Fushimi Inari Taisha: A Temple You Can't Pass Up

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ASCL 62.10 Research Project
October 31, 2021

If you take the JR Nara Line to Inari Station, you will arrive at Fushimi Inari Taisha, a popular Shinto shrine located in Kyoto, Japan [1]. Soon, you will stumble upon an otherworldly site with thousands upon thousands of torii in every size imaginable, from a mammoth entrance torii to thousands of one-foot-high wooden torii [2]. Other must-dos on this 3-4 hour excursion include wandering around Mt. Inari and slurping on kitsune udon "fox noodles" [5]. Professor Hockley, Fushimi Inari is a site you can't pass up teaching next fall. Besides being Japan's most important Inari shrine, Fushimi Inari connects to themes in class we have studied thus far, such as the blending of Shinto and Buddhist beliefs, the distinctiveness of Shinto architecture, and the dynamism of Shinto in contemporary times.

Fushimi Inari Taisha is the oldest and most important of thousands of Japanese shrines dedicated to Inari, the Shinto god of rice [2]. The founding legend of Inari is recorded in the *Yamashiro Fudoki* report, which claims that Irogu no Hatanokimi shot a rice cake, which turned into a swan and flew away. The swan landed on the peak of a mountain, and rice grew. Inari is named for this miracle; "ina" is Japanese for "rice." The report further states that Hatanokimi received an imperial order to enshrine three deities in three mountains: the rice kami (Uka no mitama), the water kami (Omiyame), and the land kami (Sarutahiko). That same year, in 711, farmers were blessed with great harvests of grain and abundant silk from their silkworms [6]. Two additional kami were enshrined in 1266, and the five are collectively identified as "Inari." A shrine of folklore and rich history, Fushimi was declared a Grand Shrine "Kanpei Taisha" in 1871. The main shrine building was later designated an Important Cultural Property in 1909.

Historical importance aside, Fushimi strongly connects to Shinto and Buddhist syncretism concepts we previously studied in the Kasuga-Kofukuji complex. Specifically, both shrines exhibit interaction between kami worshipping traditions and Esoteric Buddhist doctrines.

During the Heian period, the Japanese suspected their emperor fell ill because Mt. Inari trees were cut down to build To-ji's five-storied pagoda [8]. Kukai, the founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, appeased the angry spirits by designating Fushimi, a Shinto shrine, as the protecting kami for To-ji, a Buddhist temple. The concept of Buddhist deities as kami (*honji suijaku*) also applied to Fushimi. The Inari kami was amalgamated with Daikiniten, the Buddhist deity of the kitchen and Five Grains, and retains a position in both religions [2].

Fushimi further presents a unique opportunity to build on the architectural differences and similarities to other Shinto shrines, such as Ise, Izumo, and Nikko Toshogu. The entrance to Fushimi is marked by a main gate or *romon* (Figure 1: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, entrance to romon, 2018). The romon is similar to that of Nikko Toshogu [6], consisting of a two-storied gatehouse with a hip-and-gable roof and cypress bark thatching (Figure 2: Nikko Toshogu Shrine, Nikko, entrance to romon, 2017). However, Fushimi's romon was actually rebuilt with offerings from Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1589 after the shrine was burned down in 1468. It is said that when Hideyoshi's mother fell ill, Hideyoshi prayed to Inari Okami, pledging to donate 10,000 units of rice if she recovered. His wish was granted, and the romon was built with his donation [2]. Directly behind the romon is the main hall or *honden*, which contains the five enshrined Inari deities (Figure 3, Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, interior of honden, unknown date). The honden features corridor-style decorations and 10.6m high walls on either side [6].

Attributes exclusive to Fushimi Inari Taisha emerge at the very back of the shrine's main grounds. Located here is a torii gate-covered hiking trail, which begins with two dense, parallel rows of gates called *senbon torii* or the "Thousand Torii Gateway" [5]. At Ise, Izumo, and Nikko Toshogu, torii signify the boundary between sacred and ordinary space or identify sacred spots, such as mountains or rocks [11]. This isn't the case at Fushimi, which houses nearly 10,000

vermilion torii gates scattered across the site [4]. These torii were donated by worshippers who wanted to have a wish come true or had it fulfilled and gifted a gate in appreciation. Although there are only a few centimeters of separation between torii at the beginning of the pathway, the gates gradually spread apart (Figure 4: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, torii gates, 2013).

A final key structure at Fushimi is Okusha Hohaisho, located at the end of the *Senbon torri* [6]. People at Okusha Hohaisho pray to the holy Mt. Inari, whose three peaks can be seen right behind the building. There is a pair of stone lanterns in the back right-hand corner that are often frequented by tourists. The worshipper faces two lanterns and makes a wish before lifting the stone spheres or *kuurin* (Figure 5: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, Omokaruishi stone lanterns, unknown date) . If the spheres feel lighter than expected, worshippers believe their wish will come true [10]. Fushimi's stone lanterns draw parallels to those at Kasuga Taisha, in which stone lanterns with inscribed wishes were lit to mark a family's historical presence at the shrine. Other notable structures along Fushimi's mountainous path include Teichoan, a rest area, and Shikseki sites, places of former shrines where deities remain [6]. There are also many stones engraved with deities' names (*otsuka*) that allow worshippers to express their individual faith as they make the climb to Mt. Inari's peak, 233 meters above sea level [2].

Most importantly, Fushimi Inari Taisha compliments our understanding of Shinto in contemporary times, affirming that the relationship between the Japanese and kami is continuous and changing. During the Edo period, Inari was adopted by merchants in rapidly growing cities and was gradually transformed into a kami of business [2]. It is common to see business cards [7] or *meishi* attached to the doors and railings of the shrine to attract Inari's help (Figure 6: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, meishi, 2010). In fact, 67 firms organize an annual visit to Fushimi Inari on October 25 to pray for prosperity. Fushimi would clearly benefit any Dartmouth economics

major, but the shrine is also visited by those praying for a bountiful harvest, the safety of their home and family, successful childbirth, and protection from danger [1]. Moreover, Shinto's dynamism and flexibility are evidenced by Fushimi's adoption of fox imagery. Foxes were not part of the earliest worship traditions at the shrine, but there are numerous sculptures of foxes wearing a bright red bib or holding the key to the rice granary in their mouth [6].

Thus far, we have discussed how Fushimi relates to prior class themes, but there is potential to extend our knowledge of Shinto shrines by examining their festivals. Shinto shrines emphasize sweeping away hindrances of the past and embracing optimistic hopes for good fortune. For instance, Hatsuuma Taisai marks the anniversary of Fushimi's establishment, and Saitan-sai ushers in prayers for the new year [6]. Perhaps one of the most awe evoking ceremonies is Hitaki-sai, a festival held after the autumn festival to thank Inari Okami for the abundant grain harvest and the blessing of life. After a ceremony held in the main shrine building [3], over 100,000 wooden tablets (*hitaki-kushi*) from worshippers throughout Japan are burned in the shrine's ritual fire site, ascending to the heavens (Figure 7: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, *hitaki-kushi* burning, unknown date). Meanwhile, priests and attendees chant prayers to ritually extinguish sins and invite good fortune. Later that evening, performers sing and dance for the deities in a ceremony called *mikagura* [9].

Fushimi Inari Shrine would most definitely be an instructive addition to the temples currently featured in the class. As the most important of Inari shrines, Fushimi blends a long history of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs while adapting to and resonating with worshippers of the contemporary era. Professor Hockley, you always say, "You'll want to go to Japan after taking this class." Who would pass up the opportunity to stroll through Fushimi's senbon torii, take a selfie with an Inari fox sculpture, or make a wish at Okusha Hohosaido's stone lanterns?

Figure 1: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, entrance to romon, 2018

Figure 2: Nikko Toshogu Shrine, Nikko, entrance to romon, 2017

Figure 3: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, interior of honden, unknown date

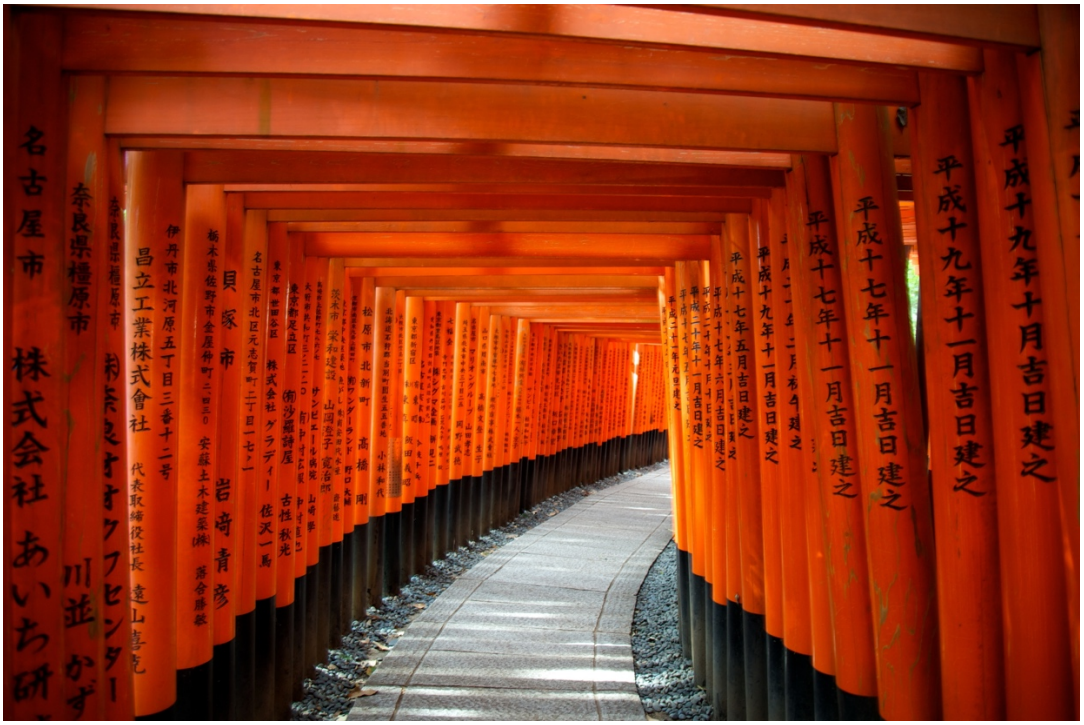

Figure 4: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, torii gates, 2013

Figure 5: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, Omokaruishi Stone Lanterns, unknown date

Figure 6: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, meishi, 2010

Figure 7: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto, hitaki-kushi burning, unknown date

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