on Japan and initiate a renewal of interest in native Japanese history, literary classics, and cultural traditions" (Stalker 2018, 162).

The idea that Buddhist, Chinese, Confucian and Daoist[16] influences at least altered the traditional, pure "Japanistic" character of Japanese society (Ueda 1998, 99–108) implicitly suggests that if it were possible to take out

nomadic character of society; whereas in Arabic cultures and Islam, women had more of a domestic role which made them passive elements stuck in household, and this caused big disadvantages for the role of woman in society general. That is why early Turkic people were unwilling to accept Islam and Arabic values, and lots of folkloric features of Turkic people were still alive in Turkic after arabicization and islamisation (İnan 1986, 204–208). Moreover, throughout history, Turkic societies changed many features of Islam and reformed it into something that could be acceptable by Turkic people, which is generally called "Turkish Islam" or "Turkic Islam" which is fundamentally different than Arabic or Persian counterpart (see, Güler 2021, 15–22).

[16] Out of these elements, the influence of Daoism in Shinto and Japanese society was probably the one which flew under the radar of Kokugaku scholars most. This was partly because Daoism was already implemented deep in the character of Japanese society in an inseparable way. "The case of Daoism in ancient Japan is most peculiar and presents a particular conundrum, because Daoist elements were never sufficiently separated from either Shinto, Buddhist, or folk practices to enable the development of a distinguishable or institutional profile" (Ooms 2015, 37). And it was partly because Daoism had an important role in the historical progress of Shinto emerging as the indigenous religion of Japanese people (Teeuwen 2015, 104).

all those influences, then we would have encountered with a purer sense of "being Japanese". And some Kokugaku scholars indeed thought of this "de-influencing" to be possible, not only culturally, but also on a more fundamental (heart-felt) level. What is problematic here for us is that, in our postmodern world, we do not deal with intellectual-cultural elements through an essentialist understanding. To think that there is a "purest", "untouched", "non-tainted" form that we can dig out, and reach is simply essentialist and fundamentalist way of thinking which had already run its course. In today's world, this kind of approach does not resonate with the dominant paradigm, as it kind of neglects the dynamic transformation of a culture and how a culture is always what it's becoming through intersocial interactions and relations. So, to think that there must be a "purest" sense of Shinto or "purest" sense of Tengrism that are hidden in the deepest parts of prehistory might be itself an oversight that misses the progressive and procreative forces of cultural occurrences, as any historical and cultural elements are always shaped by contextualities according to the paradigms of their own eras. We should always keep this in mind.

But still, what might be functional for us here is that, if we follow the desire of these scholars (not fully embracing or questioning the mentality and mindset that fuel that desire) and begin to consider how the non-fundamental "influences" can be eliminated, to reach a purer sense of Shinto, we at the same time also start to see the historical journey of some "core" elements of Shinto and Tengrism as well. For Tengrism, this is partly because, historically, there was an era where early Mongolian people were influenced by Buddhism, Confucian thoughts and Daoist views, but the tengri belief of early Turkic people stayed rather untouched (Şener 2003, 47–48; İnan 1986, 12). This was because Mongolia geographically acted like a buffer area which hindered or at least slowed down these mainly Chinese influences to reach Turkic societies. And the era was still too early for Turkic people to encounter with Islam or any other "foreign" religious and cultural effects. And after those influences reached Turkic societies, Tengri belief was pushed down in the collective unconscious and it never had the

chance to historically evolve, so it stayed, more or less, unchanged. So, when Kokugaku scholars were paving the path for the upcoming shinbutsubunri (神仏分離) in 19th century, while they were trying to warn about the historical effects of shinbutsushūgō (神仏習合) in Japanese society, their understanding of "purer sense of Shinto" in their heart might have had some fundamental, underlying similarities with tengri belief of early Turkic people. From a perspective, it can be claimed that, more Shinto gets rid of Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian influences; more it gets to a state where its character is closer to Tengrism. Even dismantling some of the historical Daoist ideals away from Japanese society might have brought Shinto and Tengrism closer to each other.[17] But again, this too might be not particular or specific enough for only both, but it might be just another similarity which is too general.

Now it seems that we have come to a turning point in our path, because it feels like we are stuck in a loop. On one hand, we are aware that most of the similarities we found are not particular enough for a special resemblance between Shinto and Tengrism to manifest itself, though it is obvious that these generalized similarities are not superficial or too common. On the other hand, we are also aware that if one takes the task of digging

[17] We realize this in the relatively non-moralistic and secular character of both Shinto and Tengrism. One of the reasons why Daoist ideals were deemed problematic for Japanese society by Kokugaku scholars was that Daoism had a heavily moralistic and dogmatic view on nature and reality. "Both yinyáng lore and astral cults already enjoyed deep and prestigious connections with the rulership by the time that they were introduced to Japan, and their attraction for Japanese (both elite and non-elite) presumably had something to do with such connections. In tandem with developments then taking place in China, by the Heian 平安 period (794–1185) these and other Daoist traditions imported to Japan had developed into a locus for cosmogonic myth, apotropaic magic, moral idealism, and political theater—a disparate combination of concerns loosely unified by the canons and pantheon of sectarian Daoism but largely advanced through non-official channels among private practitioners" (Richey 2015, 3). When Shinto got rid of most of these Daoist elements, it turned into a non-moralistic way of believing which is suitable for the secular modern world of Japanese society. Tengrism also had a similar character of non-moralistic and compatible with secular worldview. For example, contrary to Zoroastrianism, the Tengri belief did not see the reality as the ultimate battleground between good and evil but had a more positive take on whole nature as reality (Ögel 2010, 282).

into these generalized similarities, one can find deeper and more fundamental commonalities between Shinto and Tengrism which unexpectedly create new relations and links between these two. This deed of “digging into deeper” is not within the scope of this article, as that kind of digging needs bigger and more extensive research. But for now, we want to pinpoint towards some linguistic and cultural observations between Turkic and Japanese religiosities which might be used as the starting point of that possible research. Because though it is practically impossible to determine which similarities are too general and which are exclusive for Shinto and Tengrism, the strong sense of approximation between them surfaces when all these similarities are considered altogether. Maybe individually, none of them are sufficient enough, but when gathered together, there rises the sense of an essential parallel between these two where these similarities are the collective fragments of some underlying state of likeness which was whole once, though it might be as speculative as it can be.

Conclusion

As it is time to finalize this preliminary investigation, there are couple of details that we need to mention and put emphasize. When Japanese people first hear the word “tengri”, they might hear it as a bizarre foreign word which is hard to pronounce because of the “r” sound. But in fact, they are already familiar with the meaning of it. There is one theory that the root of this word is the Chinese 天 (Tiān) which means “sky, heaven, day, god” etc. (Gömeç 2011, 105). Probably at the same time in history, while early Turkic people took this Chinese word and used it for words such as *tengri* (𐰚𐰇𐰚:𐱅𐰭𐰼𐰃) (sky, heaven, god), *tanrı* (god, deity), *tan* (dawn time, twilight time), *tansık* (miracle); Japanese people took the kanji 天 (pronounced as *ten* in Japanese, meaning *sky, heaven, god*) and also used it in the word 天使 (pronounced as *tenshi*, meaning *angel*). This occurrence of same pronunciation (i.e., “ten” in Turkic tengri and “ten” reading of Japanese天) might just be a fateful accident between Turkic and Japanese historical, linguistic progress. But still, it is obvious that Japanese culture already has

a historical, linguistical and conceptual familiarity with the Turkic idea of tengri. This fact alone associates Shinto and Tengrism with each other in a significant way that we should pay attention to.

Another linguistical detail that we would like to point to is regarding the special situation that includes some of the untranslatable words from Turkic and Japanese languages. It is already a well-known fact that in Japanese word *kokoro* (心) is not translatable to other languages, especially when the Japanese word shinzou (心臓) (as biological organ) is taken into consideration. The English words such as "heart", "mind" or "heart-mind" do not really convey the special sense *kokoro* has in Japanese culture. The same situation goes for the special Turkish word "gönül" which is again untranslatable, especially when we consider other Turkish words such as "yürek" and "kalp" which can primarily mean "heart" in different contexts. Though it is impossible to translate Japanese *kokoro* into Turkish with *gönül* (and in the same way, it is also impossible to translate the Turkish word *gönül* into Japanese as *kokoro*), we can still say that the reason why we cannot translate "Kokoro" as "heart", and the reason why we cannot translate "gönül" as "heart" is the same reason with the same contextuality. Moreover, we can investigate the similarities of Turkish *gönül* and Japanese *kokoro* in a comparative way.[18] Another special linguistic situation between Turkish and Japanese language (which is related to the religiosities of these cultures) includes the Japanese word *tama* (魂 or 霊) and Turkish word *can*, again both untranslatable.

> "But finally we must conclude that nothing in any commonly used European language, including English, really does justice to Japanese *tama*. The spirit, soul, *Geist*, or *élan* to which the Japanese term has reference [..] is a vital and active entity that plays no part in any usual Western-language imagery or expression" (Miller 1982, 131).

So, *tama* remains untranslatable. There is one theory that both words ("tama" in Japanese culture and "can" in Turkic cultures) have their roots

[18] In this comparative search, it would be most fruitful if the concept of magokoro (真心) (as it was thought by Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori Norinaga) is put within the scope of the search.

in Chinese精 (Jing) which means *essence, vitality, energy, semen, sperm, mythical spirit,* and Chinese霊 (ling) which means *spirit, soul, energy* etc. According to this theory, Japanese culture takes the kanji of these Chinese words, with changing the pronunciations, and used them in words such as *reikon* (霊魂), *tamashii* (魂), *konpaku* (魂魄), *seirei* (精霊) which can be translated as *soul, spirit, geist, ghost* etc. under different contexts, all related to *tama*. And at the same time, Turkic people took the vocal articulation or sounding of this same kanji (the sounding of *jing*) and used it as the root for the word *can* which might mean *soul, spirit, geist, life, lifeforce, vitality, heart, psyche, breath, energy* etc. under different contexts.[19] There are related Turkish words such as *canlı* (alive),[20] *cansız* (dead),[21] *candan* (wholeheartedly, sincerely), *canan* (god, beloved, lover, flame), *cin* (spirit, soul, ghost, genie), *cambaz* (acrobat, balancer, tumbler).[22] Again, though it is impossible to translate Japanese *tama* into Turkish with *can* (and in the same way, it is also impossible to translate the Turkish word *can* into Japanese as *tama*), we can still say that the reason why we cannot translate "tama" as "soul", and the reason why we cannot translate "can" as "soul" is the same reason with the same contextuality. Moreover, we can investigate the similarities of Turkish *can* and Japanese *tama* in a comparative way.

Last, we can make a comparative search between Shinto notion of 一霊四魂 (ichirei shikon) [which deals with *qi* as a life force and four sub spirits of *mitama* (御魂; 御霊; 神霊), namely (1) 荒御霊 or 荒御魂 (aramitama), (2) 和御霊 or 和御魂 (nigimitama), (3) 幸御魂 (sakimitama),

[19] This theory goes further to claim that English word "genie" also comes from this interaction as it aligns with the claim that English word "genie" is taken into English from Arabic. If that is true, then it is also possible that Arabic culture took the relevant word from Turkic people. Since it is virtually impossible to validate this, because it is just speculative after a point, we will just limit ourselves with the affirmation of Japanese-Chinese-Turkic linguistic relations.

[20] In the sense of "with" can, as the Turkish "-lı" suffix designates the meaning of "with" or "together".

[21] In the sense of "without" can, as the Turkish "-sız" suffix designates the meaning of "without" or "lack of".

[22] In the sense of "the person who risks their own 'can' carelessly", because being an acrobat might be a dangerous or life-threatening occupation.

and (4) 奇御霊 or 奇御魂 (kushimitama)] and Tengrist understanding of vitality [which deals with a life force and different sub spirits such as *özüt, süne, kut, sür, tın (tin), salkin, körmös, yula, özkonuk, nefes,* etc.] (Iwasa 2020, 99–104; Gültepe 2015, 448; Şener 2003, 62; İnan 1986, 176; Roux 2011, 90–91). These comparative investigations which focus on specific aspects and details of both Japanese and Turkic religiosities and cultures might give us a clearer picture about the inner resemblances between Shinto and Tengrism.

After the preliminary research presented in this article, we reach two definitive conclusions. The first one is that there is definitely a significant similarity between Shinto and Tengrism which goes deeper than the superficial, over-simplified, reductive generalizations and resemblances that might be valid for any nature religion. The related cultural environment of Turkic and Japanese people which is shaped historically and culturally makes this significant similarity possible. In ancient times, early Japanese and early Turkic people experienced the hierophanies of nature, and the supernaturality of reality in a similar manner, though they expressed it in different terms. This similarity between Turkic and Japanese religiosities might be functional and useful in understanding not only the historical progress of the variations that were shaped by the historical change itself, but also in understanding how the local mentality of a people in a specific area might be related to another local mentality of another people where, at first look, there is not any relevant or important connection in between them.

The second definitive conclusion is that, though there is a significant similarity between Shinto and Tengrism, there needs to be lots of supporting and supplementing research to make this similarity a viable fact without a doubt. So far, this similarity can only amount to an interesting eccentricity which we need to be aware of, but it does not constitute a deep intellectual field which was "overlooked" somehow. But this similarity still holds a special importance because (1) it gives a deeper context and historical background to the positive relations between Turkic and

Japanese societies, and (2) examining the similarities between these two religiosities on a deeper level might provide some insights regarding their philosophical, metaphysical and ontological understanding which are deeply rooted and hidden in prehistory. Shinto might learn about its own earlier forms by looking at Tengrism, and Tengrism might learn about its own characteristic details by looking at Shinto. In this sense, by exploring each other through the similarities in between, Shinto and Tengrism might explore themselves, in a way that they can never manage or accomplish to do on their own.

References

Akgün, Engin (2008). *Türk Dünyasında Din ve Gelenek Üzerine: Şamanizm, Burhanizm ve Yesevilik*. İstanbul: Doğu Kütüphanesi.

Akpınar, Turgut (1999). *Türkler'in Din ve Hukuk Tarihi Üzerine Makaleler*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık.

Aliyev, Ramil (2020). *Türk Mitolojisi*. Ankara: Astana Yayınları.

Bayat, Fuzuli (2006). *Ana Hatlarıyla Türk Şamanlığı*. İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat.

Bayat, Fuzuli (2022). *Türk Şaman Mitolojisinin Teonimleri*. İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat.

Belek, İlker (2015). *Dinin Toplumsal Kökenleri: Animizm, Totemizm, Şamanizm, Din Süreci*. İstanbul: Yazılama Yayınevi.

Beydili, Celal (2004). *Türk Mitolojisi: Ansiklopedik Sözlük*. Ankara: Yurt Kitap-Yayın.

Blacker, Carmen (2005) *The Catalpa Bow: A Study in Shamanistic Practices in Japan*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Boratav, Pertev Naili (2012). *Türk Mitolojisi: Oğuzların-Anadolu, Azerbaycan ve Türkmenistan Türklerinin Mitolojisi*. Trans. Recep Özbay. Ankara: Bilgesu Yayıncılık.

Breen, John & Teeuwen, Mark (2010). *A New History of Shinto*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.

Campbell, Joseph (1960). *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Campbell, Joseph (1988). *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday.

Campbell, Joseph (2004). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Cihangir, Erol (2015). Altay Panteonu Üzerine Tenkidî bir Yaklaşım, In Uno Harva, *Altay Panteonu: Mitler, Ritüeller, İnançlar ve Tanrılar*. Trans. Ömer Suveren. İstanbul: Doğu Kütüphanesi, pp. vii–xxvi.

Çoruhlu, Yaşar (2000). *Türk Mitolojisinin Anahtarları*. İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi.

Drury, Nevill (1996). *Şamanizm: Şamanlığın Öğeleri*. Trans. Erkan Şimşek. İstanbul: Okyanus Yayıncılık

Eliade, Mircea (1958). *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Trans. Rosemary Sheed. London: Sheed & Ward.

Eliade, Mircea (1987). *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Williard R. Trask. New York: A Harvest Book.

Eliade, Mircea (2004). *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Eliade, Mircea (2005). *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. Trans. Williard R. Trask. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Enzaki, Ryūen (2025). *Yellow Book: All Short Texts – Part II (2017–2024)*. İstanbul: KDY.

Eriş, Metin (1997). *A Cultural Atlas of the Turkish World: The Pre-Islamic Period*. Ankara: Turkish Cultural Service Foundation.

Gömeç, Saadettin (2011). *Şamanizm ve Eski Türk Dini*. Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi.

Güler, Ali (2021). *Geçmişten Günümüze Türk Müslümanlığı*. İstanbul: Halk Kitabevi

Gültepe, Necati (2015). *Türk Mitolojisi: Yeni Araştırmalar Işığında*. İstanbul: Resse Kitabevi.

Hardacre, Helen (2017). *Shinto: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harva, Uno (2015). *Altay Panteonu: Mitler, Ritüeller, İnançlar ve Tanrılar*. Trans. Ömer Suveren. İstanbul: Doğu Kütüphanesi.

Herbert, Jean (2011). *Shinto: At The Fountain-Head of Japan*. New York: Routledge.

Holtom, Daniel Clarence (1938). *The National Faith of Japan: A Study in Modern Shinto*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.

İnan, Abdülkadir (1986). *Tarihte ve Bugün Şamanizm: Materyaller ve Araştırmalar*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi.

Isomae, Jun'ichi (2014). *Religious Discourse in Modern Japan: Religion, State and Shinto*. Trans. Galen Amstutz & Lynne E. Riggs. Leiden: Brill.

Iwasa, Tomoko (2020). Philosophical Implications of Shinto, In Bret W. Davis (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 97–110.

Kalafat, Yaşar (2004). *Altaylar'dan Anadoluya Kamizm–Şamanizm: Sosyal Antropoloji Araştırmaları*. İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi.

Kalmanson, Leah (2017). Pure Land Ecology: Taking the Supernatural Seriously in Environmental Philosophy. In J. Baird Callicott & James McRae (eds.) In *Japanese Environmental Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 29–46.

Kara, Mehmet & Teres, Ersin (2017). "Some Similar and Parallel Points Between the Turkic Legendary 'Creation' and Similar Texts of Japan". *Folklor/Edebiyat* 77, 189–196.

Kasulis, Thomas P. (2004). *Shinto The Way Home: Dimensions of Asian Spirituality*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Miller, Roy Andrew (1971). *Japanese and the Other Altaic Languages*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Miller, Roy Andrew (1982). *Japan's Modern Myth: The Language and Beyond*. Tokyo: Weatherhill.

Nelson, John K. (2000). *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Ögel, Bahaeddin (1995). *Türk Mitolojisi: Kaynakları ve Açıklamaları ile Destanlar*. II. Cilt. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi.

Ögel, Bahaeddin (2010). *Türk Mitolojisi: Kaynakları ve Açıklamaları ile Destanlar*. I. Cilt. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi.

Okano, Haruko (1993). "Women and Sexism in Shinto". *Japan Christian Review* 59, 27–31.

Ono, Sokyo (2003). *Shinto: The Kami Way*. Vermont: Tuttle Publishing.

Ooms, Herman (2015). Framing Daoist Arguments 670–750. In Jeffrey L. Richey (ed.), *Daoism in Japan: Chinese Traditions and Their Influence on Japanese Religious Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 37–59.

Özbek, Aydın & Kira, Esra (2019). "A Study of Mirativity in Japanese and Turkish". *Dokuz Eylül University Journal of Humanities* 6:2, 569–592.

Picken, Stuart D. B. (1994). *Essentials of Shinto: An Analytical Guide to Principal Teachings*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Ponsonby-Fane, Richard Arthur (2004). *Studies in Shinto and Shrines*. New York: Routledge.

Radloff, Wilhelm (2008). *Türklük ve Şamanlık*. Trans. A. Temir, T. Andaç, N. Uğurlu. İstanbul: Örgün Yayınevi.

Rambelli, Fabio (2018). General Introduction: The Sea in The History of Japanese Religions. In Fabio Rambelli (ed.), *The Sea and The Sacred in Japan: Aspects of Maritime Religion*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Rankin, Aidan (2010). *Shinto: A Celebration of Life*. Winchester: John Hunt Publishing.

Reader, Ian (1991). *Religion in Contemporary Japan*. London: Macmillan Press.

Richey, Jeffrey L. (2014). Conjuring Cultures: Daoism In Japan. In Jeffrey L. Richey (ed.), *Daoism in Japan: Chinese Traditions and Their Influence on Japanese Religious Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1–8.

Rots, Aike P. (2019). *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan: Making Sacred Forests*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Roux, Jean-Paul (2011). *Eski Türk Mitolojisi*. Trans. Musa Yaşar Sağlam. Ankara: Bilgesu Yayıncılık.

Scheid, Bernhard (2013). Introduction: Shinto Studies and The Nonreligious-Shrine Doctrine. In Bernhard Scheid & Kate Wildman Nakai (eds.), *Kami Ways in Nationalist Territory: Shinto Studies in Prewar Japan and The West*. Wien: Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften, pp. 1–22.

Şener, Cemal (2003). *Şamanizm: Türklerin İslamiyet'ten Önceki Dini*. İstanbul: Etik Yayınları.

Şener, Serkan & Takahashi, Daiko (2010). "Ellipsis of Arguments in Japanese and Turkish". *Nanzan Linguistics* 6, 79–99.

Shchepetunina, Marina (2017). The Power of Vision in Mythological Thinking: 'To See the Forbidden' in Japanese Myths and Fairy Tales. In Junichi Toyota, Ian Richards, Borko Kovačević, Marina Shchepetunina (eds.), *Vision Beyond Visual Perception*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 25–36.

Stalker, Nancy K. (2018). *Japan: History and Culture from Classical to Cool*. California: University of California Press.

Talat, Tekin (1993). *Japonca ve Altay Dilleri*. İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları.

Tanyu, Hikmet (1978). *Türklerin Dini Tarihçesi*. İstanbul: Türk Kültür Yayını.

Taşağıl, Ahmet (2015). *Kök Tengri'nin Çocukları: Avrasya Bozkırlarında İslam Öncesi Türk Tarihi*. İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları.

Teeuwen, Mark (2015). The Laozi and the Emergence of Shinto at Ise. In Jeffrey L. Richey (ed.), *Daoism in Japan: Chinese Traditions and Their Influence on Japanese Religious Culture*. New York: Routledge, pp. 103–125.

Toyşanuli, Akedil (2020). *Türk-Moğol Mitolojisi*. Trans. Bülent Bayram. Ankara: Bengü Yayınları.

Ueda, Kenji (1998). Magatsubi no Kami and Motoori Norinaga's Theology. Trans. Norman Heavens. In Inoue Nobutaka (ed.), *Kami: Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion*, 72-127. Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, pp. 72–127.

Uslu, Bahattin (2014). *Türk Mitolojisi*. Diyarbakır: Kamer Yayınları.

Walthall, Anne (2021). Competing Clams for the Faith and Affiliation of Shrine Priests: The Shirakawa, Yoshida and Hirata Atsutane. In Stefan Köck, Brigitte Pickl-Kolaczia, Bernhard Scheid (eds.), *Religion, Power, and The Rise of Shinto in Early Modern Japan*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 203–216.

Yamakage, Motohisa (2006). *The Essence of Shinto: Japan's Spiritual Heart*. Trans. Mineko S. Gillespie, Gerald L. Gillespie, Yoshitsugu Komuro. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

York, Michael (2003). *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion*. New York: New York University Press.

Yörükan, Yusuf Ziya (2022). *Müslümanlıktan Evvel Türk Dinleri: Şamanizm*. İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat.

Zhong, Yijang (2018). *The Origin of Modern Shinto in Japan: The Vanquished Gods of Izumo*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.