

Japan is rich in culture whether it is visual arts, nature, performing arts, pop culture, cuisine, tradition, literature, or even religion. All of these and others encompass the practices and philosophies of the Japanese in the 21st century. Religion in particular is a very interesting subject when it comes to the Japanese culture. It is known that a very large percentage of the Japanese people are non-religious. This is very strange when you also look at the daily lives of the Japanese people and how Shintoism is incorporated everywhere in it. Some examples are going to temples and shrines on New Year's Day and saying itadakimasu and gochisousama before and after a meal. These examples are customs that have been passed down for many generations and have become more of a daily lifestyle than following the actual religion, Shinto. With so much of the population non-religious it is also interesting to know what their perspective is on life and death since those two subjects are major to any religion.

The movie *Departures* depicts the rituals and traditions of death in Japan. In my opinion it seems that Japanese people perceive death as something dirty or impure but at the same time give it respect. The movie shows the main character Daigo becoming an encoffiner and what stigma is attached to it. The Japanese almost revulsion of touching a dead body is depicted well when Daigo tries to touch his wife and she literally screams "Don't touch me. Filthy!" This shows just how strongly Japanese people feel about death. In Japan encoffiners are thought of as a necessary evil and you are looked down on if you have a profession as one. On the flip side of that coin there is also respect shown in death. Life is also expressed through death in the movie. A great comparison is with the art of flower arranging, Ikebana, which is explained well in the article "The Way of Flowers (Ikebana)-Eternity Is in the Moment". Ikebana is created to only last for a short period of time. The flowers have transcended time, and they are still alive in death. This can also be said of people. The dead are made up to look as if they were still alive

with makeup and formal clothing before they get cremated. The encoffiners are very respectful of the dead when they prepare the body to be viewed by the family. What makes me believe that there is still respect for the dead is that in the movie, the encoffiners would change the person clothing and wipe them down without showing more than the head, feet and part of the arms of the body. They show respect by not showing off any unnecessary part of the body. They still want the body to be pure. You might think that it doesn't matter because the person is already dead but that is the respect given in the Japanese culture. In the movie when the old woman that owned the bathhouse died Daigo became her encoffiner. In life she had always wore a yellow scarf and Daigo decided to put the yellow scarf on here body with her formal clothing. I believe that this represents that even after death the Japanese believe that that person will live on somewhere else. The cremator who knew the old woman had said, death is not the end it is just a gateway to somewhere new. I also think Japanese believe that life is found equally in all living things such as plants, animals, and humans. This is probably closely related to their belief in Kami and that Kami is also found in everything. I believe that the Japanese feel that life and death are two sides of the same coin. They are the closely related but at the same time they are different.

I think that my own view on life is pretty similar that of the Japanese people. I don't believe myself to be a religious person so I don't quite have a specific perspective on life based on religion. It is very difficult for me to explain my interpretation on life. I mainly perceive life in nature not in people. I can see life in the plants, how they grow into trees, bushes, and flowers and how they eventually wither and die. I also interpret life with the birth of new life. In the movie when Mika tells Daigo that she is pregnant that is what I believe is one of the representations of life in the movie. It shows that as one life ends (Daigo's father) another

begins (the baby). I interpret life in a straightforward manner. I am here now living and breathing in this universe and have my own individuality. That is how I perceive life. Life to me is also somewhat terrifying because it brings you one step closer to death. Life is a precious thing that can be taken away in an instant. It is a very powerful thing. I have never lost anyone close to me so I cannot understand the deeper feelings of having a life lost, but it is depicted very well in the farewell between Daigo and his father. I also cannot understand the perspective of life based on religion. It is in my opinion someone telling you what to believe in. Not letting you believe in what you want to. I believe that religion is a very important factor in perceiving life and death.

I have learned that Japanese culture for the most part is base off of “religion” even though a large percent of the people do not practice religion. Shinto itself is not really a religion in the eyes of the Japanese people; it has instead just become part of their daily life. I have learned that because religion in Japan is more of a minority the Japanese people welcome any religion in their country. They will never reject another religion. Their Kami in the Shinto system embraces Buddhism, Christianity, and others, and since Kami is open to others there is no need to take specific sides. I have learned through the readings that the Japanese people are deeply interconnected to life’s practices. For example I have stated earlier, the art of flower arranging, Ikebana is closely related to Shinto and Buddhism. It is about the preserving the life of a dead flower. I feel that the Japanese culture is so intertwined in religion that there is no difference in the two anymore. They are one and the same. I have learned that religion itself is just a word and the action people take show more of who they are and what they believe. I also think that the long-lasting customs and rituals that the Japanese people have been preserving have begun to slowly die out with the change in times. Now in the 21st century the Japanese people are more

preoccupied with work and don't have enough time for much of anything else. Urbanization and moving out of the rural areas has caused some rituals and customs to die out. I think this could also be a factor in the increase in of people who are non-religious. They were not taught the same values and customs that their parent and grandparents were taught and as a result do not know the rich history of their culture.

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