

The Difference of Chinese Buddhist Thought During the Spread of Japan

-Combination with Shinto Religious Thought

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Abstract: China and Japan have always been two countries with much in common in the East Asian cultural circle, and their economic, political and cultural exchanges have been of great importance, whether in ancient times or in modern times. In the history of cultural exchanges between China and Japan, the Chinese Buddhist thought is the most important. Japanese Buddhist thought learned from China has flourished in its native land, and has gone through all kinds of localization with Japanese national characteristics, and in this historical process, Japanese native national culture has also had a great influence on Chinese Buddhism. which was mainly reflected in the combination with Japanese Shinto religious thought. In the cultural exchanges, Shinto absorbed the Taoism of Buddhism, and Buddhism was popularized in Japan through the momentum of Shinto. Through the research of this thesis, it is concluded that Shinto perfected its own teachings through the spread of Buddhism, and Buddhism relied on Shinto to spread through myths among the ruling class and the common people of Japan. After the Meiji Restoration, Shinto gradually overshadowed Buddhism due to the belief in the cult of the Emperor, and the development of Chinese Buddhism in Japan gradually lost its original characteristics due to the ruling class's policy towards Shinto.

Keywords: Japan, Buddhism, Shinto

1. Introduction

As two countries in the East Asian Cultural Circle that share a common border, and also two countries that have had the most frequent conflicts and exchanges in modern times, China and Japan have extremely similar ideological, cultural and social characteristics. In the Sui and Tang dynasties, Japan devoted its best efforts to learning culture and ideas from China and used them in its own national legislation. Among the vast Chinese culture, the Buddhist culture that spread from China to Japan is the most typical.

However, in modern times, since the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the outbreak of Japan's own revolution and the Second World War, as well as the post-war development of Japan and ideology view, China and Japan are two countries deeply influenced by Buddhist culture and thought gradually towards two almost completely different forms. In the midst of this change, Chinese Buddhism

imported from Japan also underwent extremely profound changes in its native land. The influence of the Japanese Shinto religion cannot be ignored. This article will focus on the combination of Chinese Buddhism and Shintoism in Japan, the changes in the status of Buddhism and Buddhist organizations in Japan, and the effects of these changes on the historical development of Japanese society.

This paper will be divided into five parts, the introduction part introduces the cultural and religious exchanges between China and Japan in the past and present and the different impacts; the first part introduces the origin of Shintoism, the native religion of Japan, and its original characteristics; the second part analyzes the fusion of Chinese Buddhism and native Shintoism in the exchanges between China and Japan and the impacts on the two religions; the third part discusses the impacts of the two religions in the process of fusion, and the impacts on the two religions. The fourth part discusses the conflict of ideologies and dogmatic precepts that arose between the two religions during this process of integration and how they differed from the medieval period to the modern era in Japan. The concluding section summarizes the above, re-emphasizes the relationship between Chinese Buddhism and Japanese Shintoism, and summarizes the profound influence of Shintoism on the spread of Buddhism in Japan.

2. Shinto Religion in Japan

Before the large-scale spread of Chinese Buddhism into Japan during the Tang Dynasty, there existed in Japan its own religious beliefs, that is, the “Shinto” beliefs derived from myths and legends. Shintoism has its origins in primitive Japanese society, and the idea that there is a spirit in all things has not faded with the passage of time. In the definition of “kami” given by Mr. Motegui, in addition to the ancient texts, there is also the idea of a spirit of all living things.

In addition to the gods of heaven and earth, which appear in ancient texts, and the gods, spirits, and people worshipped in shrines, there are also birds, animals, grass, trees, the sea, mountains, and other revered creatures with unusual virtues and excellencies. From the point of view of the relationship between gods and humans, Japanese religion belongs to the religion of the unity of gods and humans, it is believed that human beings can also become gods [1]. Its emphasis on the image of God has led to the worship of the Japanese people, and has been deeply integrated with the authority of the Emperor and the spirit of the nation [2]. The four islands of Japan are located in the Pacific Rim volcanic and seismic belt, and have been prone to natural disasters since ancient times. Early Japanese civilization saw the emergence of concepts such as animism, natural deism, and spirit worship, which were widely circulated in the religions of various ethnic groups [3]. At this time, the Shinto religion of Japan did not have the same concepts as those of the Emperor. At this time, the Japanese Shinto religion did not have its own canonical texts and doctrines, but it was closely linked to productive life. Ancient human civilization, on the other hand, had group living as an important symbol, and in Japan, it was no exception. Primitive religions were born out of productive life, and the need to unite the productive forces - the individual human beings - led to the creation of a variety of rituals and ceremonies. In Japan, the emperor has the higher power of sacrifice in the rituals. The image of the emperor as the protector of life and the promoter of productivity was the original face of the early Shinto religion.

Therefore, Japanese scholar Murakami Shigehara believes that the early Shinto religion can be traced back to ancient documents such as the Kojiki and Nihonshoki [4]. These two officially compiled “history books,” a blend of Shinto legends and imperial records, became the unofficial classics of Shintoism, in which the original face of ancient Shinto can be glimpsed. It also confirms that since its inception, the Shinto religion has had an extremely close relationship with the worship of deities and mythical emperors.

However, although Shinto at this time had developed a complete and complex system of deities, it had not developed a system of thought that could be called doctrine, and this provided the conditions for the fusion of Shinto and Buddhism [5].

3. Early Integration of Chinese Buddhism with Shintoism in Japan

During the Tang Dynasty in China, the inherent geographical advantages of China and Japan, were coupled with the positive and friendly exchanges between the two governments. This made it possible for the two countries to have economic and cultural exchanges.

With the help of the Tang envoys and merchants' groups, as well as the Japanese government's sincerity and humility activity. Chinese Buddhism and cultures were able to enter Japan along with the scholars and monks and developed rapidly.

Chinese Buddhism, as a religious belief that came into Japan in the middle of the development of foreign countries, had a great impact on the development of Japan, but it still could not avoid intermingling with the Shinto culture that still existed in the country to form a religious system that had the characteristics of Japan, but it was different from the essence of Buddhism. At that time, Buddhism was widely spread in Japan by Prince Shotoku. During his regency, Buddhism was already very influential among the upper classes. Prince Shotoku himself had deep knowledge of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and at that time, the imperial court was suffering from internal and external problems, and the royal family was weak. Prince Shengde realized that the only way to solve this crisis was to reform the political system and strengthen the centralization of power [6]. The two major clans in early Japan, the Soga and the Mobu, had a heated debate between the foreign Buddhist ideology and the local Shinto ideology. The Soga clan advocated the study of Buddhism and the advanced knowledge of China at the time, while the Mobu clan emphasized the inadmissibility of foreign ideas in local Shinto. After the Great Reformation, Buddhism flourished, but the promotion of Buddhism in Japan could not be separated from the Shinto dogma. During the Heian period, the idea of "Shinto-Buddhist harmony" emerged in Japanese Buddhism, in which the cults of the gods inherent in the country were blended with the cults of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva, the so-called foreign cults. Shrines could be built in Buddhist temples, shrines could be built in Buddhist temples, and the names of the gods were the same as the names of the Buddhas, giving rise to the theory of "local traces," in which the various gods were the incarnations of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Buddhism was assimilated and integrated with Shinto thinking, so that in the minds of Japanese Buddhists, the gods were the Buddha, and they regarded the Buddha and the gods as one and the same. In this way, Buddhism and Shinto have a direct common ground, Shinto is incorporated into the Buddhist system, and Shinto and Buddha become one Japanese religion [7]. Believers claimed the gods as protectors of the Buddha, who was then known in Japan as the "tomokami," meaning that he was an exotic god. Buddha was accepted as one of the traditional gods of Japan, and this was skillfully done." The Buddha was a god," and thus spread widely in Japan [8].

As the times progressed, Buddhism rose to a higher status in the politics and lives of the Japanese people, and as Buddhism spread further in Japan and came to influence politics, the relationship between "Buddha and the gods" slowly changed. The relationship between "Buddha and God" slowly changed as Buddhism spread further and became more influential in Japanese politics. In the Heian period, this integration of Shinto-Buddhism was further developed into the "local legend" of the Buddha's master and the god's subordinate, and the connection between the two religions was tightened even further.

4. Integration and Conflict Between Buddhism and Shintoism in the Late Period

One of the main features of Shintoism is that all human beings can be gods. Therefore, Shintoism led to the spirit of Bushido and the worship of the Emperor, who is the symbol of supreme power in the Japanese ruling class, and a “god” in the eyes of both human beings and the common people, and the confirmation of the authority of the Emperor’s rule and the “deification” of the Emperor by the people. The confirmation of the authority of the emperor’s rule and the worship of the people for the supreme emperor’s “deification” had a certain influence on the spread of Buddhism in Japan.

With the Kamakura Shogunate era as the watershed, and the Meiji Restoration as an important landmark, Chinese Buddhism in Japan experienced a deep fusion with Shinto, as well as mutual harmony with the ruling class, and eventually became almost completely independent of Chinese Buddhism. From the “Shinto-Buddhist practice” to the “local practice”, and then to the militaristic scam of the modern era, it is clear that the basic ideology of Buddhism in Japan has changed in a way that is different from that of other peoples of East Asia.

During the Kamakura period, when the samurai were in power, the Japanese samurai’s bushido served as an important manifestation of the emperor’s beliefs in Shintoism, and the samurai, who made their living by killing and fighting, gradually transformed themselves into the ruling class; the political status of the samurai was raised, and there was a greater need for a cultural ideology that was compatible with their own political status. The emerging Buddhism in Kamakura was precisely adapted to this requirement. Especially after the introduction of Zen Buddhism into Japan, it was rapidly absorbed and assimilated by the Japanese culture, which was still in the learning period. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties of Japan and the Warring States period, when wars were frequent, following Shintoism, the Chinese Buddhist sect Zen Buddhism became the internal driving force dominating the samurai’s way of life. Because Zen could harness the spiritual power of the samurai, it was skillfully molded by the Kamakura shogunate samurai regime into a system of practice that taught people to dare to fight for their lives, and to feel at home with death [9]. It quickly became the religion of the samurai with its simple teachings and practices of “not writing words, pointing directly to the heart, seeing the nature of Buddha, and realizing life and death [10]. Zen thought, the traditional Buddhist thought of not breaking the precepts of killing a little hidden, and the samurai as a unified order to kill for a living group for the organic combination of the mainstream thought of the time, not shake the rule and behavior of the samurai at the same time, but also the samurai behavior will be integrated with the wisdom of Chinese Buddhism.

After the Meiji Restoration, the Meiji government pursued a policy of locking up the country, and although it talked about freedom of religion, it still made Shintoism the most dominant religious belief in the governance of the country. Starting from January 1868, the Meiji Emperor issued a royal restoration edict announcing the “Order of Separation of Shinto and Buddhism,” which established Shinto as the state religion. From the Shinto-Buddhist Separation Decree, the religious policy went through the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the Religious Organizations Law, the Religious Corporations Decree, the Constitution of Japan, and the Religious Corporations Law, which was enacted in 1951. Under the new form, the Buddhist sects and groups carried out a series of reforms in organization and management, training of monks, and ways of propagating the Dharma in order to adapt to the development of modern society [11]. The rest of the religions such as Buddhism became tools to assist the ruling class in managing the masses [12]. The native Shintoism was favored by the ruling class and gradually won out over Buddhist ideas. The spread of Buddhism in Japan, on the other hand, was also more influenced by the position of Shintoism as a ruling class, and was more often used by the government.

In modern times, the development of fascism and military hegemony in Japan has led to the loss of Buddhism in Japan. The expansion of the Japanese Empire after the Meiji Restoration was full of

wolfish colonial aggression, and Shintoism was more significant in the ideological constraints of the Japanese military, with the soldiers practicing “dying for the Emperor” and the ruling class declaring it a “holy war,” and giving the countries surrounding the East Asian civilization the right to fight for the Emperor. The ruling class declared it a “holy war” and inflicted severe wounds on the neighboring countries of the East Asian civilization. The Japanese Buddhist community was also affected by the extreme fervor of the war at this time, such as the transformation of the Pure Land True Sect in modern times. Until the Taisho era, Shin Buddhism had become the largest Buddhist sect with the largest number of followers in Japan. However, with the changes in the relationship between religion and politics and the religious system in Japan in modern times, Buddhist groups such as the True Sect began to work for the protection of the “imperial state” on their own initiative, and the Buddhist groups that were supposed to be pursuing peace ended up voluntarily falling into the role of hawks and dogs of Japan’s militarism. In the course of Japan’s invasion of China, True Father not only reinterpreted Buddhist scriptures and sectarian classics, reformed his own doctrines to match the militarists’ public opinion propaganda and war mobilization, glorified the war of aggression, but also directly dispatched monks to participate in the battles with the army. At the same time, True Father used the name of missionary work in China to seize the properties of Chinese Buddhist monasteries and carry out cultural aggression, which was an important tool for the invading Japanese army to brainwash the Chinese people and maintain the rule in the occupied areas, and brought heavy sufferings and pain to the Chinese people [13].

5. Conclusions

Shintoism undoubtedly played a very important role in the spread and localization of Chinese Buddhism in Japan. As a local religion, Shintoism helped the Japanese people to better understand and worship God and Buddha, and allowed the ruling class and the people to better learn and accept the Buddhist teachings during the promotion of Chinese Buddhism in Japan. At the same time, it also gradually refined its own dogma, making the Shinto character more evident in the Japanese nation. During the turbulent development of Japanese society, especially during the Warring States period when the samurai were in power, Buddhism, in combination with Shintoism, served as an ideological platform for the ruling class, providing the samurai with a spiritual inner drive of precepts that governed their behavior and values. On the other hand, it provided a deeper basis of faith and aspiration for the common people living in a chaotic world, and helped the ruling class to gain a deeper understanding of how to govern the country. Although in modern times, Buddhism has gradually lost its status to Shintoism, and has gradually become a tool of the ruling class, it has created a certain conflict and contradiction in its ideological program and ideology with Bushido, which is derived from the original Shintoism, and has gradually departed from the original characteristics of Buddhism. In addition, as Japan developed into a hegemonic country with a certain degree of Western wolfishness, the Buddhist community, whether in response to Japan’s basic national conditions or as a result of a change in beliefs and dogmas, tended to glorify militarism and wars of aggression. Although this may not be a scene that the knowledgeable people in the Japanese Buddhist community would like to see, it is indeed a trend in Japan’s history.

To sum up, in the development of history, it can undoubtedly see the harmony between Buddhism and Shinto, with one side being symbiotic and co-prosperous and the other side being antagonistic. They have been localized with their own characteristics and have left a colorful mark on the development of Japanese society and history. It has also left a colorful mark in the East Asian cultural exchange circle.

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