

5. How do you see Shinto's role/position in contemporary Japan?

The role of Shinto in contemporary Japan is important in the formation and strengthening of local communities, the transmission of culture, and regional revitalization.

Shinto plays an important role in the formation and strengthening of local communities. Shrine festivals lead to community support and social inclusion, promote interaction among residents, and contribute to the strengthening of local communities. For example, children's mikoshi (portable shrines) and local festivals give the community opportunities to watch over local children, and shrines serve as community hubs that foster local culture and relationships.

Shrines also play an important role in cultural transmission and community revitalization. Shrines are used as a space to share sanctity with the local public. Shrine festivals and events carry on local traditions and culture, contributing to the formation of local identity. Furthermore, there is a movement to utilize shrines as a resource for community service, and local residents are taking the initiative in revitalizing their neighborhoods.

Furthermore, shrines and religious culture play an important role in disasters and reconstruction. During the Great East Japan Earthquake, shrines served as evacuation centers and places where local people gathered to seek safety. Shrines also served as means to mourn the victims and as a means to pray for the revival and recovery of the community. Furthermore, the continuation of festivals after the disaster has deepened community cohesion and functioned as part of community revitalization.

The flexibility of Shinto is also noteworthy. Japanese religious beliefs make little distinction between Shinto and Buddhism, and it is common for people to move in and out of shrines and Buddhist temples according to the demands and circumstances of the

moment. This implies that religious beliefs and understandings are not required. For the Japanese, religion has very practical benefits and goals, including creating and maintaining social relationships with the gods and ancestors, and ensuring purity, health, prosperity, and tranquility for the living.

In the changing media and communication environment of recent years, shrines have adapted their functions and outreach. Some shrines now operate official websites. The local community can better connect with the shrines in this way. In addition, there are many examples of shrine staff using the Internet to interact with and support people outside their local communities.

Considering the above, the role and status of Shinto serve as a means to transmit cultural and traditional values across time, generations, and communities. As the center of the community, Shinto shrines support people's connections and identity formation and promote regional development and coexistence. The flexibility of Shinto is also rooted in the Japanese view of religion, which allows people to pursue practical interests and goals in their daily lives without the need for religious beliefs.