JOURNAL OF JAPANESE STUDIES
Exploring Multidisciplinarity

@2025 Department of Japanese Studies
Vol. 4, December 2025, pp. 91-109
ISSN: 2789-3014, eISSN: 2791-0849
http://doi.org/10.55156/jjsem.Dec2506

Kami Worship in a Globalized World: Challenges and Adaptations of Shintō Practices

Araf Mashrafa Jahan[1]
Dilruba Sharmin[2]

Abstract- The veneration of kami has been the core part of Japanese culture and religion for a millennium. This paper discusses the transformation in the worship of Shintō kami due to globalization. This paper, based on secondary data reviews, examines the impact of modernization, technology, and globalization on the Shintō rituals. The closer we get to this problem, the more the study focuses on how Shintō is evolving in the twenty-first century, its traditional shrines, and how world movements and technologies are changing Shintō. It also points out the problem of the authenticity of internet practices. The contribution of this paper to the existing understanding of Shintō is its resilience in the context of global digital changes. Finally, the study aims to comprehend Shintō's future within the global context. The study argues that globalization and digital technology are challenging the traditional, authentic nature of Shintō rituals. Nevertheless, they are also creating new opportunities for Shintō to survive in modern society and spread to different countries around the world. Shintō may do it by developing new forms of practice and building international communities. This article makes an important contribution to the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of Shintō in the 21st century, by bridging the gap between discussions of religious globalization

Keywords: Shintō adaptation, Modernization, Globalization, Kami worship, Cultural challenges.

[1]Post Graduate Student, Department of Japanese Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: arafmjahan@gmail.com

[2]Visiting Professor, Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies (GSICS), Kobe University, Japan, & Associate Professor, Department of Japanese Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: dsharmin.jsc@du.ac.bd (Corresponding author)

Article History:
Date of Submission: January 25, 2026; Date of Acceptance: March 10, 2026; Date of Publication: April 7, 2026

Introduction

For thousands of years, ancient spirits known as Kami have been worshipped in Japan. These supernatural beings, known as kami in Shintō (神道), embody natural phenomena. However, globalization presents both challenges and opportunities for traditional kami worship as it transitions into modern and secular practices. This modernization challenges conventional worship methods and rituals and promotes virtual offerings. Globalization also encourages environmental awareness and multicultural understanding. This shift necessitates an evaluation of how kami worship faces challenges and adapts to globalization. By analyzing secondary data, this paper reviews the metamorphosis of Shintō rituals and their adaptive responses to global challenges, with special emphasis on how kami worship continues to transform and sustain its significance today.

Shintō's historical evolution suggests that it has evolved from prehistoric vitalism to the establishment of a state ideology in the Meiji era. It has recently transformed into a global adaptive spiritual tradition (Teeuwen & Bocking, 2017; Ugoretz, 2024). Kami worship is the core of Shintō, which embodies natural phenomena. It is based on a ritual-based way of life. This emphasizes purification, harmony with society/nature, and awe-inspiring excellence rather than faith or doctrine (Motoori Norinaga, 1798/2010; Hardacre, 2017). Shintō is invisibly integrated into Japanese daily life. Matsuri, kamidana, temizu purification, kotodama word power, omamori charms, and even giving thanks to the kami by saying *'Itadakimasu'* are prime examples. However, many do not identify themselves as explicit Shintoists (Nelson, 2008; Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2023). This cultural integration has made Shintō resilient. However, secularization and modernization have led to a decline in young people's engagement.

Globalization plays a dual role for Shintō. On the one hand, there are challenges such as institutional decline, priest shortages, Western influences, and critical views in the digital age (Ugoretz, 2022; Hirafuji, 2017; Rots, 2017). On the other hand, opportunities include online communities, virtual offerings, livestream rituals, increased global curiosity about Japanese pop culture, a tourism surge, and the promotion of environmental awareness (Ugoretz, 2022; Hirafuji, 2017; Rots, 2017). Through this metamorphosis, kami worship is adapting to modern secular contexts. Moreover, spreading among transnational practitioners through multicultural understanding (Ugoretz, 2024). This keeps Shintō relevant in the 21st century. This paper examines the future significance of Shintō by analyzing these transformations using secondary data.

Literature Review

Shintō does not come from a faith-based religion but rather from a ritual-based way of life that involves society and nature. The word 'Shin' (神) means 'gods,' or 'spirits,' while the word 'To' (道) translates as 'a philosophical way' or 'the way of the gods' (Britannica, 2026). Archaeological findings indicate that Shintō began to develop in Japan during the Yayoi period (between 300 BCE and 300 CE). The literature review is divided into seven main parts.

The Birth of the Kami and Japanese Creation Mythology

According to Japanese mythology, chaos ruled the cosmos at the beginning of time. This led to the emergence of three primordial kami, known as the *Kotoamatsukami*. A man and a woman, Izanagi and Izanami, made up the 7th generation (Kamiyonanayo 神世七代). They built an island called *Onōgoro* and set out to fill the planet and produce everything that would exist on it. The pair fell in love and got married. However, due to a distortion in the ceremony, their union resulted in the birth of a boneless and limbless child (Hardacre, 2017).

Izanagi took responsibility and urged the goddess to conduct the ritual again. They gave birth to new lineages of kami, including those of mountains, wind, and grass, and expanded the Japanese archipelago. When *Izanami* became pregnant again, the holy couple faced tragedy. She died giving birth to *Kagutsuchi*, the deity of fire, and had to leave for *Yomi*, the land of the dead. *Izanagi,* a lonely deity, sought out *Izanami* in *Yomi*, an unclean area full of contaminants and oni. He spotted *Izanami* in the dark and wanted to take her with him. Furious, *Izanami* cursed *Izanagi,* threatening to kill 1,000 people each day, while Izanagi pledged to ensure the birth of 1,500 people each day, restoring the equilibrium between life and death (Hardacre, 2017). To purify himself, *Izanagi* found a river and performed *misogi,* or purification. He purified his clothing and body, creating numerous deities and spiritual entities, including kami and *youkai. Izanagi's* tears revealed the most essential kami: 'The three precious children' (*Mihashira no Uzu no Miko* 三貴子). *Amaterasu,* the brightest goddess, emerged from *Izanagi's* left eye's tears. *Tsukiyomi,* another magnificent deity, sprang from *Izanagi's* right eye with an elegant luminescence. Finally, the furious and obstinate *Susanoo* emerged from *Izanagi's* nose (See U in History / Mythology, 2020). This is a condensed version of the Japanese creation narrative as described in the oldest surviving manuscripts of Japanese history and myth, *Kojiki* (712 CE) and *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE). This mythological account not only illustrates the origin of the world and the kami but also establishes the central Shintō themes of purification, cosmic balance, and spiritual genealogy.

The Evolution of Shintō Practices

Figure 1: *The Evolution of Shintō Practices*

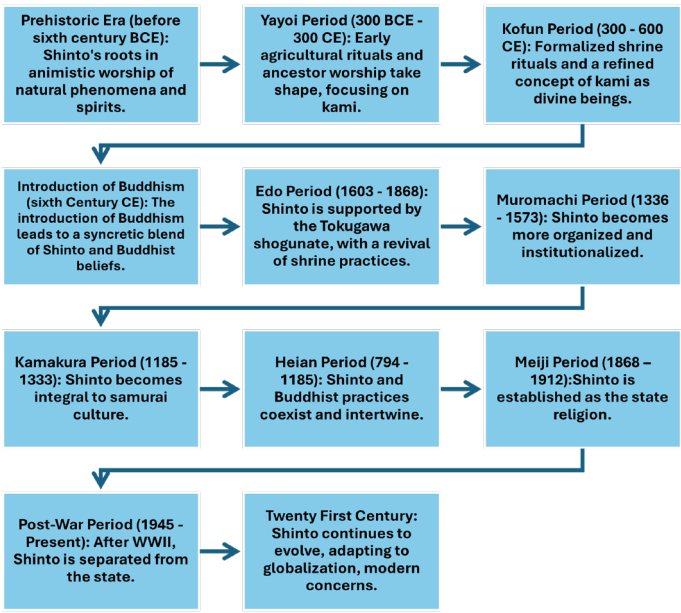


Figure 1 shows that Shintō has undergone a series of transformations from prehistoric vitalism to its establishment as a state ideology and, more recently, to a globally adaptive spiritual tradition. Kami worship is standing tall to face modern globalized challenges because of this historical flexibility.

Kami Worship and The Heart of Shintō

Kami worship is fundamentally the heart of Shintō. English translations of 'God' and 'Divinity' only partially capture the essence of kami. Norinaga Motoori, an eighteenth-century scholar, asserted, *'Anything that appeared remarkably impressive, embodied excellence and virtue, and evoked a sense of awe was termed kami'* (Motoori, 1798/2010). The ancient Japanese believed in a cosmos inhabited by kami, ethereal and intangible beings that cohabited with humanity. Shintō holds that humans are fundamentally virtuous and that evil spirits cause evil actions. Shintō ceremonies aim to ward off evil spirits while also venerating the kami or invoking good fortune. In Japanese culture, kami symbolize infinity, and their number is said to be eight million (*Yaoyorozu no kami* 八百万の神) (JREF, 2018). In Shintō, the physical universe is sacred and deserves worship. *Amaterasu,* the sun goddess, exemplifies the nature associated with kami, including mountains, rain, foxes, and earthquakes. Even phenomena such as smallpox, fertility, growth, rice, and hair each have distinct kami.

Shintō in Japanese culture and daily life

Everyday Rituals and Shrines

Many Japanese people engage in Shintō practices without explicitly identifying as Shintō practitioners. 80% of Japan's population participates in Shintō ceremonies or rituals, yet only a small fraction self-identifies as '*Shintoists*' in surveys. As of December 2023, Japan has over 84,120 shrines and approximately 85,000 priests nationwide (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2023). Shintō is closely tied to Japanese daily life and culture. Torii gates mark the entrances to sacred places, known as *jinja.* Many small shrines *(jinja)* can be found in home gardens, often dedicated to Inari**,** the kami associated with foxes, fertility, rice, tea, sake, agriculture, industry, prosperity, and success**.** Additionally, many homes feature a *kamidana***,** a miniature household shrine that contains an ofuda (a sacred talisman), two sakaki branches**,** and a platform for offerings such as rice, sake, water, and salt. A 2008 report shows that about half of Japanese households keep a kamidana (Nelson, 2008).

Purification and Language

Shrines in Japan require people to rinse their hands and mouths with water before entering, a practice common among Japanese people. This purification (*temizu*) is a shortened version of *misogi*, a purification ritual involving water. Priests are required to undergo purification before every *matsuri*, like Japanese people taking daily baths. However, such practices are not widely perceived as explicitly religious. This suggests that if something must be consciously religious, it must be explicitly done to be considered Shintō. Half of all Shintō priests are not practicing Shintō.

Japanese people often say *'Itadakimasu'* before meals, which means 'humbly and gratefully receiving.' When people do so at home, the person who prepared the meal and the person who paid for it also say *itadakimasu*. If someone is from a farming family, the person who grew the food also says *itadakimasu*. This practice is connected to Shintō**,** where people thank the kami for the food they receive.

The belief in the power of words, known as *imikotoba*, dates back 1,200 years and includes words such as 'fall' and 'slip,' which are considered unlucky in Shintō. The number four (*shi*, 四) is another example of an unlucky word, as it is homophonous with the Japanese word for death (Hara, 2001). The custom of avoiding unlucky words, originating from Shintō, is based on the belief in the power of words **(***kotodama* 言霊) (Hara, 2001).

Popular Customs and Hidden Shintō

Some activities have a clear and explicit link to Shintō but may not be perceived as Shintō practices. One example is matsuri, which refers to all ceremonies honoring

kami. However, people who attend *matsuri* do not necessarily feel they are engaging in a Shintō environment (Nelson, 2008).

Material Culture and Lucky Charms

KitKats are popular in Japan for their association with good luck, as their name sounds like 'kitto katsu,' (きっと勝つ). This means 'definitely win' (Ashcraft, 2019). They are often given as gifts to students before entrance exams. Similarly, omamori are believed to bring good fortune and offer spiritual protection (Ancient Asia Unveiled, 2025). While these examples show that Shintō continues to influence Japanese culture, many Japanese people still do not explicitly identify with it today**.**

Globalization and the Challenges

Globalization has significantly influenced traditional Japanese religious practices by facilitating the exchange and spread of ideas, beliefs, and practices across boundaries. Global religious movements, technological breakthroughs, and migration have adapted and hybridized longstanding spiritual traditions to meet changing cultural settings and community requirements. Globalization is most rapid in the realm of technology, as technology can be adopted by different societies regardless of its creator or origin (Alkharafi, 2025; IMF, 2018). However, cultural phenomena such as religion are difficult to accommodate to globalization. Globalization proceeds with great difficulty within specific groups and areas indivisible from the continuity of the group's culture. Japan's process of globalization began at the end of the Edo period in the fields of science and technology, contributing to its economic success (Ugoretz, 2022). In contrast, globalization proceeds slowly in spiritual culture (*seishin bunka* 精神文化), as it is difficult to observe traditions and establish fixed standards of 'value' for spiritual culture (Kale, 2004). Studying the dynamics of a given religious or spiritual culture across other areas of life is difficult, making globalization difficult in these regions.

Shintō in the Global Era

Digitalization and Institutional Decline

Globalization has exerted both positive and negative impacts on Shintō. It can transform traditional actions, giving them new meaning in a globalized society. Some Shintō temples across different nations have established online communities to share news, broadcast rituals, and commemorate festivals (Ugoretz, 2024a). Globalization can influence traditional practices and beliefs through external factors and economic motivations. Western influences endanger the traditional identity and traditions of Shintō. As the digital age advances, individuals' perspectives on religion become increasingly critical, making it increasingly difficult to establish distinct religious validity within a given society. The decreasing number of Shintō priests and adherents threatens the continuity and maintenance of Shintō rites and traditions.

Popular Culture and Global Curiosity

The positive effect of globalization on the spread of Shintō awareness is the popular culture of Shintō in Japan, which draws the attention of foreign tourists, especially during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The result of this surge in tourism is the rise in the number of visitors to religious sites like Meiji-jingu and Heian-jingu (Hirafuji, 2017). Modern views of Shintō have also been influenced by iconic anime films, such as My Neighbor Totoro and Spirited Away (Hirafuji, 2017).

The theoretical analysis of these adaptations shows that glocalization theory plays a vital role in understanding how Shintō is adjusting to globalization and how global influences are adapting to local contexts, forming hybrid forms. For example, the offerings and rituals of Shintō in foreign communities take on new forms, integrated into local culture (Robertson, 1995; Ugoretz, 2022). Such transnationalization has made Shintō transnational, though it also raises questions of authenticity. As an example, whether Shintō practices in the outside world remain pure as they are in Japan, or are watered down? Through the prism of digital religion, Shintō is becoming more accessible to online Shintō communities, which are increasingly growing in the diaspora but undermine the authenticity of this practice (Ugoretz, 2024c) because of the lack of a traditional physical presence. Commodification-wise, the commercialization of Shintō rituals yields economic gain at the expense of turning sacred factors into consumer goods. This can diminish the ritual's spiritual depth. Based on broader academic work on ritual adaptation, Shintō matsuri, also known as misogi, are being modified to fit international contexts. Chinju no mori is changing to environmental movement/ multicultural events. Nevertheless, the degree to which the original theological meaning has been preserved has to be measured.

The Cultural Adaptability and Resilience of Shintō Under Globalization

Teeuwen and Bocking (2017) considered the use of globalization on conventional Shintō. This analysis found that globalization has impacted Shintō rituals, including the rise of tourism, modernity, and ritual commercialization (Teeuwen & Bocking, 2017). Irrespective of these developments, efforts have been made to preserve the basic Shintō ideas and practices. The research suggests that communities around Shintō shrines, scholars, and practitioners should engage in debates to strike a balance between maintaining traditional Shintō rituals and adapting to an emerging globalized world.

The Analytical approach to these adaptations indicates that globalization is stronger in Shintō (Hirafuji, 2017). It is done by enhancing global interest, fostering pop culture fusion, and creating environmental connections (Rots, 2017). However, it is also being changed through globalization and digital/virtual practices. In this case, the transnational online kami worship loses connection to the physical shrines. Conversely, it may be weakened by secularization and commodification, leading to

institutional decay and influencing fundamental theological concepts, e.g., by turning kami into nature-independent commodified objects that lose their authenticity. It remains to be seen whether the positives outweigh the negatives in this balance. While digital adaptations keep Shintō relevant, long-term sustainability is questionable in Japan's domestic context, given projected institutional erosion that is expected to result in a 40% decline in Shintō organizations by 2040 (Ishii, 2015).

Research Method

This study is a literature-based conceptual analysis and synthesis of secondary sources. It analyses existing research, articles, reports, and online sources on the impact of globalization on Shintō, ritual adaptations, digital practices, and cultural resilience. This method allows access to transnational and historical dimensions without primary data collection. This is appropriate for this topic as Shintō's global spread and digital transformations are documented in online communities, academic literature, and media reports.

The data collection process for the research used a document analysis approach and a web-surfing data-gathering method, both of which are highly suitable for qualitative research. Especially when historical, cultural, and contemporary data analysis is required and can be conducted without fieldwork (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is an unobtrusive method that helps to collect background information, patterns, and corroborative evidence from existing documents (O'Leary, 2014). Additionally, web-surfing methods use recent internet data to provide real-time insights. This helps capture the dynamic nature of globalization and aligns with research on the digital age (Salganik, 2019). These methods were chosen for their flexibility, scope for validity establishment, and ethical considerations. These methods are ideal for studying the impact of globalization on Shintō because they provide access to cost-effective and otherwise inaccessible sources.

Recent internet data is utilized to answer the study topic. The data sources include various research papers in this area, the United Nations, Statista, the Ministry of Japan, UNICEF, journals, articles from Japan-based online newspapers, Japan Times, nippon.com, NIKKIEASIA, BBC, CBS News, and socialprotection.org. Statistical data from various reliable sources were used to enhance the clarity of the assignment. Both general and systematic searches were undertaken. (1) Kami worship (2) Japanese Shintō Religion; (3) Kami Worship and globalization; (4) Shintō and Globalization; (5) Shintō practices; (6) Challenges of Shintō; (7) Adaptations of Shintō; (8) Shintō in globalized world; (9) Shintō in Contemporary era; (10) Challenges & Adaptations of Shintō; are the keywords for the Google Scholar & ResearchGate search.

Analytical rigor: Sources are categorized through thematic coding. Triangulation and critical evaluation have been carried out to ensure the validity of the findings.

Ethical considerations: The research has addressed ethical considerations; data sources have been validated to ensure their validity; and the results' relevance to the study has been stated.

Findings and Discussion

Challenges to Traditional Shintō Practices

Destruction of Sacred Sites Resulting from Urbanization

The development of urban areas around sacred Shintō shrines has become a major concern in the modern day Japan, particularly in rapidly expanding metropolitan areas. Modernization, population growth, and urbanization have increased this loss of Shintō shrines, leading to the destruction of many historical and spiritually valuable sites. In the 1960s, the Japanese government demolished roughly 70,000 shrines (Breen & Teeuwen, 2000). Some shrines are turned into tourist destinations by commercialization in urban areas, altering their religious nature. The continued urbanization in large cities is also a challenge because the need for land destroys the spiritual significance of these sites. There are also projects intended to incorporate shrines into city spaces using pocket shrines.

Reduction in Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Shintō religious knowledge is slowly being eroded, as urban migration and industrialization are factors that hinder its intergenerational transmission. This has led to decreased support for rural Shintō shrines and to the absence of appropriate people to carry on the tradition. The loss of family bonds and the adoption of new values make younger generations attach greater importance to work and education than to Shintō rituals, and they are less practiced. These traditions are the first visit to the shrine of the year (hatsumode) and New Year rituals (shogatsu) (Ugoretz, 2024b). This is preventing elders from passing on important Shintō beliefs and rituals to younger generations. Meanwhile, the rise of atheism and other spiritual beliefs erodes the youth's interest in Shintō. Thus, a generational gap has been threatening the survival of Shintō knowledge in modern Japan.

Challenges in the Face of Modernization, Secularization, and Syncretism

Modernization

The Shintō religion was heavily impacted by Japan's modernization in the Meiji period, resulting in the fading away of religious ceremonies and thus making it independent of the state. Subsequently, Shintō traditions, such as seasonal festivals and family rituals, lost their favor with the urban population (Yamanaka, 2021). This change raises the question of Shintō's applicability in the contemporary globalized world.

Secularization

The concept of secularization is a process in which religious thought, practice, and institutions lose social importance. This is because of modernization, rational thought, and the fragmentation of society (Wilson, 1966). Its basis lies primarily in Max Weber's concept of 'disenchantment of the world', in which science and rationality undermine religious authority (Weber, 1930). There is a discussion of secularization in Bangladeshi literature, especially the important perspective that secularism itself is functioning as a 21st-century' *religion.'* It binds people, according to Durkheim's definition of religion, and seeks to replace traditional religions with an emphasis on rational thought and personal freedom. However, traditional religions do not disappear completely; rather, they adapt to challenges. In Japan, this process has significantly reduced Shintō's influence, especially among youth.

Secularization has notably reduced Shintō's influence in Japanese culture, particularly among the youth. According to recent statistics (2023/2024) from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, there are about 180,000 registered religious corporations in Japan (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2023; Reuters, 2024). However, inactive corporations (those with no religious activities for more than 1 year) have increased to over 4,400. This is an increase of one-third by the end of 2023 (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2023; Reuters, 2024). The number of Shintō shrines has declined from about 81,200 in 2005 to around 80,600 in recent years (Unseen Japan, 2024). This reflects the closure of 668 shrines (Unseen Japan, 2024). In terms of priestly decline, it has fallen from around 88,000 in 1997 to around 71,000 in 2017 (The Economist, 2019).

Furthermore, according to a 2015 projection by Kokugakuin University professor Kenji Ishii, Shintō organizations could drop by 40%+ by 2040 (Ishii, 2015; Japan Today, 2023). This is due to population aging, depopulation in rural areas, and reduced contributions. They are currently more active in secular pursuits associated with work, technology, and consumerism. This was strengthened during the Meiji Restoration and further weakened after World War II, as the state began to lose its association with Shintō religious practices. As a result, Shintō has lost its influence in the lives of the population, and the traditional rituals might no longer be a factor contributing to national identity. Youths, due to their inclinations towards secularization and global culture, are less involved in religious practices. The 2022 data from the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS) cumulative data 2000-2023 indicated that 71 percent of the respondents did not believe in any religion and had no religious background (Iwai, 2024). According to the Japanese National Character Survey (2018), 74% of them do not have a personal religious faith. Among the youths (20-29 years), the level of personal faith is very low. It is estimated that 26% of personal faith (Iwai, 2024). Nonetheless, there is a high level of cultural engagement; 80%+ participate in New Year shrine visits or rituals,

though they do not regard themselves as explicit Shintoists (Hardacre, 2017; Agency for Cultural Affairs reports, 2025). According to a study of diaspora conducted by Ugoretz (2024), Shintō is increasing among global/online populations, while declining in the domestic sphere. However, Japan is still experiencing institutional erosion. This fact confirms the secularization hypothesis that modernization and demographic shifts are diminishing the social importance of Shintō, yet remnants of the culture remain.

Syncretism

The fusion of Shintō and Buddhism occurred in the past, particularly during the Heian period, through the shinbutsu shugo ritual, which harmonized their practices. They were separated by the policy of shinbutsu hanzen of the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Nevertheless, most of the modern Japanese continue to engage in both customs. This syncretism is studied by scholars such as Fredrik Westman and E. S. Lepekhova, and it is also discussed in modern times as part of Shintō's integration with philosophies such as Christianity. Such studies highlight the flexibility of Shintō and its relations with other faiths, as well as the issues this syncretic attitude raises in Japan.

Adaptations to Globalization

Digital Innovations: Virtual Shrine Visits and Online Rituals

The Event "Rapid End of Coronavirus Pandemic"

Zoom and live streaming have gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting Shintō shrines to explore online options to reduce crowding and avoid shared rituals (Johnny, 2021). A 2020 blog post highlights a bilingual ritual held by the Los Angeles branch of the Shintō Shrine of Shusse Inari in America on YouTube, focused on the "Rapid End of the Coronavirus Pandemic." The event lasted 30 minutes (Dougill, 2020). The ritual had a pleasing symmetry, with the opening ritual (purification), the bow of respect, and the offerings preluded by a prayer and a *tamagushi* presentation. The ritual was carried out clearly and concisely, with English instructions (Dougill, 2020). The service included *saishi* (prayers) directed toward nature, prosperity, happiness, a bountiful harvest, and world peace. The shrine also offers a live Shintō ritual for non-Japanese speakers, allowing them to experience the true meaning of Shintō. The live streaming of *Shusse Inari* has become a new normal for Shintō enthusiasts worldwide.

2020 Virtual Nagoshi-no-Ooharae, Shintō Ceremony of Great Purification

Ooharae is a great Shintō purification ceremony held twice yearly in Japan to ward off distortions, sins, impurity, or spiritual exhaustion. As shown in a 2020 community post by the Japan America Society of Greater Philadelphia, the ceremony was conducted by certified Shintō priestess Rev. Kuniko Kanawa and recorded at Rev. Kanawa's home shrine, then broadcast over Zoom. Attendees were guided in Japanese and English and chanted along with the great purification liturgy

(Japan America Society of Greater Philadelphia, 2020). A *katashiro*, a small human-shaped paper doll, was released into the sacred river stream during the ceremony. The ceremony included a special prayer on the COVID-19 crisis, a *kagura* Shintō sacred dance, and a Q&A at the end. The three Shintō prayers included '*Akueki-chinsei*,' '*Saiyaku-Tenkan,*' and '*Banbutsukyōzon-kyōei,*' which promote the coexistence and prosperity of Great Nature and Mankind. Handmade *Chinowa* amulets were available for purchase (Japan America Society of Greater Philadelphia, 2020).

Tokyo Shrine's Virtual Solace

Onoterusaki Shrine in Tokyo has livestreamed prayers via Twitter during the May 1 to May 10 holiday, allowing those at home to participate in rituals (News on Japan, 2020). Messages from remote worshipers are displayed on virtual wooden tablets, which are offered to Shintō gods to protect against evil spirits and the epidemic. The shrine aims to offer a peaceful place for people to pray during times of unease and major life changes.

Shrines at a Distance: Shintō Ritual Practice and Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted religious traditions and activities worldwide, particularly in the context of Shintō rituals. From 2020 through 2023, the pandemic has led to significant disruptions in worship, purification, gathering, and exchange, affecting the flows of bodies, material, economic support, ritual calendars, divine blessings, and data and internet access (Ugoretz, 2024b). Shrines in Japan have adopted a variety of strategies while upholding traditional restrictions on internet-mediated worship. However, some temporary measures involving internet mediation are undergoing normalization. For example, cameras or recordings of the ritual were not allowed, and the main worship hall was closed to promote social distancing (Ugoretz, 2024b).

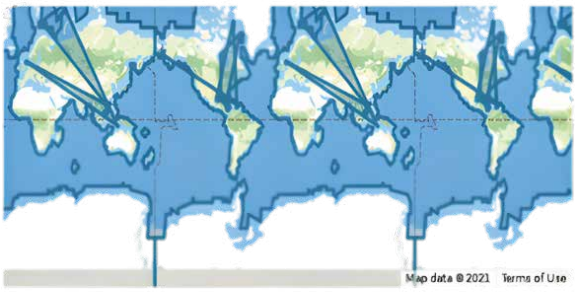
Establishment of Shintō Communities Abroad

Digital Shintō Communities (DSCs)

Digital Shintō Communities (DSCs) are global networks of Shintō shrines, priests, and lay practitioners enabled by digital technology, specifically social media platforms (Ugoretz, 2021). DSCs originated with the introduction of the Shintō Mailing List (ShintoML) on Yahoo! Groups in 2000 (Ugoretz, 2024a). Currently, about 10,000 people are members of an active Facebook DSC, with community engagement across many social media platforms (Ugoretz, 2024a).

DSC members share principles and practices but may support different shrines and *kami*. International Shintō practitioners, who may lack direct access to traditional locations and resources, must effectively use easily accessible resources to create communal knowledge, aesthetics, and practices. DSCs are relevant to the study of Japanese religion, digital religion, and globalization. Concerns about authority and authenticity arise when DSC members discover, develop, and dispute personal interpretations of Shintō through networks of shrines, academic literature, internet forums, blogs, and mainstream media (Ugoretz, 2021).

Figure 2: *Digital Shintō Communities (DSCs), Date Range: 2001 CE - 2021 CE*



Source: https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0398260

They provide materials such as guidelines for household ritual activities, recommended books, and instructions on how to interact with and help Shintō temples. Although internet-based religion is prohibited in Japan, overseas shrines such as 'Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America' and 'Shintō Shrine of Shusse Inari' have formed online communities to spread information about upcoming events and broadcast rituals and festivals (Figure 2).

Incorporation of Environmental Activism into Shintō Teachings

Chinju-no-mori

Chinju-no-mori, the little forests around Shintō temples in Japan, have long been associated with nature worship before Buddhism arrived. These forests have served as sites for trade, relaxation, rituals, festivals, and annual meetings. *Chinju-no-mori* have long been known in Japanese rural communities as *chinju-sama*, serving as both objects of devotion and woods intimately related to everyday life. Under the Shrine Merger Policy of 1906, the government ordered the merger of smaller shrines into larger regional shrines (Rots, 2015). Nevertheless, the House of Peers ruled against unnecessary shrine mergers, and *chinju-no-mori* was preserved to combat deforestation. Although their numbers have significantly declined since the 1950s due to land development during Japan's economic growth, the preservation of chinju-no-mori has become a way for Shintō to address threats from urbanization.

Local Adaptations in Urban Japanese Communities

Small Shrines in Urban Areas

Inari shrines, primarily located at Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto, are a popular Shintō practice in Japan. These shrines, categorized by vermilion *torii* gates, are believed to bring good harvests or prosperous business. The number of Inari shrines is estimated to be 100,000 (Tour Guide Japan, 2024). This is a sizable number compared to the 55,000 convenience stores in Japan, such as Seven-Eleven and

Lawson (Plan My Japan, 2024). The popularity of these shrines dates back to the Edo period, when Tokyoites built small Inari shrines throughout the city to promote prosperity, family safety, and fire prevention. Although the remnants of Tokyo's original urban areas have disappeared, the small shrines remain in their original sites, as no one removed them for fear of curses. In some cases, small Inari shrines were relocated to the rooftops of high-rise buildings that once stood on the grounds.

Practices in Shintō Diaspora Communities, Such as in the U.S. and Brazil

Shintō Comes to America

Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America, located in Seattle, WA, is a traditional *jinja* Shintō shrine and the direct North American branch of Tsubaki Ōkami Yashiro in Mie Prefecture, one of Japan's oldest and most revered shrines, with a history spanning over 2,000 years. Amaterasu Ōmikami, the Sun Goddess, is the principal goddess worshipped here. Kanangra Jinja and Tsubaki America were merged to form the new Tsubaki Grand Shrine in America. The shrine has five kami symbolizing invention, the sun, harmony, the American landscape, and the inception of life. The shrine's anniversary is commemorated each year in early summer, with the Grand Shrine organizing several *matsuri*. Other notable shrines include the Granite Falls Shintō Shrine in Granite Falls, Washington; the Shambhala Mountain Center in Red Feather Lakes, Colorado; the Honolulu Shrine; and the Inari Shrine of America. Other locations include Hilo, Hawai'i, and Maui.

Shintō in Brazil

Shintō has notably influenced Brazilian religious life through groups like Seichō-no-Ie, Sekai Kyūsei Kyō, Perfect Liberty, and Sūkyō Mahikari, which have attracted non-Japanese Brazilians (Watanabe, 2020). To facilitate conversions, they address language barriers and incorporate Brazilian perspectives on miracles and spiritual possession, recognizing converts' ties to the Roman Catholic Church. Educational structures and adaptable doctrines have been developed to support this integration (Nakamaki, 2008; Usarski & Shoji, 2016). Additionally, Japanese shamans have created supplementary groups through syncretism, blending aspects of Catholicism, spiritualism, and Afro-Brazilian religions (Shoji, 2018).

Shrines Using Modern Technology

Smartphone Apps for Shrine Locations and Prayers

Recently, many shrines have been using technology to enhance visitor engagement. To share historical information and guide visitors, Meiji Shrine uses a mobile app. On the other hand, Fushima Inari Taisha is offering an animated reality experience for reciprocal storytelling. Mobile apps feature digital kamidana, spiritual guidance, moon phase tracking, offering remindes and fortune telling to make shintō more feasible.

Digital Offerings and Virtual Shrine Visits

Japanese temples receive digital gifts now. The trend began at Atago Jinja in Tokyo in 2014 but gained popularity during the pandemic (Ugoretz, 2022; Ugoretz, 2024b). E-money donations and virtual tours increase convenience and reduce theft. The shrine administrators affirmed *'deities know everything and receive people's wishes even if they donate with digital money.'* For instance, Nikko Futarasan Jinja, currently a UNESCO World Heritage site, uses QR codes at various locations for digital products (Steinkopf-Frank, 2025). It shows how contemporary shrines are relevant to modern urban life while maintaining their spiritual core.

Conclusion

This research clearly shows that globalization simultaneously strengthens, transforms, and weakens Shintō. On the one hand, it has increased Shintō's resilience through global curiosity, digital adaptations, and glocalization. This made kami worship accessible and relevant among transnational practitioners. Environmental links are aligning Shintō with modern sustainability, giving it global relevance. These positives have made Shintō transnational and adaptive in the face of Japan's domestic decline.

Conversely, Shintō is being diluted by secularization, commodification, and institutional erosion. There is a low personal faith and high cultural participation, especially among the young people in Japan. Nevertheless, this is not explicitly identified . These trends threaten authenticity by making the main theological ideas, like kami, into commodified or virtual beings rather than naturally bound spirits of holiness. There are two possible futures for Shintō. Although the sustainability of traditional practices is doubtful in the local setting with population ageing and secularization, there is a chance that sustainability may be preserved and implemented through digital and environmental redesign and international propagation. As long as the representatives of the shrine communities and adherents can balance preservation and adaptation, Shintō might survive in the 21st-century world of multiculturalism, at the cost of authenticity being diluted and institutional erosion. The question is open: Is it possible to connect with true spiritual ties through digital/virtual kami worship? Or does globalization make the Shintō community in Japan more disconnected from its native heritage and turn it into a new worldwide religious tradition? Such implications provoke the use of empirical studies and interdisciplinary studies of Shintō.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Araf Mashrafa Jahan https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1276-0950

Dilruba Sharmin http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8955-9622

References

Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2023). *Shūkyō nenkan 2023 [Religious yearbook 2023]*. Government of Japan. https://www.bunka.go.jp

Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2025). *Shūkyō nenkan* [Religious yearbook 2025]. Government of Japan. https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/r07nenkan.pdf

Alkharafi, N. (2025). Globalization: An overview of its main characteristics and types, and an exploration of its impacts on individuals, firms, and nations. *Economies, 13*(4), 91. https://doi.org/10.3390/economies13040091

Ancient Asia Unveiled. (2025, February). *Omamori – Japan's lucky charms from Shintō shrines*. *Ancient Asia*. https://ancient-asia.blogspot.com/2025/02/omamori-japans-lucky-charms-from-shinto.html

Ashcraft, B. (2019, February 7). Why Kit Kats are good luck for Japanese students. *Kotaku*. https://kotaku.com/why-kit-kats-are-good-luck-for-japanese-students-1832417610

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Breen, J., & Teeuwen, M. (2000). *Shintō in history: Ways of the kami*. University of Hawaii Press.

Britannica. (2026, January 30). Kami. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/kami

Dougill, J. (2020, June 11). *Shintō goes live*. *Green Shintō*. https://www.greenshinto.com/2020/06/11/shinto-goes-live/

Hara, K. (2001). The word "is" the thing: The "kotodama" belief in Japanese communication. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics, 58*(3), 279–291. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42578117

Hardacre, H. (2017). *Shintō: A history*. Oxford University Press.

Hirafuji, K. (2017, September 1). *Shintō culture in the age of globalization: Challenges to conveying concepts.* European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS) Conference, Torre A, Piso 0, Sala 03, Lisbon, Portugal. https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/eajs2017/p/5461

International Monetary Fund. (2018, April 9). *Globalization helps spread knowledge and technology across borders*.

https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2018/04/09/globalization-helps-spread-knowledge-and-technology-across-borders

Ishii, K. (2015). *Projection on the decline of Shintō organizations by 2040* [Survey analysis of Japanese religious institutions]. Kokugakuin University.

Ishii, K. (Ed.). (2010). *Shintō wa doko e iku ka* [Where is Shintō going?]. Perikansha.

Iwai, N. (2024). *Religious beliefs and religious organizations in Japan based on the JGSS cumulative data 2000-2023.* WAPOR 77th and WAPOR Asia Pacific 7th Joint Annual Conference. Sungkyunkwan University. https://wapor.org/wp-content/uploads/Iwai-Measuring-religiosity-and-views-toward-religion-in-the-Asia-Pacific-region.pdf

Japan America Society of Greater Philadelphia. (2020). *2020 Virtual Nagoshi-no-Ooharae – Shintō ceremony of great purification*. Japan-Philly.org. https://japanphilly.org/events/2020-virtual-nagoshi-no-ooharae/

Johnny. (2021, September 26). *How the pandemic is changing the ritual practices of Japanese shrines and temples*. *Spoon & Tamago*. https://www.spoon-tamago.com/japan-shrine-temple-pandemic-response/

JREF. (2018, June 6). *Religion – Kami*. https://jref.com/articles/kami.34/

Kale, S. H. (2004). Spirituality, religion, and globalization. *Journal of Macromarketing, 24*(2), 92–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146704269296

Kokugakuin University. (2024). *Faculty of Shintō Studies: About the faculty*. Kokugakuin University. https://www.kokugakuin.ac.jp/en/education/fd/shinto/about

Lepekhova, E. S. (2010). On the modern interpretation of Shinto-Buddhist syncretism in Japan. *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture, 15*, 47–60. https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/en/search/search_detail.jsp?seq=544456

Mendes, E. (2020). Omamori: Harmonization of humans and their environment in cultural symbols. *E3S Web of Conferences, 202*, 02070. https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202020207073

Motoori, N. (2010). *Kojiki-den: Book 1* (A. Wehmeyer, Trans.). Cornell East Asia Program. (Original work published 1798)

Nakamaki, H. (2008). Japanese religions, calendars, and religious culture in Brazil. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, 35*(1), 145–159. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30234505

Nelson, J. K. (2000). *Enduring identities: The guise of Shintō in contemporary Japan.* University of Hawai'i Press.

Nelson, J. K. (2008). Household altars in contemporary Japan: Rectifying Buddhist "ancestor worship" with home décor and consumer choice. *Japa-*

nese Journal of Religious Studies, 35(2), 305–330. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30233835

News On Japan. (2020, May 21). *Tokyo shrine offers virtual solace to worshippers unable to attend in person*. https://newsonjapan.com/article/127226.php

O'Leary, Z. (2014). *The essential guide to doing your research project* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Plan My Japan. (2024). *Japan konbini (convenience store) guide*. Plan My Japan. https://www.planmyjapan.com/japan-konbini-convenience-store-guide

Reuters. (2024, September 19). *As sales of Japanese temples and shrines surge, a crackdown on bad-faith buyers.* https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sales-japan-temples-shrines-surge-crackdown-bad-faith-buyers-2024-09-19/

Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Global modernities* (pp. 25–44). Sage Publications.

Rots, A. P. (2015). Sacred forests, sacred nation: The Shintō environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of *Chinju no Mori*. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, 42*(2), 205–233. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43686903

Rots, A. P. (2017). *Shintō, nature and ideology in contemporary Japan: Making sacred forests.* Bloomsbury Academic

Salganik, M. J. (2019). *Bit by bit: Social research in the digital age*. Princeton University Press.

See U in History / Mythology. (2020, November 10). *Izanagi and Izanami: The origin of Amaterasu, Susanoo, and Tsukuyomi - Japanese mythology*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuZHotjtrJs

Steinkopf-Frank, H. (2025, May 21). *QR codes at Futarasan Shrine: Merging tradition with technology*. Worldcrunch. https://worldcrunch.com/tech-science/qr-code-technology/

Teeuwen, M., & Bocking, B. (2017). Shintō and globalization: Cultural interaction and adaptation in shrines and practices. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, 44*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.47941/ijcrs.1345

The Economist. (2019, May 2). *The imperial succession highlights Shintō's muddled status in Japan.* https://www.economist.com/asia/2019/05/02/the-imperial-succession-highlights-shintos-muddled-status-in-japan

Tour Guide Japan. (2024). *There are small shrines everywhere in the urban areas of Japan's large cities*. Tour Guide Japan. https://www.tour-guide-japan.jp/single-post/there-are-small-shrines-everywhere-in-the-urban-areas-of-japan-s-large-cities

Ugoretz, K. (2021). Digital Shintō communities are also known as "online Shintō communities." *UBC Community and Partner Publications: Database of Religious History (DRH)*. http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0398260

Ugoretz, K. (2022). Do Kentucky Kami drink bourbon? Exploring parallel glocalization in global Shintō offerings. *Religions, 13*(3), 257. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030257

Ugoretz, K. (2024a). Shintō overseas and online. *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 48*, 45–53. https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/journal/3/issue/348/article/2377

Ugoretz, K. (2024b). Shrines at a distance: Shintō ritual practice and technology during COVID-19. *Annual Report of the Institute of Human Culture Studies, 19*, 58–62.

Ugoretz, K. (2024c). *Going digital, going global: The growth of contemporary Shintō practice outside of Japan* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara]. eScholarship. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3bz1q4kx

Usarski, F., & Shoji, R. (2016). Buddhism, Shintō, and Japanese new religions in Brazil. In B. Schmidt & S. Engler (Eds.), *Handbook of contemporary religions in Brazil* (pp. 279–298). Brill.

Watanabe, M. (2020). *Acculturation and ethnic boundary maintenance: Japanese religions in Brazil and Brazilian religions in Japan*. https://www.fapesp.br/japanbrazilsymposium/pdf/1-5_Watanabe.pdf

Weber, M. (1930). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (T. Parsons, Trans.). George Allen & Unwin. (Original work published 1905).

Westman, F. (2013). *Shinto-Buddhism syncretism: A historical peculiarity or a renewed spiritual paradigm?* (Master's thesis, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University). Lund University.

Wilson, B. (1966). *Religion in secular society*. C. A. Watts.

Yamanaka, H. (2021). Religious change in modern Japanese society: Established religions and spirituality. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, 48*(2), 365–382. dx.doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.48.2.2021.365-382