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THE RELIGION OF THE SAMURAI

A STUDY OF ZEN PHILOSOPHY AND DISCIPLINE IN CHINA AND JAPAN

by

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INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is geographically divided into two schools[FN#1]--the Southern, the older and simpler, and the Northern, the later and more developed faith. The former, based mainly on the Pali texts[FN#2] is known as Hinayana[FN#3] (small vehicle), or the inferior doctrine; while the latter, based on the various Sanskrit texts,[4] is known as Mahayana (large vehicle), or superior doctrine. The chief tenets of the Southern School are so well known to occidental scholars that they almost always mean the Southern School by the word Buddhism. But with regard to the Northern School very little is known to the West, owing to the fact that most of its original texts were lost, and that the teachings based on these texts are written in Chinese, or Tibetan, or Japanese languages unfamiliar to non-Buddhist investigators.

[FN#1] The Southern School has its adherents in Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Anan, etc.; while the Northern School is found in Nepal, China, Japan, Tibet, etc.

[FN#2] They chiefly consist of the Four Nikayas: (1) Digha Nikaya (Dirghagamas, translated into Chinese by Buddhaya?as, A.D. 412-413); (2) Majjhima Nikaya (Madhyamagamas, translated into Chinese by Gautama Sanghadeva, A.D. 397-398); (3) Sanyutta Nikaya (Samyuktagamas, translated into Chinese by Gunabhadra, of the earlier Sung dynasty, A.D. 420-479); (4) Anguttara Nikaya (Ekottaragamas, translated into Chinese by Dharmanandi, A.D. 384-385). Out of these Hinayana books, the English translation of twenty-three suttas by Rhys Davids exist in 'Sacred Books of Buddhist,' vols. ii.-iii., and of seven suttas by the same author in 'Sacred Books of the East,' vol. xi.

[FN#3] The Southern Buddhists never call their faith Hinayana, the name being an invention of later Buddhists, who call their doctrine Mahayana in contradistinction to the earlier form of Buddhism. We have to notice that the word Hinayana frequently occurs in Mahayana books, while it does not in Hinayana books.

[FN#4] A catalogue of the Buddhist Canon, K'-yuen-luh, gives the titles of 897 Mahayana sutras, yet the most important books often quoted by Northern Buddhist teachers amount to little more than twenty. There exist the English translation of Larger Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra, Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra, Vajracchedika-sutra, Larger Prajna-paramita-hradya-sutra, Smaller Prajna-paramita-hrdya-sutra, by Max Müller, and Amitayur-dhyana-sutra, by J. Takakusu, in 'Sacred Books of the East,' vol. xlix. An English translation of Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, by Kern, is given in 'Sacred Books of the East,' Vol. xxi. Compare these books with 'Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism,' by D. Suzuki.

It is hardly justifiable to cover the whole system of Buddhism with a single epithet[FN#5] 'pessimistic' or 'nihilistic,' because Buddhism, having been adopted by savage tribes as well as civilized nations, by quiet, enervated people as well as by warlike, sturdy hordes, during some twenty-five hundred years, has developed itself into beliefs widely divergent and even diametrically opposed. Even in Japan alone it has differentiated itself into thirteen main sects and forty-four sub-sects[FN#6] and is still in full vigour, though in other countries it has already passed its prime. Thus Japan seems to be the best representative of the Buddhist countries where the majority

of people abides by the guiding principle of the Northern School. To study her religion, therefore, is to penetrate into Mahayanism, which still lies an unexplored land for the Western minds. And to investigate her faith is not to dig out the remains of Buddhist faith that existed twenty centuries ago, but to touch the heart and soul of Mahayanism that enlivens its devotees at the present moment.

[FN#5] Hinayanism is, generally speaking, inclined to be pessimistic, but Mahayanism in the main holds the optimistic view of life. Nihilism is advocated in some Mahayana sutras, but others set forth idealism or realism.

[FN#6] (1) The Ten Dai Sect, including three sub-sects; (2) The Shin Gon Sect, including eleven sub-sects; (3) The Ritsu Sect; (4) The Rin Zai Sect, including fourteen sub-sects; (5) The So To Sect; (6) The O Baku Sect; (7) The Jo Do Sect, including two sub-sects; (8) The Shin Sect, including ten sub-sects; (9) The Nichi Ren Sect, including nine sub-sects; (10) The Yu Zu Nen Butsu Sect; (11) The Hosso Sect; (12) The Ke Gon Sect; (13) The Ji Sect. Out of these thirteen Buddhist sects, Rin Zai, So To, and O Baku belong to Zen. For further information, see 'A Short History of the Twelve Japanese Buddhist Sects,' by Dr. B. Nanjo.

The object of this little book is to show how the Mahayanistic view of life and of the world differs markedly from that of Hinayanism, which is generally taken as Buddhism by occidentals, to explain how the religion of Buddha has adapted itself to its environment in the Far East, and also to throw light on the existing state of the spiritual life of modern Japan.

For this purpose we have singled out of thirteen Japanese sects the Zen Sect, [FN#7] not only because of the great influence it has exercised on the nation, but because of the unique position it holds among the established religious systems of the world. In the first place, it is as old as Buddhism itself, or even older, for its mode of practising Meditation has been handed down without much alteration from pre-Buddhistic recluses of India; and it may, on that account, provide the student of comparative religion with an interesting subject for his research.

[FN#7] The word Zen is the Sinico-Japanese abbreviation of the Sanskrit Dhyana, or Meditation. It implies the whole body of teachings and discipline peculiar to a Buddhist sect now popularly

known as the Zen Sect.

In the second place, in spite of its historical antiquity, ideas entertained by its advocates are so new that they are in harmony with those of the New Buddhists;[FN#8] accordingly the statement of these ideas may serve as an explanation of the present movement conducted by young and able reformers of Japanese Buddhism.

[FN#8] There exists a society formed by men who have broken with the old creeds of Buddhism, and who call themselves the New Buddhists. It has for its organ 'The New Buddhism,' and is one of the influential religious societies in Japan. We mean by the New Buddhists, however, numerous educated young men who still adhere to Buddhist sects, and are carrying out a reformation.

Thirdly, Buddhist denominations, like non-Buddhist religions, lay stress on scriptural authority; but Zen denounces it on the ground that words or characters can never adequately express religious truth, which can only be realized by mind; consequently it claims that the religious truth attained by Shakya Muni in his Enlightenment has been handed down neither by word of mouth nor by the letters of scriptures, but from teacher's mind to disciple's through the line of transmission until the present day. It is an isolated instance in the whole history of the world's religions that holy scriptures are declared to be 'no more than waste[FN#9] paper by religionists, as done by Zen masters.

[FN#9] Lin Tsi Luh (Rin-zai-roku).

Fourthly, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist religions regard, without exception, their founders as superhuman beings, but the practisers of Zen hold the Buddha as their predecessor, whose spiritual level they confidently aim to attain. Furthermore, they liken one who remains in the exalted position of Buddhahood to a man bound by a gold chain, and pity his state of bondage. Some of them went even so far as to declare Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to be their servants and slaves.[FN#10] Such an attitude of religionists can hardly be found in any other religion.

[FN#10] "Shakya and Maitreya," says Go So, "are servants to the

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