

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PRACTICE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN EVERYDAY LIFE OF MODERN JAPAN

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Abstract: The paper demonstrates some peculiarities of Japanese religiousness at the present time and investigates some forms of religion which are displayed in the daily life in Japan. The article analyses the manifestation of Shintoism and Buddhism and their influence on the Japanese everyday life.

Key words: mode of life, traditions and beliefs, religion, religiousness, ancient rituals, cult, rite holidays.

Nowadays Japan is an outstanding example of a post-industrial developed country, where scientific and technical progress and a high economic level are combined with peculiarities of a unique cultural nation's mode of life. Traditional Shinto and Buddhist traditions and beliefs are reflected there at most. From ancient times to the present days this influence is displayed in the Japanese everyday life in different shapes.

However, there is a notion that Japanese are irreligious people. Allegedly, official surveys and sociological researches, conducted by scientific organizations in Japan, show that, in fact, Japanese are often referred to religiously indifferent (Игнатович, Светлов, 1989; Пронников, Ладанов, 1983). As a typical example we can refer to a popular book written by some Japanese authors and made for better understanding of Japanese people by foreign students and young Japanese: «Japan. How to understand it». Written by specialists of the University of Ehime, it is aimed «to explain complex aspects of Japanese culture as simply as possible» (Дэвис, 2008). This publication reviews various aspects of the contemporary Japanese culture, but religion is mentioned about quite briefly. According to these authors it might be thought that a religious factor in the life of modern Japan is not so much essential as could be. However, such a view of this Japanese social consciousness's aspect seems not to be quite right. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to find out the peculiarities of Japanese religiousness at the present time and in what form religion is displayed in the daily life in Japan.

First of all, it should be clarified, that in our society religion performs a lot of different functions: worldview, communicative, legitimizing ones, etc., so it covers all parts of human existence. In Japan the cultural and social practice has its own special features. There is an evident connection between cultural practice and national traditions.

Although in the Meiji era a lot of traditions, dating back to ancient times, were rethought, respect for traditions is preserved and transmitted from generation to generation.

Generally, traditions, more exactly traditionalism, deeply penetrating in consciousness of the Japanese nation, have become the most important feature of its character. The Japanese strenuously attempt to keep unchanged inherited from previous generation's code of conduct, culture and its forms. As in no other country, in modern Japan it is characteristically to react carefully and venerationally towards ancient monuments and the formed way of life. For modern Japanese it is shown in the conventional modes of behavior, in different kinds of activities. Therefore, ancient rituals have been serving as the essential part of the Japanese mode of life over the centuries, so strongly they have entered in their lives.

It is fully applicable to traditional religious ritualism. In many respects it is regarded as a component of national customs, reflected the way of life typical for the entire nation. Therefore, it is a necessary manifestation of respect for the culture of their country as a whole (Пронников, Ладанов, 1983; Светлов, 1985).

Different functions of religion are manifested through traditions of the nation – for instance, they perform regulatory functions of the society, i.e. stabilize the accepted relations, reproduce them in the life of the new generation, serve as the norm of human behavior. So traditions have a high influence on both political thinking and social behavior of the Japanese. Existing religious organizations in Japan, both traditional and new, are born with a strongly marked social character, and in this regard they fill the daily life of the Japanese. Religion in Japan today is hundreds of cultural, educational, sporting and charitable institutions and the common practice of using a variety of religious organizations by different political forces (for example, the Komeito party is linked with the most powerful religious organization - Soka Gakkai) (Игнатович, Светлов 1989; Пронников, Ладанов, 1983).

Different celebrations and festivals perform a communicative function - every time a huge number of people, including foreigners who are interested in the Japanese culture gather there, where people are involved in communication with each other; they can establish interpersonal relations and develop mutual understanding among them.

Traditional flamboyant celebrations or festivals called matsuri are an integral part of the everyday life of the Japanese. There are some local ceremonial events but they are not national holidays. Thousands of festivals of this kind are celebrated annually at different time and in different places. They are performed at different life stages in honor of the seasons or a memorable date. Originally Matsuri was linked with the Shinto cult; at the interpenetration of Shinto and Buddhism it became more widely used, and Japanese began to use the term «matsuri» in all kinds of holidays, not only in religious ones (Арутюнов, 1968; Пронников, Ладанов, 1983).

For "welcoming" the deity the temple is put in order, and the place for the deity is enclosed with a sacred rope called simenawa. Ritual food and other offerings are laid out on the altar or in a sacred place in the temple. Pine branches and bamboo are put at the entrance of a house (during the New Year holiday) or streets are brightly decorated (in the Tanabata festival). An obligatory part of these traditional festivals are theater performances, music, dances, contests, carnivals. Participants usually wear special apparels. Often colorful masks are the part of such suits, sold in huge quantities at the festival (Tengu mask, otafuku, LRC, etc.). Japanese people usually have several of these masks; they have an own special meaning to the host. They are used to emphasize the character traits of any person, the manifestation of feelings and emotions that the Japanese try to hide in the everyday life, as a public expression of emotion is unacceptable for them.

Shinto festivities are devoted, at most, to manifestations of the earthly life, for example, to the beginning of sowing, labor, conceiving a baby, birth, childhood and youth. Thus, the emergence of a newborn is accompanied with certain ceremonies and rituals: at first, relatives come with gifts and greetings; then parents of the baby, according to the tradition, cook rice with red beans or rice cakes, and then they bring the baby to the Shinto temple (Пронников, Ладанов, 1983; Светлов, 1985).

Various rituals of Shinto temples serve as a delight for a deity. The ceremonies are simple and require from the Japanese offerings and simple rituals only (Светлов, 1985). Maybe that's the reason for such a consolidation of the principles of Shinto in the minds of the Japanese. Rituals are needed so that desires or requests can be heard by the gods. For many Shinto temples o-mamori amulets' sale and wooden plates ema, on which visitors of the temples write their appeal to the gods, are the important source of their income. The Japanese ask them for curing illnesses, being a success in some business, for the harmony of the marital relationship, for protection from harm, etc. in this way. There are some shrines, a visit of which helps to get married successfully, gains longevity, passes exams, helps to promote in a career, provides a prosperous childbirth, etc. For example, in the days before exams, one can observe the walls of many shrines, hung with such plates. So the implementation of these religious rituals shows the importance of the compensatory function.

Also in Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples you can purchase an o-mikudzi – the prediction of the fate printed on paper strips, so the Japanese can learn about what awaits them in the near future, about successful and critical days to their undertakings (Игнатович, Светлов, 1989; Светлов, 1985).

Ceremonies sometimes still have a connection with temple rituals, but in fact they are no longer religious. The most important of these rituals is wedding. Weddings at the temples are a widespread phenomenon, since it allows holding the wedding in a ceremonial atmosphere with a small amount of cost. In many temples, there are pavilions built specifically for weddings, it is also one of the main sources of income of the temples (Игнатович, Светлов, 1989; Светлов, 1985).

The connection between religion and the daily life is reflected in the attitude of their body, in hygiene habits. It is known that in Shinto, instead of the binary opposition of righteousness and wickedness, there is opposition of purity as an extremely good condition and contamination. The purity is understood both physical cleanliness and figurative meaning. The man, in some way affected by pollution, had no right to communicate with others, and especially with the deity, so purification is an integral part of any Shinto ritual. In the daily life it is expressed both in a hallway in the Japanese house called genkan, where you should leave your street shoes as well as an outfit, and in the diversity of footwear used at home (for street, house, even toilet there is an own pair of shoes), and in a special love for the bath, hot-springs and furo.

Offering food to the gods is an integral part of each ceremony or celebration. Rice is presented in folk rituals overall. For example, it is a main offering to the souls of the dead. One of the principal deities whom common people always worshiped, has been the god of rice fields. The Japanese do not forget about the fact that their favorite alcoholic drink, the sake, is made of rice. It is one of the mandatory offerings for the deities; in ancient times Shinto temples were the main producers of this drink. So far, the Shinto shrines always have a lot of kegs where the best and pure sake is stored (Мещеряков, 1999).

But if Shinto deities care for alive, Buddhism rules the world of the dead (Игнатович, Светлов, 1989). In Japan there are two types of burials – it is the burial in the ground and the custom to burn the corpses, which appeared in Japan with Buddhism in the early VIII century but has not replaced the old Shinto custom. Before the cremation, while relatives kindle fragrant herbs, priests read over the dead "purifying" prayers and incantations. After cremation relatives take away the ash and bury it in a special urn. After a certain period of time (from 7 weeks till 1 year) they put a monument with an inscription or the image of a Buddha on the grave. Cemeteries are usually located in the shade of the trees on the hills or mountain slopes. In the cities at the cemeteries under a grave stone obelisk there is a special box in which urns with ashes of the dead relatives of the family are placed (Арутюнов, 1968).

Apart from the rituals, with the advent of Buddhism in Japan, new holidays appear. For example, in mid-July, Bon – the Day of the ancestors - is held. It is believed that at this time the ancestors visit the house where they lived before. A special welcome bonfires mukae-bi are lit for them, which at the end of the holiday are replaced by farewell fires Okuri -bi (sometimes they are lit in the lamps and let down on the water). In the Buddhist temple in honor of deceased ancestors a ceremony Urabon is held. In these days, people all over Japan, dressed in national costumes, dance a special Odori dance and visit the graves of their ancestors (Пронников, Ладанов, 1983).

The concepts of Zen Buddhism (one of the directions of Buddhism) is reflected in wide-spread martial arts (such as, kendo, aikido, karate, etc.), and also in the aesthetics of arts, due to it in the Japanese language there are such terms as a hanami (a flower viewing), a tsukimi (a moon viewing), yukimi (snow viewing), which express an essential part of the Japanese everyday life. The tradition of worshipping the beauty impacts on people's lives, comes in their feelings, words and actions, passes from generation to generation (Пронников, Ладанов, 1983). In the daily life this principle became apparent, for example, in such a cultural phenomenon as tokonoma, which expressed an aesthetic taste of the house owner through ikebana, pictures or scripts, because the house is the continuation of the inner world of a man who, in turn, is the seat of universal harmony. We can also see Zen in the art of flower decoration and art of the tea ceremony.

The convergence and synthesis of two religions by their mutual complement are also reflected to some extent in usual traditions. For instance, the tradition to set special altars at home – the Buddhistic altar (called butsudan symbolizing the memory of the deceased) and the Shintoism one (called kamidana embodying the gratitude to the gods). Each morning in front of the kamidana a family commit a ritual of worship clapping their hands and bowing low. In the evening candles are lit in front of it. Models of monuments with the names of the dead are set on the butsudan. Offerings of flowers, branches of sikimi, tea, rice, etc. are placed there. It is believed, that well-being of the family depends on how faithfully every generation commits this ritual, as the ancestors are the essential part of the present for Japanese (Пронников, Ладанов, 1983).

Thereby, it can be concluded that religious rites and rituals, both Shintoism and Buddhism, are the essential part of Japanese everyday life, and different forms of religious and social practices fulfill the most socially important functions. But at most they are perceived in the society as an integral

element of national customs, traditions, culture, as an attribute of the formed certain lifestyle. At the same time the religious content of the tradition is blurred, because people often don't remember what the symbolic meaning some custom or rite has, what the original meaning of it is. Therefore, the religions are closer to people, merging with their daily lives, but at the same time partly lose the value-semantic aspects, which is their main content.

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