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## A Detailed Review Of The Education System In Japan And Shinto Religion's Teaching

Nowadays, some modern scholars considered that Shinto was not a really religion at all or that it did not exist as a separate religion until the creation of State Shinto in the Meiji period. However, in my opinion, Shinto already became a religion before Meiji period. In the Oxford dictionary, the term "religion" is defined as "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or Gods" (Oxford Dictionary.com). Shinto in early Japan complied with this definition of religion to some extent. Why some scholars thought that Shinto was not a real religion in the early period is that Shinto was not completely the same as western religion. But there are some scholars who talked about this kind of debate that it is because the Japanese conception of religion is not the same as the occidental conception of religion. Woodard pointed at that the occidentals regard Christianity as what a religion should be. This conception could not understand Japanese religions because the nature of Japanese religion is different from Christianity. He thought that Shinto itself was different and so is Buddhism; if religion is to be defined solely in terms of the traditional occidental concepts, then neither Buddhism nor Shinto can be called religions (86). People cannot say that Shinto was not really a religion in early Japan, it just a religion which has some different characteristics from other popular religions. The reason why Shinto is different with other popular religions is that it's based on Japan's unique culture, polity and it's centered on the imperial institution.

Lots of scholars such as Hirai Naofusa considered that Shinto is the indigenous religion of Japan, and has continued in an unsevered line from prehistorical times to the present (Breen and Teeuwen 4). Another scholar, Joseph Kitagawa, has a similar consideration with Hirai. He gives subdivisions of Shinto which are "shrine Shinto", "folk Shinto" and "sect Shinto". Kitagawa thought that Shinto as the indigenous religion of Japan has "no founder, no official sacred scriptures, and no fixed system of ethics or doctrine, Shinto may be regarded as Japanese types of religious beliefs, sentiments, and approaches, which have been shaped and conditioned by the historical experience of the Japanese people from the prehistoric period to the present" (139). Another scholar Teeuwen defined Shinto as consisting of "polytheism, animism, shamanism, divination, syncretism and ancestor worship" (373).

Shrine Shinto can be seen as the origin of the Shinto religion. During the Jomon and Yayoi periods, except hunting and fishing for common life, people also acquired the spiritual life because the earthquakes, typhoons, and other natural calamities were common occurrences. Japanese people want some protections from spiritual world. Meanwhile, various cultural and religious customs were brought from Asian continent to Japanese island during this period.

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Japanese people built shrines and worshiped kami to show respect and thankful for world. A shrine is the place for worshipping kami (meaning of gods in Japanese). Japanese people go to the shrine and do rituals so that they can show their worship to kami. The worship of kami by the Japanese occurred much earlier than the formal establish of Shinto. In other words, the worship of kami by Japanese people at the shrine has started from very early period, but the formal name of Shinto, which written in Chinese characters are 神 were appeared until sixth century A.D (Kitagawa 139). For example, the most important shrine in Shinto is the Grand Shrine of Ise. Ise Shrine was established sometimes around 300 C.E., when the sun god Amaterasu was moved to this place (Yusa 25). According Hirai's view of Shrine Shinto, he considered that Shrine Shinto had existed from the beginning of Japanese history (4). Kami is a significant term in Shinto, kami is the first character “神”. Shinto defined that there are 8,000,000 kami in this religion. Kami can refer to spirits of nature—mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, and oceans—all conceived to be alive and sacred. Andreeva considered that kami were worshipped as supernatural forces controlling natural elements, or as hereditary deities and ancestors of powerful clans. Kami in Shinto are largely invisible but physically resided in Japan (679). Japanese people believed that different kami have different meanings and can give them different deities. The Japanese practice religious rituals in the kami's shrines. Some of the shrines were official and some of them were non-official, and some of the shrines were in the outer space and some of them were in the inner space. In Shinto, kami can be both good and evil powers. This is different to other popular religions, gods in Shinto are not necessarily good.

Starting from the Nara period, another religion took important position in Japan, which is Buddhism. In this period, Shinto and Buddhism interacted. The understanding of Shinto was influenced by the introduction of Buddhism. During Nara period, Shinto kami deities were considered to protect the Buddhist doctrines (Yusa 60). In later period, Buddhist created the idea Honji Suijaku to associate with kami in Shinto from Buddhist deities. And some views, faith and ritual from Buddhism begun to be a part of Shinto. In other word, by the influence of Buddhism's organization and way of rituals, the Buddhism help Shinto to build an organized structure.

Similar with other popular religion such as Hinduism in India, Confucianism and Daoism in China. Shinto also used by Japanese government ruler to ruled people before Meiji period. The Emperor Tenmu (673-686) ordered the compilation of the early Japanese which resulted in the Kojiki. In Kojiki, the imperial family considered that they are the descendants of Amaterasu. The Emperor started to offered imperial protection to some major shrines. Emperor and Empress were described as living kami so that they can ruled local people very well and made them to obey or worship imperial family. Because of Shinto's important role in the folk area of Japan or Kitagawa's term “folk Shinto”, imperial family's attitude to Shinto not only helped them successfully ruled local people, but also consolidated imperial family's position in Japanese history. This can be a reason why imperial family can exist such long period from early Japan till

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now.

Influenced by the imperial family, Shinto's religious situation in Japan changed a lot. Shinto priesthood appeared and developed fast (Kitagawa 151). Men were chosen for religious of becoming kami-possessed, and some female shamanic diviners to speak on behalf of the kami. As far as the imperial court was concerned, lot of Shintoist and Shinto priestly families appeared to the stage of Japanese history. These priests, for instance, Watarai Yukitada, a Shinto priest of the Outer Shrine of Ise. He described various facts of Shinto tradition and Shinto symbolism (Yusa 63). The term "sect Shinto" which Kitagawa mentioned became an important thing in the history of Shinto by a famous Shinto priest Yoshida Kanetomo who further developed Watarai's line of work. He is the head priest of the Yoshida Shrine in Kyoto. Yoshida asserted Shinto was the root and trunk of all truth, and Shinto should be pure and primal which was devoid of the influenced of other religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism (Yusa 64).

Move to the Edo period, the several lines of Shinto support were united and reinforced by a powerful movement called Restoration Shinto (Earhart 144). During the Edo period, Japan was isolated from foreign influence for about 2 centuries. This isolation both had positive and negative effects. Because of the exclusion of foreign influence, the national pride and national strength of Japan grew in this period. Shinto became a significant term in Japanese national pride. Japanese people began to consider Shinto was superior to all religions, and Shinto scholars have been great religious importance and have influenced the course of the nation and its cultural identity (Earhart 144). The Restoration Shinto later become the spiritual base of Meiji Restoration.

In a conclusion, Shinto has already existed as a religion before the Meiji period. Differenced with other popular religions, Shinto didn't have a clear and formal start or organized faith. But this kind of situation was caused by Japan's environment and Japan's unique culture. Shinto do have the contribution and influence similar as other popular religions do. Firstly, Shinto has the exact worship places which named shrines and gave the spiritual encouragement to local people; secondly, it not only influenced local people's life but also the ruling class; thirdly, Shinto also has professional priests and sect. Even though Shinto was organized and become a pure faith in later period which is different from other religions that are built an official myth at the beginning, we still cannot say that Shinto was not really a religion before the Meiji period.

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