

The Development and Influence of Buddhist Culture in Japan During the Warring States Period

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Abstract. Buddhism has been an important part of Japanese culture since its introduction. Japan's Warring States period (in this case, the period from the Ethio Rebellion of 1467 A.D. to the time when the Tokugawa Shogunate fully established its dominance over Japan after the Osaka-Summer Battle of 1615) was characterized by social upheaval and the separation of regimes. The unique social environment and social needs also impacted the development of Buddhism in Japan. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the course of Buddhist culture in Japan and its multidimensional impact on Japanese culture by examining its manifestations during the Warring States period. The paper compares its state of development before Japan entered the historical phase of the Warring States period by using the methods of literature review and comparative study. As one of the important segments of Japanese culture, Japanese Buddhism can serve as a microcosm of the general trend of the times in this era. Through the evolution of Buddhism and its influence on other elements within Japan, the paper provides a glimpse of the character of Japan's Warring States period.

Keywords: Japan, Buddhism, secession, Warring States, characteristics of the era.

1. Introduction

Many different definitions of the division of the Japanese Warring States period have long existed in historiography. It generally begins with the beginning of the decline of the Muromachi Shogunate in 1467 with the Ethio Rebellion. As for the division of the endpoint, there is the success of Oda Nobunaga's ascent to capital in 1568. In 1568, Oda Nobunaga succeeded in ascending to the castle of Azuchi and started the Azuchi-Momoyama period, which was the end of the Warring States period; some mark the end of the Warring States period as the end of the Osaka Summer Front in 1615, when the internal wars in Japan largely subsided. This paper adopts the second theory and defines the "Warring States Period" of Japan as the period from the Ehito Rebellion of 1467 to the Natsukoshi Battle of Osaka in 1615.

The history of Japan's Warring States period has always been a relatively blank or less involved part of studying Japanese history in China. However, Japanese Buddhist culture, as one of the important veins of cultural development in its antiquity, was naturally present during this period. As a colorful part of Japanese history, the development of Buddhist culture during the Warring States period in Japan naturally influenced other elements of the history of the period to varying degrees.

The evolution of Buddhist culture in Japan during the Warring States period was a complex process of cause and effect, involving many different social, economic, and cultural dimensions. The evolution of Buddhist culture in Japan during the Warring States period contributes to a better cognizance of the social characteristics and the overall history of Japan during the Warring States period.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the causes and phenomena of the development of Buddhism in Japan during the Warring States period. It first deduces the general situation of the development of Buddhism in this period and analyzes its impact on various fields, mainly political and economic, in Japan during the Warring States period.

2. Overview of the Development of Buddhist Culture in Japan during the Warring States Period

2.1. Overall Tendency to Decline

During the Muromachi Shogunate period, with the separation of the daimyo into separate groups and serious social upheaval, Japanese Buddhism went from strength to strength. Many of the original Buddhist sects that flourished in Japan, such as the Pure Land Sect, the Nichiren Sect, and the Jodo Shinshu Sect, had their internal disputes over the death of their founders or the orthodoxy of their sects. Together with the successive internal wars of division, almost all the various sects of Buddhism were unable to carry out all kinds of religious activities in a completely normal manner, and therefore all of them experienced different degrees of decline. In particular, the Pure Land Sect, which uses naming and chanting as the main path to enlightenment, and the Nichiren Sect, which advocates chanting to attain enlightenment, have been most severely affected.

At the same time, some temples and sects clashed with the more powerful daimyo of the Warring States period and were suppressed and destroyed, most notably in 1571 when Nobunaga Oda retaliated against Enryaku-ji Temple on Mount Hiei with the “Burning of Mount Hiei. Of course, even though the times were so unfavorable to the development of Buddhism, the transmission of Buddhist culture in Japan did not decline. Rather, a sizable number of believers remained in each of the sects and were revitalized in subsequent eras with the support of state policies and other factors [1].

2.2. Renaissance during Decline

During the Warring States period in Japan, there were some quiet hints of a revival in the general direction of the decline of Buddhist culture. For example, Zen Buddhism, because its practice is based on sitting meditation, has played a role in training people’s endurance, etc., and advocates “clearing one’s mind and seeing one’s nature” and following one’s instincts. Therefore, it fits well with the psychological needs of the samurai class for a stoic and calm character and for determination and self-restraint on the battlefield. In his book, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, the renowned Japanese Zen scholar Daikaku Suzuki writes: “Zen practices simplicity, determination, self-reliance, and self-restraint, and this tendency toward precepts is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the samurai [2].” At the same time, Zen Buddhism did not have strict requirements for the recitation of sutras, which was very friendly to the samurai class, who had fewer opportunities for education and a very low generalization of education during the Warring States period in Japan [2].

Moreover, many monks were honored and protected by many samurai daimyo due to political demands such as gaining popular followers and consolidating their own rule. In a certain sense, it also curbed the momentum of Buddhism’s decline and laid the foundation for its restoration and revival. For example, Matsunaga Hidetoshi, who rebelled against the Muromachi Shogun, advocated the construction and maintenance of temples and enacted many laws and regulations relating to Buddhist temples. Under the protection of these daimyo, part of the Buddhist power was preserved in the chaotic social situation and became the foundation for Buddhism to flourish again after the society was stabilized.

2.3. Buddhism’s Attempt at Resistance

Naturally, Buddhism was not willing to decline with the changing times, so many Buddhist sects began various attempts to pursue survival and revitalization. Some sects began to turn to secularization, such as the Shingon and Tendai sects, which sought to expand by joining forces with the samurai groups that were the dominant political forces of the era, and the Jodo and Nichiren sects, which joined forces with the lower classes to fight for the preservation of their development. The latter became a strong and stable religious force in the Kyoto area through a variety of channels, including uprisings and political struggles. It was able to develop peacefully in the chaotic and turbulent social environment that followed the Einin Rebellion.

The other way is the “Ikkyo”, i.e. a peasant uprising. It was an attempt by a larger religious force to separate itself from the warring daimyo to survive. Some of the more famous ones are the “Iyi Ikkyo”, which has been practiced many times by the Jodo Shinshu Sect, and the “Dharma Ikkyo”, which was practiced by the Nichiren Sect in Kyoto in 1532. The former was an ongoing revolt by the Jodo Shinshu after the overthrow of oppression to avoid the re-establishment of forceful rule by the daimyo in the region; the latter was a struggle within the various sects of Buddhism but carried out at the behest of the emperor and the shogun’s shogunate.

Some of these resistance attempts were to protect their monasteries, followers, and property; Some, such as the confrontation between Ishiyama Honganji Temple and Oda Nobunaga, were the result of alliances between daimyo and religious forces and the intensification of political power struggles between the various factions during the Warring States period. However, in any case, they are naturally noteworthy as attempts by Buddhism to survive in these times.

3. Influence of Japanese Buddhist Culture

Culture, as a field, has never been alone from time immemorial. As a very important element in the field of culture, Buddhism naturally has a very important impact on other fields such as politics and economy. As a sizeable political force in Japan during the Warring States period, Japanese Buddhism naturally played a very influential role in characterizing the period.

3.1. Political Field

By the time of the Warring States period in Japan, Buddhism had developed on a considerable scale in Japan and could be characterized as very much its class universal. In addition to the frequent wars during the Warring States period, Buddhism, which seeks peace of mind, naturally became a good solace for the commoners of the lower classes and the soldiers during the wars, and therefore the audience was still very wide, and the number of monasteries and monks was also on the rise. Under this condition of having many followers and a certain scale of inherent land, Buddhism can naturally form a local power of the nature of a religious order and can exist as a party of political division.

At the same time, monasteries have established monks and soldiers, which are local armed groups, to protect the property and land within the monastery. Some of the most famous ones are “Sanshoji” from Enryakuji Temple and so on. When the monks and soldiers were powerful, they could even threaten the emperor and shogun, such as Minamoto no Yoritomo who was once forced to exile his meritorious minister, Sasaki Toshizuna Toward the end of the Muromachi Shogunate, as society became more turbulent, Buddhism became more popular with the samurai class, and the addition of samurai further expanded the ranks of the monks and soldiers, giving the monasteries even more military power. This made the Japanese Buddhist organizations of the period a combination of military, political, and economic power, not with the color and name of a religious community, but with the reality of a local military force [3].

At the same time, some sects, such as the Ichiyama Honganji Temple, which is representative of the Ichiyo sect, emphasize “jihad” and advocate “Ikkyo,” or armed insurrection, as a means of separating themselves from the daimyo. While unifying the congregation, the excessive attachment to the “Ikkyo” led to many armed conflicts with local daimyo, which in turn aggravated wars and turmoil in various parts of the country. Some of the temples, in turn, even sheltered local forces such as the Kokujinsho and allied themselves with the ruling forces, significantly slowing down the pace of unification of the more powerful daimyo [4].

In general, the Buddhist sects of this period, as a local force that formally appeared on the political scene, shared some of the characteristics of the sectarian forces of the period. This, together with the radicalism of some sectarian doctrines, somewhat slowed down the process of Japan’s transition from division to unification during this period [5].

3.2. Economic Field

During the Warring States period, the daimyo of Japan would not only honor and treat monks favorably but also divide up land and wealth among them to woo them in pursuit of political support. As a result, many of the Buddhist powers of this period owned their land. The temple, a local estate that would not be easily spread and destroyed by war, together with the large number of believers attracted as laborers, successfully promoted the development of the estate economy in ancient Japan [6].

Furthermore, a certain degree of self-protection existed in the monasteries through the daimyo's protective pull and their own established organization of monks and soldiers, which provided more effective protection of the land and wealth concentrated in the monasteries. Under the Bantian system, which was carried out by the Land Laws promulgated in 692, the land and wealth of the monasteries were granted tax immunity and more stable ownership. Therefore, against the backdrop of social unrest, war, and destruction of the economic and production environment during the Warring States period, temples played a relatively effective role in protecting and preserving the Japanese economy. Thus, it objectively favored the development of the Japanese economy during this period and beyond.

3.3. Cultural Field

As one of the components of Japanese culture, Buddhism also had a relatively profound influence on other cultures during the Warring States period in Japan. Much of the art created during this period has a distinctly Buddhist flavor. For example, many of the resignation poems of the Japanese Warring States daimyo have shades of Buddhist culture. For example, Toyotomi Hideyoshi's repeated references to "Asahi", Akechi Mitsuhide's realization of the "Great Way", and Takeda Shingen's release from the "mundane life". Other fields such as literature, architecture, and painting were not devoid of Buddhist concepts. It can be said that Buddhism played a trendsetting role in the cultural field of Japan's Warring States period.

4. Conclusion

During the Warring States period in Japan, Buddhism served as a cultural component of Japanese culture that had become indispensable in the development of this era. The social upheavals of the period, the needs of the daimyo for political struggle, and the claims and changes in Buddhism itself all combined to create a general trend of revitalization of Buddhism during this period, despite its general decline. Buddhism, as a substantial religious force, also contributed to the broader period characteristics of Japan's chaotic political landscape and developed economy in the Warring States period.

Buddhism, as an important component of Japanese culture, was inevitably involved in the tides of the times, and thus also took on the color of being involved in political struggles and impeding unification. In general, Buddhism, as one of the important segments of Japanese culture, can serve as a microcosm of the general trend of the times in this era. Through the evolution of Buddhism and its influence on other elements within Japan, this study provides an insight into the character of Japan's Warring States period. This contributes to the understanding and studying of this historical period of time.

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