

Changing Pattern of Religion in Japan: Future Implications in Japanese Society

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Article history:</i> Date of Submission: 04-09-2024 Date of Acceptance: 18-12-2024 Date of Publication: 30-10-2025 <i>Keywords:</i> Religion, Society, Japan, Globalization, Shintoism, Confucianism	Rather than demonstrating the historical background of religion in Japan, this study prioritizes the changing pattern of religion in Japanese society. On the other hand, established knowledge of the sociology of religion suggests that religion and religious belief influence humans within society regarding politics, culture, and morality. By evaluating existing literature, this research clarifies the pattern of religion and its influence on Japanese society. At present, whether Japanese are religious or not is a matter of debate; however, the study's findings identify that Japanese people technically swing their perception regarding religion. Besides the case investigation on Japanese society, this paper reveals that continuing a more flexible religious practice has a spillover effect on their daily life, particularly in maintaining their work life. The Abductive approach of this research also found that practicing multi-religion in Japan is a familiar consequence, expressing that the Japanese are now more likely liberal and reform-minded. Based on secondary data, this investigation further reveals that religion is a more socio-political instrument than a constant spiritual belief for the Japanese. Besides the considerable expansion of consumerization and marketization of economic goods due to the results of globalization, this research question has a broad scope for further investigation. This study might bring more practical consequences for Japan regarding the subject matter by including primary information.

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Introduction

It has been a well-accepted notion that society is the core molecule of this universe, where human beings are the principal substances. Without the presence of humans, no society will sustain itself. In contrast, having no existence of societal bonding, humankind, perhaps, would not be able to protect their ancestral history nor be capable of expanding their familial responsibility since the introduction of civilization. Society and humankind have continued their waywardness together. During this period, social norms, values, ethics and morals, religion, familial, social, and institutional education, law, legal rules, regulations, constitution, etc., control human behavior, which is necessary to protect the social structure. In this study, values are vital issues that have required clarification to understand the findings. Until now, reaching a satisfactory definition of religion has been quite challenging. Because every definition of religion has its debates, perhaps the practitioners of different religions have various opinions regarding religion, primarily based on their religious beliefs and values. When it comes to religion, whether the Japanese are religious or not is a matter of dilemma. Existing knowledge also agreed with this thought, as evidenced by well-known sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858 - 1917). Durkheim has argued that 'Religion' cannot be defined in terms of believing in the supernatural since almost every human being in the world has no specific difference regarding religion (Fitzgerald, 2022). Here, Japanese society is the key element to discuss for further investigation, where religion is the core subject matter to demonstrate its state of presence and influence over Japanese society. Though there are a variety of opinions established in the existing literature on religion, this research doesn't intend to describe only the historical consequences and facts related to religion. Rather than doing so, this study aimed to identify the changes in religious practice in Japanese society due to a few influential factors. This research will address the following research question.

RQ1: What are the significant factors that bring the changing pattern of religion into Japanese society?

Literature Review

Over time, religion in Japan has shifted, and practitioners of any specific religion have no issues due to the changing pattern of the religion. Simultaneously, the available data reveals the current consequences of religion and the number of religious practitioners in Japanese society, which is surprising for a religious country. Besides, the way of philosophy that the Japanese hold regarding religion has shown their liberal mindset with the modernized attitude toward religious practice within their society.

In 1991, a book titled 'Religion in Contemporary Japan' was published by Ian Reader. The author shared a story about when he was visiting Japan, which happened between

his two Japanese friends. Introducing those Japanese as non-religious, the author mentioned the incident in two different synagogues of two dominating religions in contemporary Japan. Those religions and synagogues are the *Shinto Shrine* for *Shintoism*, a native Japanese religion that first appeared during the *Jomon* period (14,000 BCE - 300 BCE), religious practitioners, and the Buddhist Temple for Buddhism; Buddhism emerged in Japan from China through the Korean peninsula during the *Heian* period (794 AD - 1185 AD), practitioners. He described the incident at the Shinto shrine, where his friends bowed their heads in prayer, held their hands in tandem, and tossed coins into the offertory box. They also applauded twice with their hands, the customary response for the *kami*. Gods are known as *Kami* in the *Shinto* religion, and it is believed by the practitioner that there are around 8 million Gods in *Shintoism* or celestial beings in the *Shinto* religion. He also added that when they went to a Buddhist temple after that, his Japanese friends performed the same ritual there. For example, making offerings, bending down, applauding, and worshipping fervently. In the meantime, the author noticed that one of his friends didn't clap his hands in the temple. After they finished praying, the author told them about their mistake, and they replied that their parents had taught them the whole praying ritual. And surprisingly, these little bits of mistakes do not make a big deal to them as they used to with such incidents. However, there is no *Shinto* tradition of clapping one's hands before the intaglio during praying. Instead, it is a Buddhist tradition to clap hands during praying.

Nevertheless, using the same pattern to show respect to the deity does not bother the Japanese. At the same time, the author becomes very surprised by witnessing the whole incident. Apart from the authors' view, it can be assumed that the Japanese have become accustomed to a liberal approach to praying to the Kami, Gods, or Buddha, rather than being bound to strict rituals or traditions. Showing respect to the spirit is their aim, not necessarily maintaining any hard-and-fast method of praying.

Lately, a well-known balanced economic, political, cultural, more or less geostrategic bilateral partnership between the USA and Japan is highly appreciated by world leaders. To some extent, the USA paradigm in Japan may look like a cooperative relationship. However, the USA administration still controls Japan indirectly. To make this narration, Fitzgerald (2022) has vindicated by claiming that it is fundamentally an inherently conditional exercise of the USA authority in Japan, even in Japanese religious practice in daily life. Several studies show that in the beginning, despite there not being a Japanese name for spirituality, the USA insisted that Japan must practice religion throughout the *Meiji* period (1868 AD - 1912 AD) to enact the *Meiji* Constitution in 1889 AD (JOSEPHSON, 2019; Takahashi, 2021; Fitzgerald, 2022). Another source claimed that the *Meiji* Constitution didn't isolate Japan from religion or religious practice (Hardacre, 2014). In fact, Horii (2020) revealed that the function

of religion was used as a strategic tool to rebuild the Japanese nation after the *Meiji* restoration in 1868. After the conclusion of the Pacific War, popularly known as the Asia-Pacific War (December 7, 1941 - September 2, 1945), they revised the Japanese Constitution, written by the USA, promulgated on November 3, 1946. They came into effect on May 3, 1947, once more, highlighting that *Shinto* is, in fact, an established faith that was not a component of the Japanese territory (Takahashi, 2021). The researcher added that Americans needed to educate the Japanese on what Shinto was and was not. This unmistakably shows the ownership of the dominant image of the USA, which is, to some stages, a critical, hesitant issue for the Japanese. Besides, it also expresses that the Japanese are not bothered about their religion, whether it plays a role in their social life or not. Instead, the Japanese are more conscious of maintaining their brotherhood with the USA. In a religious sense, realisation can express that the Japanese authority's trustworthiness, honesty, and humbleness toward the USA can disseminate loyalty to a relationship.

However, it was challenging for the Japanese government to estimate an appropriate number of followers for various religious groups because the state does not mandate religious organisations to register their affiliations. Consequently, the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) has found that the number of members of religious organisations is higher than the present total population of Japan as per the 2017 data. The 2017 data from the ACA reveals that the recent number of members of religious organisations is 182 million, whereas Japan's total population is 127 million. Conversely, the latest data show that as of December 31, 2019, 183 million people were affiliated with religious organisations. As of the middle of 2021, there were 124.7 million people in Japan (U. S. DEPARTMENT of STATE, 2022). This source also discloses that as of 2019, around 180,828 religious groups exist in Japan. One noticeable piece of information is the latest data regarding the number of religious practitioners prepared by the USA and published simultaneously. As a result, the attainable literature suggests that Japan is a highly multi-religious country. People can be involved in various religious institutions without ritual or religious barriers. Japanese are not stuck on any specific religion or tradition. This is a familiar consequence: a family can register their name for the *Shinto shrine* and Buddhist temple. Due to practicing both *Shintoism* and Buddhism and taking membership from both synagogues, the number of members of the religious groups is not equal to the present total population in Japan.

Another scholar, Susumu, 1981, regarded Japanese society as more likely to be *Soka Gakkai* or a value-creating society as Japanese are more moral, ethical, virtuous, and value-oriented human beings who have practiced those since birth. This trend of conventional, at the same time, traditional popular thought regarding religion creates the emerging notion of the philosophy of hearts. In general, this represents an idea of purity and unending capability with a sense of self-reinforcement for thinking about

the future. However, the Japanese are not too accustomed to the spiritual worship of deities. Instead, they are associated with religious belief and significantly enchant oneself with their nature of humanity. It reflects the consequence of the development of an individual with all the positive essence of religion, which has no specific boundary in Japanese society. However, the ancient communal religious ties in Japan were shattered by globalization (Susumu, 1981).

Globalization is a process of integration, interaction, and interdependence among people, communities, societies, and governments worldwide. In support of this view, Hiroshi, 2021, mentioned the term consumerization; it refers to the growing market of any economic goods towards its consumers and then expands through business activities with the help of information and technology, and marketization which enables the state-owned organisations working as a market-oriented enterprise, as a result of globalization. At this point, the recent practice of religion in Japan differs from ancient times. The marketization of economic goods and the necessity of products resulted in consumerization, which influenced the Japanese to change their pattern of religious practice (Hiroshi, 2021). The drastic change in the information, communication, and technology sectors helped Japan expand its market towards monopolizing consumer goods. Upgraded technology changes their lifestyle and way of thinking. The diffusion of knowledge and technology shows both the negative and positive spillover effects on Japanese society. Apart from the traditional market policy of accumulation, production, competition, and expansion, this evolving shift in Japanese society brings numerous strategic sustainability benefits in terms of religious practitioners and religious organisations. For instance, different religions and religious beliefs offer practitioners various thoughts and rituals. However, it is up to the practitioner to decide which religious rituals to follow. There are no strict rules or regulations for practicing any religion. As mentioned earlier, the number of religious practitioners is higher than the total population in Japan.

The liberal norm of religious practice gives access to its practitioners to use religious goods in terms of their necessity and put those into their personal lives. This is the consequence of the coexistence of multi-religion in a single territory. However, numerous previous works on the sociology of religion, the study of religion and religious belief using the methods and disciplines of sociology, which is regarded as the sociology of religion, strongly emphasize the inherent and social advantages of joining religious organisations or practicing religion (Miller, 1998). Apart from the spiritual meaning of religion, it also plays a social role through its organisational practice. For example, it offers chances to interact socially, build connections personally, or get guidance and direction.

Additionally, belonging to a group gives one an elevated feeling of communal

belonging and access to an atmosphere at work where reputation can be attained independently of one's standing in the wider secular world. Nevertheless, religious faith provides intrinsic advantages such as consolation, enthusiasm, and clarification. In addition to offering moral instruction, religious teachings offer the believer a broad spectrum of rationalizations for questions like the purpose of existence, the essence of the ethereal power, and the presence of life after death. Though the religious practice is quite different in Japan, it is not familiar to Western's pattern of religious practice. For instance, in a Western country, practicing Christianity from China around the 6th century via the Korean Peninsula during the *Heian* period (794 AD - 1185 AD) is not similar to what the Japanese practice. Available studies revealed that Christianity is the results of modernization in Japan (du Quenoy, 2020). Most of the time, in the case of marriage, the Japanese follow Christian rituals, although many Japanese couples still maintain traditional *Shintoist* rituals for getting married. Due to the emergence of cross-border and international marriage, now-a-days Christianity and its impact have increased in Japanese society.

Consciously or subconsciously, Japanese people still practice different religious festivals and rituals. The whole of Japanese psychology has been built based on multi-religion output. Available sources also show that around 69 percent of people are interested in visiting different synagogues during their holidays (Miller, 1998). In contrast, another latest source reveals that 70 percent of the Japanese are keen to visit their ancestral graveyard in their free time (Hiroshi, 2021). There is no drastic change in Japanese minds about their relatives who passed away. As data from 1998 was 69, which increased only 1 percent, it stands at 70 after 23 years later in 2021. In the meantime, Japan become the 3rd largest economy in the world, one of the highest aid donor countries among developed countries, nearly 27 percent of their population is 65 or overpopulation, inclusion of women in the workforce has been increased, etc. So, it can be assumed that the Japanese have not changed how they respect their elderly and maintain a hierarchy. Still, they do the same.

Nevertheless, there is a tradition in Japan called *Obon*, which is held every year in the middle of August, around August 15. This *Matsui* or festival refers to respecting ancestral history during the festival time by following *Shinto* rituals. Showing respect to the elderly, devoting to family or *Filial Piety*, maintaining civic rituals, harmony within society, etc., are Confucianism's essence. *Confucianism* is a philosophical thought of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 BCE - 479 BCE). Emerge from Korea at the end of the 3rd century in Japan. In this sense, the collaboration and similarity with harmony between different religions and religious norms, values, rituals, cultures, etc, can be identified and realised. Several examples, like this festival in Japan, are celebrated by following more than one religious norm. For instance, *Hatsumode*, or the first shrine or temple visit of the year, *Obon* or respecting the

ancestors' soul, celebrating the new year, childbirth rituals, etc., are examples of fusion religious festivals that followed *Shintoism* and Buddhist religious beliefs. Due to the religious fusion, practitioners of both *Shintoism* and Buddhism religion celebrate these festivals. That's why these festivals are considered as *Shinbutsu-Shugo*, or the mixture of *Shintoism* and Buddhism religion.

Problem Statement

Therefore, after reviewing the available literature on religious practice in Japanese society, it has been found that various religions exist in Japan. All religions coexist and are simultaneously practiced in Japanese society. The resources also claim that the number of different religious practitioners is higher than the total population in Japan (REID, 2017; U. S. DEPARTMENT of STATE, 2022). However, the attainable data reveals that the Japanese are not confined to religion or not stuck in one specific religion (Takahashi, 2021). On the other hand, Dewan (2023) claimed that rather than being influenced by one religious value, the Japanese prefer to take the essence of each religion and follow those in their daily life to accomplish their individual and collective goals. However, there is no specific reflection of the pattern of religion in Japanese society (Scroope, 2021). Over time, how Japanese religion has changed and which factors are working behind these changes need to be identified, so a gap has still been found in the remaining literature. Therefore, to minimize the knowledge gap in existing literature, this study investigates the changing pattern of religion in Japanese society.

Significance of the Study

This study investigated the Japanese case and found that, over time, different factors worked behind changing the pattern of religion in Japanese society. For example, globalization results in the marketization of consumer goods and services, requiring humans to be more liberal-minded rather than stuck in conventional religious thought and practice. Besides, humans are in a race with time to accumulate resources to survive in this competitive world happily. On the other hand, religion, an inevitable part of society and humankind, is a dynamic element practiced by the adherents for spiritual satisfaction and as a crucial tool to ensure a positive ethical reformation. As a result, Japan, as a ritualistic-minded nation, has welcomed every religion and religious thought and taken the inner essence from all the religious principles, which makes them more proactive toward globalization. These findings will contribute to the knowledge of the sociology of religion in Japan.

Research Method

This qualitative research aims to learn about the changing religious patterns in Japanese society. Besides, it intends to understand the whole context depending on the

research questions by interpreting previous research on religion in Japanese society. Though there is an identified gap in the existing knowledge, this secondary data-based research work attempts to clarify the findings using an abductive approach. After reviewing the attainable information, this paper found that religion or religious beliefs and values do not hamper Japanese daily life. Praying is a flexible activity in Japan that does not put extra pressure on the Japanese. Due to work pressure, the Japanese do not regularly pray at different synagogues.

Moreover, over time, various factors changed the pattern of practicing religion in Japan. To some extent, the Japanese never prayed, and then they started maintaining religion due to the insistence of the USA. After doing web surfing, this study also finds that globalization arrived and expanding marketization and consumerization affected the Japanese practicing religion. Furthermore, the case of Japanese society has been analysed to investigate the subject matter. Meanwhile, religion in Japan and the practice of religion are more flexible in Japanese society. In this way, this case study interprets a few secondary pieces of information for gathering knowledge and represents the findings by following thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is easy and effective for any qualitative secondary data-based research to present the study's findings. By extensively studying every secondary source of information, this research finds two themes to represent all the findings gathered and analysed. Both themes indicate the study's research question and provide a critical view of the pattern of religion in Japanese society. Those themes are:

- First, conventional religious values to overall ethical reform,
- Second, globalization resulted in the marketization of religion.

Findings

Conventional religious values to overall ethical reform

Interestingly, it would be tough to identify any Japanese who will be able to respond instantly by mentioning the name of one specific religion that they have practiced since their birth. It is difficult for them because answering with one singular religion may make their life, in fact, religious practice questionable. Since birth, they have been welcomed by following *Shinto* traditions or rituals. For example, *Obiiwai*, or ritual for a safe delivery, where *Shinto* tradition is followed by praying for safe childbirth to the *Kami* in a *Shinto Shrine*; another is *Omiyamairi*, or first visit of a *Shinto Shrine* after childbirth to show him to the *Kami* for his blessing. All these are driven by *Shinto* tradition, and it can be imagined that the Japanese were welcomed by *Shinto* tradition before birth. So, the Japanese were born *Shintoist* adherents. Later, in their childhood, adulthood, motherhood, fatherhood, and parenthood, numerous rituals are based on *Shintoism*. Though there is no scheduled time for daily prayers, the essence of *Shinto*

tradition still exists in Japanese daily life. That is why the Japanese are called born *Shinto* religious adherents. However, the principles of the *Shinto* tradition are very naturalistic, as most of its *Kami* are natural elements, and its practitioners think that the deity and its power source are natural. For instance, in myth, the Sun or *Amaterasu* is the most powerful deity in *Shintoism*. Besides waterfalls, mountains, trees, etc., are considered *Kami* in the *Shinto* religion.

The Japanese have been nurtured primarily by following *Shinto* religious values since birth, and consequently, these values have influenced Japanese society for a long time. However, as Japan has a tight economic bond with China due to their natural resource limitation, a new pattern of religious values arrived called Buddhism. It first arrived in Japan during the 6th century via the Korean Peninsula. Recent data reveals that, at present, around 84.8 million, or about 46.3 percent of the Japanese, are practicing Buddhism (U. S. DEPARTMENT of STATE, 2022). The increasing number of Buddhist adherents shows that native *Shintoism* can be the root of every Japanese.

Nevertheless, the principles of Buddhism provide a social structural reform within Japanese society by offering the right action, effort, intention, and other norms. These values profoundly influenced the Japanese, resulting in a progressive generation that valued communal harmony and unity for the betterment of society. It also insists on the ethical reformation of Japanese society to reduce the negative consequences of economic flexibility due to a lack of proper moral education. Similar to *Shintoism*, Buddhism does not demand daily praying from its practitioners. However, the practice of Buddhism is an inevitable part and parcel of Japanese daily life. As mentioned earlier, every Japanese person, to some extent of their life, is born a *Shinto* religious believer. Despite the tradition of funerals in *Shintoism*, most funerals follow Buddhist rituals. Another study found that 90.1 percent of funerals are finished by following Buddhist rituals (Hiroshi, 2021). In contrast, only 3.4 percent of the population is maintained by *Shintoism*, and 99 percent of Japanese families prefer the Buddhist tradition to funeral ceremonies (Nippon.com, 2015). In this way, the Japanese are regarded as being born in *Shinto* and dying in Buddhism.

After *Shintoism* and Buddhism, *Confucianism* had an immense influence on Japanese society. During the 3rd century, *Confucian* thought emerged in Japanese society. For instance, the notion of *Uchi-Souto* has been extended due to *Confucius's* values. *Uchi* refers to the close relationships within society, such as family, friends, office, etc. As in every three examples, she holds a close bond with every family member, friend, and person within the office. Without maintaining those bondings, Japanese people cannot continue inside and outside circles.

Conversely, *Souto* refers to the outside circle within every relationship. For instance, neighbors, society, communal organisations, etc. This is maintained because Japan is a hierarchical society where people strictly consider formal and informal relationships to show respect to seniors, juniors, friends, and close and long-distance relationships. Besides sharing information, emotional attachment, showing respect, and requesting something, to some extent, helping someone also depends on the inside-outside relationship. Apart from inside and outside relationships, *Filial Piety* is also an essential part and parcel of Japanese society, and it is one of the most profound principles of *Confucianism*. It means devoting time to the family, which strengthens familial bonding and enhances the responsibilities of the Japanese family. This philosophical thought also encouraged the Japanese to maintain social harmony by performing and continuing different civic rules and regulations. Practicing *Confucianism* as a norm and a value in daily life helps the Japanese to stress out their work pressure. And tighten their family bonding to protect their social structure during Westernization. Westernization refers to the process of Western European cultural adaptation. After the *Meiji* Restoration in 1868, Japan moved forward with modernization and westernization.

However, in recent times, the influence of Christianity within Japanese society is so remarkable. Scholars found that the changing mindset of the young generation has been highly attracted by the gorgeous and simultaneously harmonious style of marriage in the Christian religion, which helps to enter into Japanese society. However, Christianity was introduced in Japan in 1549 from Spain. After a long journey, however, the number of Christian practitioners is insignificant. Christianity still faces different limitations in Japanese society. Existing data shows that only 1.9 million Japanese people, which consists of 1 percent of the total population, practice Christianity in Japan (U. S. DEPARTMENT of STATE, 2022). None other than this issue is any mentionable reason for Christianity's expansion in Japan. However, the values of Christianity spread peace and stability within Japanese society.

At this point, an interesting observation is that rather than competing with each other, *Shintoism* and Buddhism, the most dominating religions in terms of the number of adherents and influence, cohabit in Japanese society. Every religion and religious value play their native role within their practitioners' lives, even though there is no religious boundary. *Shintoism* has its rituals and traditions and is considered the caretaker of Japanese society (Miller, 1998). Events associated with ancient calendar schedules have been followed through *Shintoism* rituals. Notwithstanding, Buddhism still has a significant influence on Japanese society. At the same time, *Confucianism* and Christianity are also practiced in Japan. Over the years, Japan welcomed every religion due to the construction of its social structure and its remaining stable socio-political country. In addition, Japan represents itself as a peaceful nation after having various religious values, which is quite a contrast to its WWII (September 1, 1939 - September 2, 1945) history.

Globalization resulted in the marketization of religion

Globalization resulted in drastic economic growth with the help of international trade facilities in Japan. Besides, it has negative consequences in Japanese society as well. For instance, the declining birth rate results in a labour shortage in Japan. It welcomes Korean, Chinese, Indonesian, Filipino, Thailand, Malaysian, Brazilian, and so on nationals in Japan to cope with the labour shortage issue. As the available knowledge is evident, Japan is a homogeneous society. However, nowadays, the Japanese are interested in foreigners taking them as their spouses. Besides, the life-leading cost in Japan is much higher than in other developed countries. All of these eventually result in friction between the joint family and the single family. In the Japanese context, the number of three-generation families is drastically decreasing, whereas the number of single or one-generation families is rapidly increasing. Here, a three-generation family consists of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren.

Conversely, a one-generation family consists of parents and their children only. Secondary data reveals that in 1986, around 44.8 percent of Japanese families were three-generation families, which decreased to 9.4 percent in 2019 (Hiroshi, 2021). This study also shows that the number of single parents, unmarried ladies and gentlemen, and only husband-wife families was also raised due to globalization. Data shows the percentage was 31.3 in 1986, which has increased to 61.1 percent in 2019 (Hiroshi, 2021). This means that the generation's values are not passing, and junior family members are responsible for arranging every funeral ritual for those who passed away. This ceremony was organised by a collective initiative that shifted to individual responsibility recently. Different organisations in Japan handle these rituals due to the high cost of rituals and the work pressure of collective memorials.

There is no official data about how many Japanese are practicing religion; one source vindictively claimed that around 62% of Japanese are not practicing any religion (Takahashi, 2021). Recently, a survey was conducted by the *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* or NHK (the Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in 2018 regarding different religious practitioners in Japan. It reveals the latest number of Japanese who follow any specific religion.

Table 1. Percentage of religious practitioners in Japan

Types of Religion	Percentage of Adherents (%)
No religion	62 %
Buddhism	31 %
Shintoism	3 %
Christianity	1 %
Others	1 %
No answer	2 %

Source: NHK, 2018; Scroope, 2021

The representation in Table 1 is evident in the recent consequences of religion and the different religious adherents in Japan. The most concerning issue is the increasing percentage of non-religious practitioners daily. The literature review section identified the factors that influenced Japanese religion over time. Japanese have also acceded to changes happening due to external and internal issues. It reflects the apathies of the Japanese toward religious practice. However, believing in any deity or spiritual belief united people and guided humanity toward an enlightening pathway for their future movement. So, suppose the Japanese have no religious practitioner. In that case, they will not lose their religious belief or values, norms, ethics, rituals, etc, which take them into their present stage of socio-economic development.

Discussion

Over the years, Japanese society has observed a variety of religions. That is not necessarily shifted due to their internal reason. Apart from their internal issues, external consequences also pushed Japan to change its practice of religious patterns. As a matter of fact, Japanese society was heavily influenced by a monarchy culture until 1854, when Commodore Perry opened a trading route to the capitalists Western world (Alam, 2013). Consequently, religious practice and following the gist of the values and principles of various religions make Japanese society and culture simultaneously. Besides somewhat being influenced by others’ insistence, Japan modified its motivation to welcome changes. Even though Japanese society is still regarded as a homogeneous society with different limitations, they never said no or did not ignore receiving any favorable life-changing modification through religion and its values in their society.

Table 2. Overview of the four major Religions in Japan

Religion	Emerg- ing time	Syna- gogue	Practi- tioners	Rituals	Principles
Shintoism	Native to Japan, Jomon period	Shinto Shrine	80% Around 80 million people	* <i>Omatsuri</i> (rice cultivation festival)	*Gods are known as <i>Kami</i>
				*New Year’s Day	*Worship of the nature
				*Wedding	*Keep away from evil spirits

Buddhism	China around the 6 th century (Heian period) via the Korean peninsula	Bud-dhist Temple	67% Around 3,55,000 people	*Funerals & Death anniver-sary * <i>Nenjiyuu</i> (an-nual feasts) * <i>O-bon</i> (honouring the ancestors)	*Right action
					*Right effort
Confu-cianism (philo-sophical thought)	From Korea at the end of the 3 rd century	Con-fucian Temple	—	* <i>Filial piety</i> (devotion to family) *Civic rituals *Cosmic har-mony	*Right intention
					*Right livelihood
					*Free mind from evil
					*Ethics
Christian-ity	From Spain in 1549	Church	1-1.5%	*Wedding ceremonies	*Practice of Truth
					*Value of Knowl-edge
					*Humanity
					*Loyalty
					*Morality
					*Frugality
					*Love God
					*Love enemies
					*Forgive others

Source: Created by the author based on REID, 2017; Scroope, 2021; U. S. DEPARTMENT of STATE, 2022

The depicted table denotes the significant religions and related information that signifies their oblivion in the Japanese mind and society. The available literature claim that the term ‘new religions’, *Shinshukyo* in Japanese, is a general term that was first appeared after the WWII. It refer to a wide range of various organisations that have emerged from the beginning of the 19th century to the contemporary (Baffelli, 2023). It reveals the liberty of choice to practice religion with the essence of different religious values. In the end, the moral values, norms, ethics, and, most importantly, the overall positive attitude of the Japanese nationals have remarkably glorified Japan to the whole world. These religious values, principles, and values are not just remarks that the Japanese practiced; instead, all of these are now part of the broadening of Japanese culture. In this regard, Baffelli & Takahashi (2023) claimed that practicing different religions significantly contributing to build various peaceful religious groups in Japan which is good and have no specific threat to the Japanese society because of those religious minority groups.

Moriyama (2019) conspicuously claimed that religion is a mandatory element in teaching a generation about moral and character-building necessities, showing a path to explore the motives of human life. The study further noted that it is a matter of unfortunate and worrying at the same time that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Japanese are avoiding religious texts in their education curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels. Besides, in the era of modern technological advancement, new descendants are more engaged with electrical and electronic devices; therefore, spiritual beliefs and value education can provide a direction that can give new hope for Japan to sustain the workforce shortage due to the declining birth rate issue. In addition, religious beliefs have a positive effect on the economic growth of a country. In this regard, Dewan (2023) suggested that increasing the number of participants in different synagogues can strengthen religious beliefs, for instance, the afterlife, paradise, and inferno, which decrease dishonesty and enhance honesty, frugality, employment morality, and trustworthiness.

Consequently, the corruption rate becomes lower, resulting in ultimate progressive economic mobility in a positive sense. Conversely, the available sources also argue that attending different religious rituals in different institutions is, to some extent, time-consuming, and those who participate have less value for time. On this note, developed countries consider time priceless and are not interested in investing time in religious practice. However, Armet (2009) and Alam (2013) suggested that participating in different religious agencies makes people, specifically the youth, more social and open-minded to working collectively as a group rather than moving forward as a single entity.

From a global perspective, older people are generally more religious than young people. Moreover, the existing knowledge also reveals that longevity is one of the crucial elements for which the number of religious practitioners may be high. Research data shows that older people are too involved in practicing religion. 124.9 million Japanese people, among them 29.1%, are in the aging population, and about 20.05 million people are 75 and over. From this point of view, Japan, as an elderly populated country, can ordinarily be regarded as a religious nation. Conversely, Di Febo (2023) critically revealed that young people's ability to take action, and exercise their religious agency has been limited as a result of their inability to balance the exigent demands of older members with conflicting obligations and a lack of authority, and leadership in making decisions.

Now, the readers can find the source to analyse what other nationals think about religion, which is quite different from that of the Japanese. Japanese are not strict about any single religion or religious practice. Besides, the discussion section also identified that in the present context, the Japanese are born as *Shinto* and die as

Buddhism. The essence of every religion exists in Japanese society, which makes them human, and as a result, they represent themselves as honest, hardworking, sincere, trustworthy, patient and, persistent, punctual; in fact, a morality-based society where every Japanese works unitedly for the development of their homeland.

Limitations and Future Research Scope

Religion is not only spiritual; human beings might also pray and follow the attached rituals. Rather than religion, it is one of the multi-dimensional intangible essences that can be an influential instrument, which has been realised after doing an in-depth investigation of the case of Japanese society. As all information has been accumulated by interpreting secondary resources, the latest perception of the pattern of religion in contemporary Japanese society has been absent. In addition, this quick research has no expert view due to time constraints and the need to reduce the cost necessary to generate accurate knowledge. On the other hand, a common observation in qualitative research is that a researcher may become biased with the subject matter. Therefore, the objective and research question of the study has enormous scope for future research.

Conclusion

Japan is an island nation with limited natural resources; at present, it has become the third-largest economy in the world, which holds 10 percent of the world's gross national product. This industrialized democratic country is not an example of miraculous economic growth. Undoubtedly, their development is not seen only because of their excellent preparation or plans; it is beyond their policy, where religion has an extraordinary contribution and influence. It fueled their daily life to build up morally and ethically, which is paying off nowadays. This investigation has unfolded the consequences of religion and its influence on Japanese society. Besides, it demonstrates the practice pattern of different religions and religious changes in Japan. In the beginning, Japan took religion as a tool of social reformation to reconstruct their country by bringing behavioral changes in native Japanese people. To strengthen the social structure by building up their nationals ethically and morally, they represent themselves as an organised, well-educated, peaceful-minded nation, which is the opposite of their WWII nature. Despite the USA's insistence on Japanese religious practice over time, Japan maintains a warm bilateral relationship with the USA. Whether having any political strategy or not, Japan takes the positive insight of every instruction of the USA and practices those for their socio-economic development. Afterward, globalization resulted in huge marketization of every product, and as a consequence, the pattern of religious practice was also reformed. Technological advancement and organisational facilities provide modernization in numerous religious rituals in Japanese society. The recent trend of reformation may

result in different aspects of religious practice in Japanese society. However, Japan and its administrative body still have control over their consumerization of goods, and their ethical mentality will not support any ambiguity in their society due to religious practice in Japan. Attainable information also suggests that a homogeneous country like Japan, which has a conservative mindset till today, has little chance of being influenced by others. Besides, before making any decision, they think about the benefits of humankind first. In this sense, changes in religious practice in Japanese society may shift in the future, and they have no intention of putting any religion over humanism. Consequently, it proves that becoming a multi-religious country, Japan is a role model for other nations that can take lessons in utilizing religious principles for the overall societal ethical reformation.

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