

## In Pursuit of the Idealism of Japanese Buddhism

Japanese Buddhism has got to differ significantly from the original one. Well, how about the denial of desires?

### (1)original Buddhism

The Buddha was aware that this world is one of suffering. All things are impermanent; we will someday grow old, fall ill, and have to die. We feel this as distress, cause for grief and anguish. Why is it that we must suffer in this way? It is because human beings have desires. Humans suffer because they grow attached to life despite the fact that they have to die, and because their desires expand from one to another and they are unable to attain satisfaction. The Buddha thought that if we could cast desire aside ( or at least control it ), suffering would also disappear. Buddha, clearly denied the world of death, simply argued getting enlightened to nirvana in one's own efforts without salvation. The essence of the Buddha's idealism is, thus, his criticism of desires. To cut desires out, the original Buddhism had strict precepts: renouncing the world, not having a wife, children, and any worldly goods, and being as a ragged beggar. And further one who tries to get enlightenment has to keep 250 kinds of precepts. Far from present-day Japanese Buddhism! My opinion is that this criticism is valid even these days, for capitalism, communism and globalism that have produced lots of bitter problems, are all based on the across-the-board affirmation of desires.



Buddha

Although Japanese Buddhism, a kind of Mahayana Buddhism, is far from the original one, his idea is still alive in Japanese Buddhism, I think.

### (2)Mahayana Buddhism

After Buddha's death, Buddhism was divided broadly into 2 schools: Hinayana Buddhism which takes as its purpose renouncing the world and carrying out practices to attain enlightenment by oneself, which is closest to the original Buddhism and is prevailing in Sri Lanka and most of continental Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand).

Mahayana Buddhism, introduced to China, Korea, Japan and so on, preaching from 利他救済(りたきゅうさい=ritakyusai=emancipation through benefitting others) that all human beings are equally capable of becoming buddhas. Here, the salvation idea was taken in. An Indian Buddhist monk Nagarjuna ( 150 – 250 AD) who systematized Mahayana Buddhism argued "the essence of Buddhism is mercy or humanity", which led to the Buddhism change from "getting enlightenment" in the original Buddhism to "salvation."



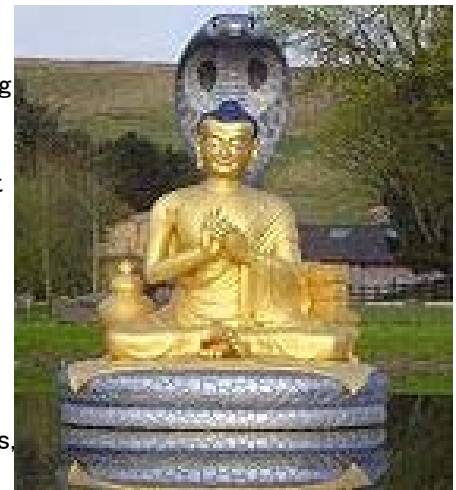
Painting on Tamamushi Shrine  
symbolizing ritakyusai

As to the criticism of desires, he seems to have been not so exhaustive as Buddha, and he kept a forgiving attitude to desires. He said "It's wrong to affirm desires, which is attachment to beings. However, too much sticking with the denial of desires is also wrong, which is attachment to nothing. 空(くう=emptiness) is vital, which is free from both of attachment of beings and attachment to nothing." Therefore Mahayana Buddhism adopts a much more forgiving attitude to desires than the original one. So, I don't think Buddha's strict criticism of desires was thoroughly conveyed to Japan that had accepted Mahayana Buddhism.

If Japanese Buddhism were to lose the spirit of criticism of desires, it would not be Buddhism any more.

### (3)Japanese Buddhism

Though Japanese Buddhism didn't pursue the spirit of criticism of desires, it held its new ideal: 菩薩道(ぼさつどう=bosatsudo=Bodhi-sattva Way), that is, practicing and making efforts for both of one's own enlightenment and salvation of others. To do so, practicing 六波羅蜜(rokuharamitsu=the six Perfections), the six kinds of practices of Mahayana Buddhism, is required.



Nagarjuna(=龍樹 in Japanese)

- ①fuse: casting aside desire and donating something significant for the buddha or those who are suffering
- ②jikai: keeping the precepts
- ③perseverance in enduring insults and not being swept away by passion
- ④shojin: assiduously endeavoring toward doing good
- ⑤zenjo: calming the mind and concentrating the spirit
- ⑥chie: having eyes to see actual truth

Zenjo and chie are a bit professional practices though, the other 4 could be done by anybody. Those 4 have been penetrated deeply into Japanese society. The ideal Japanese figure is: giving goods and wisdom to others, exercising moderation, never angry no matter how bad things are said, and exerting one's fullest effort according to one's belief. Those are just like the denial of desires!