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People have lived in the Japanese archipelago for at least 40,000 years. Over time, they developed and shared values, ethics, and a spiritual worldview rooted in Shinto. These form the contextual foundation of Japanese culture. Some archaeological theories suggest even older habitation—maybe in the future, that 40,000 years will be revised to 80,000 or 120,000.

As I’ve written before, Japanese grammar doesn’t place the verb immediately after the subject. This delays clarity in a sentence and encourages listeners to patiently follow the speaker’s train of thought. This patience is culturally reinforced by Japan’s frequent natural disasters—earthquakes, typhoons—which demand endurance and resilience.

Shinto, unlike many world religions, has no holy scriptures or central founder. It’s not about obeying the words of a single god or prophet. Instead, it’s an active process of observing nature and ancestors and drawing wisdom from them. Whereas many religions are passive, Shinto promotes an active spiritual stance.

There are stories, for instance, of a Saudi Arabian leader who was inspired by Japanese elementary school children cleaning their classrooms and introduced the practice in his own country. Some visitors praise Japan’s cleanliness, quietness, and politeness, and say their nations should follow suit.

But mimicking these surface behaviors alone won’t replicate Japan. The roots lie in 40,000 years of cultural continuity, the Japanese language, and Shinto. In regions like Europe or China, where ethnic groups have replaced each other over time, such long-term cultural continuity is difficult.

Personally, I believe Arabs should be Arabs, Europeans should be Europeans, and Japanese should be Japanese. While intercultural interaction sometimes requires caution, it’s perfectly fine for cultures to remain distinct.

Sadly, we won’t be around to see what humanity is like 40,000 years from now. But for the foreseeable future, I believe it will remain difficult for other societies to emulate what it means to be Japanese.

Category

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Tags

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