Abstract

This paper focuses on Shinto (also referred to as the religion of Shinto). When talking about itself, Shinto isn’t assertive but modest. For this reason, it is often said that Shinto doesn’t put the concept of Shinto into words but expect instead people to feel it when visiting a shrine and perform the rituals intuitively. Shinto is about ethics, so it can have the demands of a religion and be understood intuitively. There has never been a need to systematize it the way other world religions have. In fact, Japanese people have long questioned the necessity of having an official religion, which has led a majority of them to see themselves non-religious people. Yet, although they are non-religious, ethical values provide for natural harmony in society and make people lead their daily life the right way. For instance, Japanese generally respect nature and think that they are part of it. They have believed this since ancient times when the archipelago was first inhabited by the Kami (God). Although one can see places which have been deformed by economic activities and urbanization, most places are still well-preserved and nature beauty spared. Many Japanese visit ancestral graves during holidays to pray for their good health and fortune. It has been this way even before Buddhism arrived in Japan. This phenomenon can be said to be related to the Shinto tradition and its way of thinking.

Japan is a country with permanent threats of natural disasters (typhoons, earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis) that give Japanese the special ability to sense the beauty that resides in the combination of fragile human life and stability of nature. This unique geography also enhances the uniqueness of its culture and ideas, all the more as it is surrounding by oceans with no connection to other continents. Even nowadays, when foreigners come to Japan they feel that public order (security) is very good. Moreover, while many Japanese hold their wedding ceremony according to Shinto rites, some marry according to Christian rites even if they are not Christians. Clearly, Japanese are religiously very flexible and tolerant. As explained in this research paper, native Shinto and Buddhism have peacefully coexisted for more than 1400 years.
This research aims to clarify the religious identify held by Japanese people in spite of the fact that they see themselves as non-religious. This all the more unique as even though most Japanese claim to be non-religious, they have a religious-like ethical code guiding them in their daily life, making them deeply disciplined, and emphasizing harmony in society. Since, all this may have something to do with Japanese aesthetics and its ethical relevance in their daily lives, this research also attempt to link the relevance of Japanese aesthetics to Shinto.