Arguments To Prove That Shintoism Is A Religion

Can Shintoism be deemed as a religion based on comparative evidence from Shintoist and Buddhist artworks from the tenth to the thirteenth century Japan?

A large contrversial question in regards to religion within Japan is if Shintoism was truly a religion or not. This debate lead to two famed historians, Toshio Kuroda and Joseph Kitagawa, to explain their own beliefs on this debate in their books. Kitagawa's Religion in Japanese History argues that Shinto is a religion, while Toshio Kuroda's Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion is open to other interpretations of it. Toshio Kuroda sees the subject matter to be that as a way of percieving. However religion is based upon a way of knowing, faith, which directly intertwines itself with religious knowledge systems. Religions worldwide are expressed through systems of faith and worship, usually with a particular overarching, controlling power. Despite abundant differences from other religions it can not be denied that Shintoism was a religion. Japan has no exemption to the defintion of a religion, as expemplified through the use of art as a means of expression. By examning artwork as a key part of Japanese history, it is thoroughly capable as providing evidence of Shintoism as a religion. In agreeance with Joesph Kitagawa, Shintoism should exclusively be refered to as a religon, as it can be compared to Buddhist artworks, which is a verified religion.

Traditional Shinto culture establishes itself as one with nature, with no singular religious founder, scriptures, or name. They stand by the idea that the world is inhabited by spirits referred to as "kami"(gods) that live everywhere. Anything and anyone can be possessed by a kami; which can be any sort of spirit, potentially even a reincarnated spirit of a deceased loved one. The people of Japan would pay their respects to different kami with various levels of cultural significance. As Shinto concepts developed, the Chinese continued to expand their sphere of influence to neighboring countries. Through interactions with Chinese culture, Japan began to adapt new modes of expression and belief, one of these primary cultural exchanges being the Buddhist religion. As the Japanese began to incorpotrate the practices of Buddhism to Shintoism, they also deviated from traditional Chinese ways of expression while maintaining the general concepts. Another mode of expressions that was adapted was the artworks and tools, which played a key role in documenting beliefs of the time period. Althogh they had been inspired by the Chinese, the Japanese made the artwork theirs. The Japanese used simple compositions in their artworks, not overly intellectual, with lots of bright colors. They were also known to replace well-known original poems, with ones that emphasize the theme of nature with their developing langauge. The Japanese amalagated Chinese influence with their own way of artistic expression that was translated to their art. Art is a documentation of what people believed and saw as significant when created, demonstrarting that all paintings carried their own ideas. As art can be used as a form of religious practice, it legitimizes Shinto art, based on the premace that Buddhist art is legitmate. Put into historical context, by the time that Kamakura period (1185-1333), and the Nanbokucho period (1333-1392) arrived, there were new developments in religion which lead to changes in religious art. With the rise and fall of Minamoto Yoritomo, the Japanese working class formed a more tactical warrior class known as the Samurai, known for their dedication and specialized skills in combat. The Kamakura period

lead to the rise in production of sculptures, metalwork, and paintings centralized mostly on Buddhist motifs, as well as armor for the samurai. With modernization the armor was typically bronze and leather, sculptures were wooden, and paintings were on scrolls of either fine silk or paper. Painting was strongly encouraged in the society's rebirth, as it was used as a way for story telling and teaching. However prior to these artisic developments the Shintoists prayed, performed, and created just like the more upcoming Buddhists did. The shift of power caused a shift of relgion, as the samurai were drawn to the discipline which Zen Buddhism taught. The samuari combined Shintoism with Zen, meaning that Shintoism was never truly abandoned, even by those who adopted Zen. Shintoism and Zen Buddhism were complimentrary so much that it is common to disregard the disposition of Shintoism as a whole.

The artistic schools all stemmed from different religious and resource developments. The new developments inspired the reflection of their religious practices. The Kei school was one of the first established sculpture schools to rise out of the city of Nara. Through this school, several reputable works of religious art were created, such as Nio and Jizo. The Nio sculpture was carved by Unkei and Kaikei, and stands at the Todaiji temple gate as the largest wooden Nio in Nara. The two figures, Misshaku Kongo and Naraen Kongo represent the mantra of existence, "om". Jizo is a kami which derived from Buddhism, who serves as a protector of women and children, and is an integral part of Pure Land Buddhism. Samurai placed their faith in beings like Nio and Jizo, and spread their beliefs through artisitc practices. Additionally, the Japanese developed Zen Calligraphy along with the practice of creating more realistic drawings and adopted it as a form of writing their teachings. Buddhism undoubtedly had a distinguished presence in the Kamakura period, especially in the rebuilding of previously destoryed temples. Replacing old unknown icons with Buddhist figures, Buddhism increasingly established itself as more prominent than Shintoism. Buddhist art flooded the Japanese religious practices, with religious motifs, especially the Pure Land. Although there is no denial that there was more Buddhist icons than Shintoist, the religious iconography popularity does not disqualify Shintoist as legitmate.

Although the Buddhist beliefs dominated Japanese culture, they did not definitively set a singular religion. Shintoism set ideals such as the use of paper screens for dim bright lighting in homes, as well as "Ikebana" (living flowers) or a floral arrangement, accompanied by "shodo" (calligraphy). Additionally, there remains many "netsuke" (little sculptures) of living creatures which includes multiple elements of the earth, including bugs that may be considered disturbances by some. These all are unique to Shintoism and continued to be practiced as assimilation with Buddhism occurred. This demonstrates an extreme significance and awareness of peaceful coexistence between man and nature, and is reflected throughout thousands of years of Japanese visual art. The emerging warrior class resented the aristocracy which had much more refined tastes, which encompassed both Buddhism and Shintoism practices. The higher class had the power and with it they used it to practice their religious beliefs.From 1132-1142, Shinto Emperor Sutoku reigned in Japan until he left to become a monk when he was 39. He was exiled after failing to stop the Hogen rebellion and sent to the Sanuki Province he dedicated himself to restablishing himself as a monk, until he died and was buried at a "Misasagi" (Memorial Shinto Shrine) in Kagawa. His legacy lives on as he is considered to have become a demon after death, and he was responsible for the suffering of Kagawa which followed. This can be seen in Ten Heroes of the Tametomo, in the scene where Princess Shiranui fights evil Sutoku. As the increase in religious artworks carried on through to the Nanbokucho period, the paintings of both Shinto and Buddhist religion that were created during this period adopted the stylings of mandalas and sutras. Through this, one of the

Japanese masterpieces Illustration of Hell was created. This was an “emaki” (narrative handscroll), a more traditionalist way of the Japanese art mediums. In this particular emkai there is a sinner who has redeemed himself to escape hell, and a “sutra”(religious text). This relates to the Buddhist beliefs of the six realms, but only this specific artwork shows this exact tale. As depicted in the handscroll, there’s a strong contrast of red and blue hues, as well as the repeated tree landscape surrounding the area. Another masterpiece of the time period is Portrait of Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, a Shintoist Japanese poet. Kakinomoto no Hitomaro was one of the first poets with documentation of their work, which has been maintained since the late Asuka period. Although deceased, the spirit of Kakinomoto no Hitomaro his can to this day be visited at shinto shrines. He was known to relate the past to present, showing that even though portrait was created centuries later, the Japanese adhere to what they believe, and who they believe in. While the buddhists strongly dominated the evolving arts realm, they do stay in touch their deeply Shinto roots. Japanese arts whether visual, theatrical, musical, or linguistic all demonstrated religious iconography. The icons existed with different religious beliefs capturing that there was a Shinto religion.Although the iconic works are much more rare, they do exist and can not be denied as an example of medieval Japan teachings. Illustrated Legends of the Kitano reflects the teachings of the Shintoist beliefs in the tormented human souls. This relates to the belief that unforeseen forces and nature are controlled by these souls that are still suffering. Specifically, this work reflects the legend of Sugawara Michizane, who was a poet who was exiled. At his Shinto shrine people would bring him poems, eventually making him the god of literature and music. All of which are ritualistic in Japan’s religious expression. Kumano Shrine Mandala shows the conflicting religions during the Nanbokucho period. This mandala has distinguished icons from the separate religions Shintoism and Buddhism. Proving that both religions existed and distinguishing the differences between the two. The mid-section shows the Buddhas, while the bottom shows Shinto deities. Wakamiya of Kasuga Shrine evolves the combination of religions with a Shinto deity and a reincarnation of a Buddhist God. Both Wakamiya (Shinto), and Manjushri (Buddhist) are combined to represent the new way of thinking conflicting with the old. The Divine Rainmaking Boy uses a similar combination method as the Wakamiya of Kasuga, shaping a Shinto god into a Japanese aristocrat with items of Buddhist ritual. The Divine Rainmaking Boy and Wakamiya of Kasuga both came after the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, but show the coexisting religions.

A religion is a system of beliefs that must be practiced, which both Shintoism and Buddhism do. There remains artwork in the form of shrines, paintings, armor, ceramics, dolls and netsuke of both the Shintoists and Buddhists. Nearly all people held the beliefs and relied on the practices of both. The imagery of artwork reflects that of both naturalistic and religious in the forms of two diverging religions. Japan’s documentation of beliefs and ever evolving schools of art are able to demonstrate that Shinto was and continues to be a prominent religion. While a historian like Toshio Kuroda argues that Shintoism isn’t deemed as a religion, the evidence given leans in the favor of Joseph Kitagawa. The Shinto artifacts: The portrait of Sutoku-In, Illustrated Legends of the Kitano Shrine, Kumano Shrine Mandala, Wakamiya of Kasuga Shrine, and Divine Rainmaking Boy all date back to the tenth to the thirteenth century. Historians who disagree do not acknowledge the strictly Shinto shrines and people in modern day Japan who categorize themself as a Shintoist. Buddhism undeniably had a stronger influence on the culture of the time, but this does not mean that Shintoism was obsolete.The means by how to carry out life is found through coexistence with the earth, and inner peace. There’s no singular way of religious practice or religion within Japan. The arts give evidence that prior to the rise of Buddhism, and even during, there was Shintoism.

Japanese artwork plays a vital role in the documentation of evolutionary beliefs and practices, religious or not. The subject matter varies but all holds a key part of Japanese history. The argument over whether Shintoism existed or not can simply be answered that it did exist. Through the definition of religion, the practices of Buddhist art and the similiarties in approaches to religion, Shinto is one. The premise of religion holds the belief of something other than what is known, a belief that there is a greater power. Shintoism believes that objects hold the power to create peace or to cause chaos. They worship and pray just like the other popular religion in Japan, Buddhism. Buddhist artworks only differ from Shinto artworks due to their distinct beliefs. If religion can be define by something which is practiced, both Buddhist and Shinto artworks are practiced and documented through the arts. The Shintoist artworks are just as authentic as those of Buddhist and other worldwide decents.

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