

An aspect of Japanese culture that always fascinated me was their religion. From what little I know, it seems to play a very different role in society than religion does in the Western world. For starters, I've heard that Japanese religion, both Shinto and Buddhism, is more of an internal religion. This means that where as Western religion is all about an external Creator (God) and an external savior (Christ), Eastern religion is more about each individual being a part of the religion, each individual has a little bit of their Creator with them, or their own inner Buddha. Despite this, religion still formed a social institution for itself in Japan. This is what has caught my attention in the Gordon readings on Tokugawa. As a social institution, religion in Japan plays a unique role in its history. While in Europe the ruling kings always swore fealty to the Church and the Pope, this was not so in Japan. The Shogun was chosen and approved of by the Emperor, a religious symbol in of himself, but religion as a social institution did not seem to play a part in the decision. The shogun did not have to regularly visit the temples, and he did not have to rule according to the temples' wishes. In fact, the temples and their monks often fought against the rulers, siding with the underdog rebels.

Perhaps a better way to view Japanese religion is to view it as fully integrated into everyday life. Perhaps the Buddhist ways of life and thinking, combined with the Confucius ideals, were so well integrated into their way of life it was hardly a religion in the Western sense of the term. It was simply how they lived their lives. Or perhaps most of the population, including the Shogun, simply didn't care most of the time. Sure, they may say they are Buddhist and live by those ideals, so that the general public and the Emperor have an easier time accepting their rule. And of course they would never make a serious move on the Emperor because of his status; the Emperor was top dog. A Shogun could never be Emperor because he was Shogun, and the Emperor decided on the Shogun.

I have yet to fully understand what role religion played in Japanese history, both for the people and the government. I also would like to someday have a better understanding of how it compares to

Western religions. Although I realize that many people have already made the comparisons, and it's not as if there are any real connections between Japan and Europe before the first Portuguese missionaries, the topic of the similarities and differences between Japan and Europe is a topic of utmost interest to me.