INTRODUCTION: RELIGION AND EDUCATION

It is too obvious for anyone to pay attention that religion continues to exist. The fact means that religion is transmitted from generation to generation, which is the educational function intrinsic to religion. Since the beginning of human history, when there was no school, man needed to be educated, namely, learning language and way of life, in order to be a man, a member of certain society. It is the religion that provides the most basic knowledge on man, world and God, and also how to behave, etc, without which man cannot live.

Since the modern age, however, the development of natural science, industrialization, and technologies has required the rational education to children, and so promoted the school system. Today, education means almost exclusively school education, which has been the strong rival to the traditional religious education. The natural science and rationality can not prove the transcendent existence of God and the Hereafter, providing, instead, the mechanical world view and physical view of man. These confront with religious views, and moreover there has occurred a new belief that the natural scientific truth is the only truth. Probably, this new belief may be the stronger rival to every kind of religious beliefs.

The above-mentioned traditional religious education is still effective.
even today outside school, mainly in family and local community life. Religions like Islam, closely related to the life style by means of daily prayer and rituals, have been more influential in its education than the religions of the individual inward faith, such as Protestantism and Japanese Buddhisms.

1. Religious traditions in Japan

Before talking about religious education in Japan, I will explain, though very simply, religious traditions in Japan. The most salient characteristics of Japanese religions is the historical coexistence of Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism. Joseph M. Kitagawa, the late professor of the University of Chicago, in History of Religions, calls it “the division of religion”; the spiritual salvation, i.e., salvation after death, has been charged by Buddhism, the ethics of hierarchical socio-political structure and family relations by Confucianism, and daily community life by Shinto, though Japanese have considered Confucianism not a religion but ethics. As the idea of the division of religion best describes, three religions have coexisted not in a complete independence or utter syncretism, but in a way that each Japanese, belonging to the three religions, chooses one of them according to situations. Such overlapping beliefs are hardly understood by Muslims. Besides, Taoism has been fused in Japanese folk religions which are a part of popular Shinto. Because of this religious soil, monotheistic religions have not become popular in Japan even today.

a) Shinto

Shinto is the archaic Japanese religion, whose beginning is not known. Though Japanese myths, creation myth of Japanese islands, struggles among gods and goddesses, gods' coming down to the earth from sky, origin of crops, etc., are written down in two books (Kojiki and Nihonshoki), they are not recited in rituals. Shinto has no holy scripture, nor definite doctrine or creed. If one dares to explain its creed, it is the spiritual and physical cleanliness and purity. So the rites of purification (harai in Japanese) are so important in Shinto. There seem to be two or three types of Shinto.

The first is the Shinto as state religion, which was related to Emperor (Tenno) worship. Based on a Japanese myth that the Tenno family is the descendents of gods, Tenno was the ancient priest king of the first state of Japan about 4th century, and his sacredness was kept till the end of WWII after he had lost his political power in 8th century. Historians analyze that the myth was manipulated and written down shortly after the Tenno became the ruler of Japan.
The second type of Shinto is the popular religion in local community. There are so many local shrines in Japan, at least a shrine, sometimes a few shrines, in each village and town. Each shrine enshrines a different god, mainly a land or field god who protects the area, who are worshipped in each local shrine by the community members through seasonal rituals such as New Year, Thanksgiving, etc. Many shrines enshrine natural gods of mountain, sea, tree, rock, etc. Some gods are the dead spirit, which became worshiped by people who feared its wrath, otherwise it would have caused various calamities. Some gods like Hachiman or Tenjin are enshrined by many shrines all over Japan. Besides, there are numerous gods who are not enshrined in shrine, such as house god, fire god, well god, etc. As for the ancestor god, one of the most important beliefs among Japanese even today, it is no doubt of Shinto tradition, but heavily influenced by Confucianism as well.

There is a third type of Shinto, which has the doctrine or theology. It is called Kyoha (sectarian) Shinto developed in Edo era. This was formulated by coping with Confucianism and Buddhism which were foreign religions. Nationalism based on Tenno worship will be mentioned below.

b) Buddhism was first brought to Japan from China and Korea in Nara period, 6th century, and accepted and supported by the Tenno family and ruling class. Identified with gods, Buddha was, at the first time, believed as the stronger god who would protect the state of Japan. Buddhism spread among aristocrats in Heian Period (8th - 10th centuries), but widely spread among ordinary people from Kamakura period (13th century) on. There have been many sects in Japanese Buddhism, but major sects are as follows; Shingon-sect and Tendai-sect since Heian period, Zen Buddhism, Pure-land sects (Jodo-shu, Jodo-shinshu) and Nichiren-sect since Kamakura period. Though Nara Buddhism did not develop to major sects, it constructed several huge temples such as Todaiji and Horyuji, which are very famous today.

Each Buddhist sect has elaborated doctrines and philosophical thoughts based on Holy Scriptures, none of which teaches or approves the ancestor worship. Nevertheless, most Buddhist temples have been committed to ancestor worship by monopolizing funeral ceremony and memorial services for the dead since Edo era. Since the state policy in Edo era (Shogunate) ordered that each family should register a Buddhist temple in neighborhood, Buddhism has become a family religion, not an individual faith, till today. In a word, Japanese Buddhism has developed separated into the two aspects,
theological or theoretical Buddhism and the practical Buddhism related to ordinary people's daily life. Logically speaking, the two aspects are contradictory. Buddhist theology in general, especially Mahayana Buddhism, has remained indifferent to the Buddhist church-type institution, and also to socio-political spheres, though Buddhism approves the importance of “three treasures,” Buddha, Dharma (Truth) and Sangha (Buddhist community).

The early Buddhism teaches that man must become monk, detached from family life and economic activities, and concentrate on the accomplishment of Enlightenment (satori in Japanese) in this life. However, Pure-land sect stresses faith in Amita-buddha, teaching that an ordinary inferior man can not fulfill the strict practices by himself, but also that the Mercifulness of Amita-buddha will help the inferior miserable man to be reborn in the Pure land (jodo, eternal paradise) after death. Though Pure-land theologies stress the inward faith and the practice of prayer (nenbutsu, praising Amita-buddha’s name) like dhikr, the belief became popular that man goes to Pure land after death. As Shinto has the belief that the dead can become (ancestor) god only if the descendents perform the funeral and other rituals for the dead, the original Buddhist teaching that man can become a buddha (hotoke) gradually assimilated to the former. Today, most Japanese simply believe that man becomes hotoke after death.

c) Roman Catholic missionaries arrived at Japan in 16th century and succeeded to some extent before Edo era, but it was banned before Edo era till Meiji era. Few Christians survived against hard persecutions, who were called the hidden Christians, whose families also were forced to register local Buddhist temples so as to be nominal Buddhists. The Meiji government allowed their missionary activities, for it had to allow the freedom of faiths in order to be a modern state. As a result, many private missionary schools, most Protestant and a few Catholic, were established. Though many Japanese have preferred missionary schools, few pupils and students have converted to Christians. Today Christian population remains about 12% of all the Japanese.

d) It is remarkable in Japanese religious situations that so many new religions have been established since the end of Edo era till today. Though they are called “new” religions, many of them are of popular Shinto type, and some are sectarian groups of the Nichiren Buddhism. Even in the last cases, each new religion has a founder, whose mystical experience or
prophetic activities obtain believers so as to establish a church-type organization. Though not all but many new religions teach irrational magico-medical care and the importance of the ancestor worship by stressing the fear of the dead spirits, in a word, they seem antagonistic to modernity, which will be mentioned below.

1. Religious education in Japanese History
   a) Edo era

   In the middle of Edo era, Terakoya (literal meaning "cabin in Buddhist temple) were built in every area of big cities, but not always in Buddhist temples. This was elementary school for children, mainly boys of warrior and merchant classes. Confucian texts, reading and writing Japanese and calculation were taught there, but Buddhist scriptures were not. Most local feudal lords established higher schools, called han-ko, to educate bureaucrats and administrators.

   In Edo era, Japanese ethics was mainly based on Confucianism. It stresses virtues of particular human relations such as loyalty of servants to master, and respect to parents by children. Besides, Shinto plays another religio-social role in local community. Japanese ethics has been mainly based on human interrelations. It is called culture of shame, "Don’t do what is shameful to others" by contrast to the monotheistic culture of sin to God.

   Buddhist sects kept their own religious education system and institutions for monks in main temples, where doctrines, recitation and commentaries of Holy Scriptures were taught. There were some meetings in local temple where monk preached people, and a kind of pilgrimage to main temple of the sect to which one belonged. But Buddhism did not develop their own popular educational institutions in Edo era.

   Mainly against popularity of Confucianism, some scholars began to insist on the importance of the original Japanese thoughts based on the myths. This new discipline was called Japanese or National studies (Kokugaku) which rejected both Chinese Confucianism and Chinese-Indian Buddhism. This scholarship helped to establish the third type of Shinto, Kyoha-Shinto.

   Through the Edo era, Japan banned any free trade and trip with foreign countries, which is called sakoku, with exceptions of very limited trade with China and Holland at Nagasaki port. In Nagasaki, western languages (Dutch, later English and French) and western medical science, later, military technology and science, were taught to a few students. They played
important roles in the end of Edo era and also in the beginning of Meiji era to communicate with Westerners.

b) Meiji era till WWII: Japanese nationalism based on Tenno worship and its education.

Since the very beginning of Meiji restoration, western education systems were rapidly established in Japan; elementary school, high school and universities. Probably because Japanese in general have been enthusiastic to education, and as Robert Bella points out in his book *Tokugawa Religion*, because elementary education was already spread among ordinary people in Edo era, the modern educational reformation was smooth and successful. No one can deny that this success of educational reformation supported and promoted the rapid Japanese modernization in general.

The Meiji government looked for a religion, rather ideology, which would support the nationalism, for it requested all Japanese to work hard with little wages, and to fulfill military duties with loyalty to the new state. Rejecting Christianity, the government found it in Tenno worship. Partly based on the myth of the Tenno as the descendents of gods, Tenno became a living man-god, whom all the Japanese, even Christians and atheistic communists, should worship. On the one hand, the government approved the freedom of faiths in the constitution, but on the other hand, it needed to justify the compulsory Tenno worship. It introduced the tricky cause which said that Tenno worship, i.e., Shinto, was not a religion, so the government made it compatible with any religion. Tenno worship was taught in all schools. Only from Meiji era till the end of WWII, some main shrines such as Yasukuni-jinja, became national shrines, while most local shrines were not.

Under this policy, Buddhism was not persecuted but oppressed. Buddhists did not openly resist against the government policy, but their concern and passions turned toward the reformation or modernization of the traditional theological studies by learning Western Indologists and Buddhologists philological studies. At the same time, some of the Buddhist educational institutes were reformed as modern private universities on the one hand. At the same time, influenced by Christian missionary schools, some Buddhist sects began to establish their own high schools and women's schools.

Because Shinto has no holy book to be learned, it did not developed its theology in a strict sense, except some thinkers of National studies in Edo
era. Two private universities were founded to educate Shinto priests in Meiji period.

During the World War II., Japanese nationalism was much strengthened. Every Japanese was taught to be a child of Tenno, so that every one had to sacrifice oneself to Tenno, i.e., the imperial state of Japan. The war was fought for the sake of Tenno, and for this reason, the dead soldier was believed that he should become integrated to national god, enshrined by special national shrines such as Yasukuni-jinja, besides becoming usual ancestor god. Yasukuni-jinja still enshrines all the dead spirit of soldiers, and performs annual memorial ceremony for them. This problem has developed to the question of who should take care of the dead spirit of soldiers, and has not yet solved under the following new policies today. There are some more complicated reasons to be explained here, for the facts that Chinese and Korean governments have always been very sensitive and critical to Yasukuni problems, such as Prime Minister's attendance to Yasukuni-jinja.

c) After WWII: prohibition of religious education in public national schools

Immediately after the war, various reformations were planned, guided and performed by GHQ, the General Headquarters of occupying American Army. The constitution itself and most of laws were changed, and Japan has become completely secular state. Tenno himself declared that he is only a man, not a man-god, but the constitution says that Tenno is the symbol of Japan. Shinto was, for a while, banned, but most shrines have survived till today.

Democracy has been taught, and religious education was utterly prohibited in new school teachings. Afterwards, private schools and universities were allowed to reopen their own religious educations. Japanese children learn about religions partly in history textbooks, and partly in civil politics and ethics textbooks, but have no chance to learn specifically about Japanese religions.

Great changes have taken place in Japanese ways of life, especially of community and family life style. As nuclear families have increased especially in urban area, family ethics has gradually become weak. They cannot construct new social relationships with neighbors. Rapid development of high technologies has weakened or even lost younger generation's respect for senior persons, which was necessary for learning from seniors' knowledge and techniques based on their experience. Though the ancestor worship still continues today, it also has become weaker and
Buddhism cannot change its family religion system into individual faith system. In Turkey, new camis are constructed in new urban areas, but no new Buddhist temple or shrine is constructed in new towns in Japan. (This would be a reason why new towns cannot succeed in the creation of new social relationship with neighbors.) As the result, most people in urban area moving from various local villages have kept their own family temple and cemetery in their home town, visiting the cemetery once or twice a year, in addition to special memorial services. Partly because Japanese Buddhism has not formulated daily or weekly prayers or rituals, most Japanese Buddhists do not go to temples in neighborhood, even if the temple belongs to the same sect. In spite of many Christian schools, the number of Christians does not increase in Japan, which differs from Korea where Christianity has spread more than half population. For these reasons, according to analyses of sociologists of religion, there has been a kind of vacant space of religion and ethics in Japan, where many new religions, some dangerous cults, have grown up.

After Aum-shinri-kyo (Aum-truth religion) committed the sarin attack terror on many passengers of Metro trains at Tokyo, in March 1995, Japanese government, especially the ministry of education, some religious leaders, and some scholars of religious studies, have begun to reconsider how religious education should be introduced. Since, as mentioned above, Japanese religious situations are so complicated, different from Islam, it will be very difficult to make a new textbook of religious education for children. For example, if one explains basic teachings of Buddhism, there is no reference to ancestor worship.