

# Culture, traditions and religious beliefs of japan

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Normally, a people's culture as the total way of life is as a result of the historical, socio-cultural developments of that community. The case is not any different from that of the Japanese culture. This development is clearly exemplified by the fact that virtually all of Japan's culture such as the Shinto shrines, the beliefs and practices surrounding the shrine and the construction works are based on the myths and legends that were associated with leaders such as Sugawara no Michizane. Similarly, some of the architecture and practices were based on the beliefs concerning the pantheon of gods that characterized the Japanese culture.

According to the Japanese culture, mythology and folklore, the Sugawara no Michizane is the proper name for the Tenjin, the indigenous spiritual force that is also known as the personification and the embodiment of the ideal Japanese scholar, politician and poet. As another name for Sugawara no Michizane, Tenjin stands for both sky and deity, with the same denotation of 'the god of thunder.' The history and culture of the ancient Japanese have it that Sugawara no Michizane rose through the ranks in the government during the late epoch of the 9th century.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of 10th century, Sugawara no Michizane succumbed to the plot of a rival group which had traces in the Fujiwara family. This resulted in his demotion and subsequent deposition to Kyushu. This development would later herald his lonesome death which paved way for drought, plague and widespread deaths among the populace in Daigo Empire. The princes of the empire would also fall herein. It is interesting to note that after this development, there were endless spates of lightning rainstorms and heavy deluge.

The gravity of the matter is that the locals interpreted these developments as phenomenal and supernatural attestations of the spirits being displeased and irked by the exiling of Sugawara no Michizane. This led to the building and construction of the Shinto shrine located in Kyoto. This shrine was later called the Kitano Tenmangu. In this regard, the office and post of Sugawara no Michizane was thus restored posthumously, while any mentioning of his exiling was totally expunged from the records (Samovar, et al 2009) .

As if all the above is not enough, Sugawara became deified as the Kami or the Tenjin-sama of scholarship and learning. It is against this backdrop that most of the Shinto shrines in Japan are dedicated to Sugawara no Michizane. Another important way in which the beliefs, superstitions and practices related to the gods affected the Japanese culture is found in the culture of burial and funeral rites. Particularly, the act is known to have been rejuvenated during the fourteenth generation of Haji family. At this time, Nomi no Sukune as the descendant of the god Amenohohi was the supreme leader.

As of the ancient days, during the rein of Emperor Suinin, the funeral arrangements and burial arrangements were primitive to the core, to an extent that the deceased would be buried alongside his kinsfolk. The burial of Empress Hibasuhime alongside the clay images of 300 potters at the behest of Nomi no Sukune in lieu of living retainers and relatives on the account of the need to have a just government was the first breakaway from the somewhat devious culture. This paved way to the assimilation of the culture of burying people with clay models, as opposed to the living.

With time, the culture of burying the dead with the aforementioned accompaniments soon became faced out. Similarly, it is the family of the Sugawara no Michizane that the Confucian movement as a religious way of life. At the same time, Confucian scholars arose from this group to supply the Japanese culture with the culture and spirit of intellectualism. The Haji, together with the middle rank of the Sugawara formed the society's middle rank, mainly serving the ancient Japanese culture as courtiers.

Conversely, that the ancient Japanese culture has its genesis of the belief in the gods is well underscored by the fact that the Japanese culture has been believed to have emanated from the gods. In a closely related wavelength, it remains a fact that Furuhito gave the petition of concerning the Japanese family and history. It is against this backdrop that the Japanese family and culture is known to have been divided into three stages. The stages start with the legendary point or stages; the period of loyalty; and the period of the decline of the Yamato's family status.

All the offshoots of the family are said to have descended from the god Amenohohi. Amenohohi on the other hands is said to have come about as a result of the gods, Amaterasu and Susanoo coming together in a procreating contest (Lebra and Lebra 2006) . The legend has it that Amaterasu took off to the cave, for which Susanoo followed in hot pursuit after her. At this point, Amaterasu is said to have swallowed Susanoo's sword, giving rise to three girls who were known to be the children of Susanoo.

Afterwards, Susanoo swallowed Amaterasu's jewelry, with the spitting out of five boys. These five boys are known to be the sons of the Amaterasu. Among the five sons is Amenohohi. The fact that this above account is seen

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to be ubiquitous to among the Japanese is well underscored by its appearance in Nihonshoki and Kojiki letters; albeit the letters exhibiting variations in details. The Kojiki source has the Amenohohi as the ancestor of the Izumo magistrate and the Haji family among five other local magistrates.

Despite the scantiness of evidence that would authenticate the accuracy and originality of the Haji account. It is suggested that the Haji sources originated from the Izumo who served in the Yamato courts and also as supervisors of funeral arrangements and pottery making during the ancient times. Investigation into the political and social institutions of the Yamato courts before the 645 AD Taika Reforms yield better and more productive information on the Haji family (Varley, 2000) .

Both historical and archaeological evidence point out that the affairs of the Yamato courts and Japan's primordial social and economic structures are known to have dated as early as the pre-historic era. This standpoint is clearly underscored by the historians' agreement and approach of dividing the tomb period together with all its markings of religious leadership from the middle tomb period as characterized by heavier military paraphernalia and symbols.

Given the above developments, it is easier to see that the Japanese culture was totally fixed upon concepts that bordered on: common lineage and history, to which it was believed that all the concerned clans emanated from the gods [Amaterasu and Susanoo]; common culture and common traditions and religious beliefs. References Lebra, T. S. and Lebra, W. (2006). Japanese Culture and Behavior: Selected Readings. New York: Prentice Hall. Samovar,

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