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ZEN DOCTRINE AND ITS INFLUENCE UPON THE SAMURAI CLASSES

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As in other countries, different religious creeds in Japan have invariably exerted, in their flourishing days, potent influences upon the minds of the people. Such was significantly the case with the Zen, a contemplative sect of Buddhism. After its introduction to Japan about 1191, Zen began immediately to exercise a deep influence among the court and samurai classes, who were attracted by its mystical and invigorating doctrines. The elevating influence of this sect reached its zenith in the Kamakura Period (1199-1333) and the Namboku-Chō Period (1333-1392). In the beginning of the Muromachi Period (1392-1603) this sect became very firmly established, counting a great many military men among its adherents. At this time, the Zen priests, stepping out of the bounds of their proper profession, interested themselves in various secular affairs, political, diplomatic and literary, playing important rôles and thereby exerting a preponderating influence upon the contemporary social psychology. However, in the ensuing Edo Period (1603-1868), the sect gradually declined and lost its former power.

We have now to make a survey of the doctrine of Zen, and show its essential truth, so as to be able to grasp the reactionary and reconstructive ideas held by the samurai classes before the Kamakura Epoch, and to understand the reason why Zen thought so deeply touched their inmost sentiments and produced a strong and far-reaching effect upon the social life of the time. In the closing years of the Heian Period (794-1159) the people's thought was strongly influenced by superstitious cults and practices such as Manichaeism, divination, horoscopy, incantation, oneiromancy, fasting and the like. Under

the sway of such degenerating superstitions, they were rendered completely spiritless and conservative, and with the pressure of the military they became all the more pessimistic and sick of life.

Since the masses were thus downcast in spirit and devoid of hope in this life, it was but natural that they all longed for the salvation by faith in Amida Buddha, rather than for salvation through personal wisdom and virtue. Hōnen Shōnin (法然上人), the great teacher of Amidism earnestly exhorted the masses to believe in the grace of Amida Buddha. He spoke highly in favour of the Amida doctrine, saying: "The ways of attaining salvation, however varied, may be divided into two categories; one the Shōdōmon (Holy Way Division) and the other Jōdomon (Pure Land Division)." The Shōdōmon, or the Way of Law, teaches that man can work out salvation for himself through the perfect observance of the Law and through a strict walking in the holy way of self-strength and self-discipline while he is alive. The Jōdomon, or the Way of Grace, preaches that man can attain birth in the Pure Land, or Paradise, where eternal Life and Light reign.

The former way may be compared to walking on foot all the way along a very rough road, whereas the latter way is just like going by ship comfortably on the sea. This parable is to show that helpless and ignorant human beings can be carried over to the Pure Land in the west by the graceful vessel of Amida. Hōnen's preachings, since they emphasized ultimate deliverance from the bondage of existence through the mighty strength of Amida Buddha, struck a responsive cord in the hearts of the despondent and world-wearied masses whose sole desire was to be born into the Land of Bliss. And, as a matter of course, a large number of people were attracted by, and became devoted followers of, the Jōdo doctrine.

The Shui Ōjōden¹ (a collection of stories describing the passing scenes of many devoted believers in salvation by Amida) contains some interesting accounts of how many blessed priests and laymen, in their dying hour, sat upright facing the Western Paradise, picturing

¹ 拾遺往生傳—Consisting of 3 volumes, the first of which was compiled in 1123, A.D.

in their minds the coming existence of bliss, repeating the great name of Amida in joy and thankfulness, holding incense-burners in their hands, and hanging five-coloured threads in the hands of images of Buddha.

As may be gathered from those stories, the Jōdomon doctrine of obtaining salvation by complete faith in Amida appealed strongly to the religious longing of the people, and thus became very popular and flourishing.

In the meantime the Zen Sect, a branch of the Dhyāna School, was introduced from South China. In direct opposition to the Jōdomon doctrine of entering the abode of the blessed by simply clinging to Amida, the Zen masters laid down that the Buddha lies hidden within one's mind, and that one has only to find it by silent meditation. An idea of this abstruse doctrine may be obtained from the following excerpts taken from the sermons of the two foremost Zen masters, Dōgen (道元禪師) and Daiō (大應國師). To quote Dōgen:

"All external objects are embraced in the mind and there exists no sense-world outside of the mind; the enlightened mind being devoid of colour and form. The state of a mind unbound by sentient objects and released from the external world, perfectly quiet and wholly vacant, is in itself an absolutely holy state of Buddha. There are three different states of Buddha, viz., Ōjin Butsu (應身佛), Buddha in human form and in historic existence; Hōshin Butsu (報身佛), Buddha as an ideal person, or the personification of virtue, wisdom and enlightenment, such as the Buddha Amitabha; and Hosshin Butsu (法身佛), Buddha as the Absolute or the Noumenon that underlies all phenomenal existence. These three states of Buddha are all embodied in one's mind. It may, therefore, be considered that those who fail to appreciate the virtue and capacity of the mind conceive wrongly the unity or identity of the three different stages of Buddha.

"It is accordingly a mistaken idea to desire to be born into the Pure Land of Bliss, by putting faith and trust in the three different states of Buddha. Such a false attempt may be likened to searching

for a missing person in a wrong direction. The farther one advances, the more one drifts away from the person sought for. If one becomes enlightened about the fact that the three different stages of Buddha are contained in one's own mind, one will realize that there is no Buddha and no Pure Land existing beyond one's mind."

Daiō remarked in one of his sermons :

"Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, enunciated various ways of attaining salvation. But the most essential thing is to penetrate into the inner quality of the mind and fully grasp it. Ordinary people, not being capable of realizing that each mind is a living Buddha, are vainly searching for Buddhahood outside their own minds, which does not accord with the truth. Such a foolish endeavour is something like a silly boy's running after his father northward when the latter has gone off eastward."

The first fundamental tenet of the Zen teaching is the idea of self-reliance and self-development. In his preaching in favour of the way of salvation by faith in Amida, Hōnen proclaimed the Zen way of salvation as Nangyōdō (the way of hardships), saying that it is like walking on foot all the way on a rugged road, which is a task utterly impossible for those whose feet are paralysed and whose eyesight has become dimmed. It was indeed an extremely hard task for the weak-willed and not highly educated people of those ancient times to understand and to carry into practice the profound doctrine of Zen.

The fundamental principle of the Zen Sect being to work out one's own enlightenment and salvation by one's own wisdom, by meditation and ascetic practices, there arose the need of Zazen, that is, sitting cross-legged and meditating while regulating the inhalation and expulsion of the breath. It was natural that those who practised Zazen came to cultivate the idea of self-reliance and self-strength. It may be of interest to explain here the meaning and object of Zazen. Zazen is a kind of mystical self-intoxication by which the believer seeks, while sitting in silent meditation, to rise above the world of sense with all its limitations and differences, and come into the

freedom and harmony of the Reality or the Universal Self.

From another point of view, we must not overlook the fact that Zen teachings embody a good deal of worldly and realistic thought. A passage in one of the sermons of Ikkyū Zenji (一休禪師) makes this point clear :

"What is called the Land of Bliss and what is called Hell exist in our own minds. Questioned as to the whereabouts of Hell, Daruma Daishi replied that it means nothing but what results from the ties of worldly passions—lust, anger, and ignorance, and that if we cut asunder the ties of earthly concerns with the sword of wisdom, we may build a land of bliss within our minds." As may be gathered from the above interpretation of Daruma Daishi, the Zen Sect strongly maintains that men should strive to attain enlightenment by dispelling evil passions and illusive thoughts, as they get along in the present existence, by means of the practice of Zazen. There is no doubt that this doctrine implanted in the minds of the mass of the people the realistic and courageous sentiment of achieving one's object by bravely overcoming all trials and difficulties.

Another significant merit of the Zen doctrine is that through manly discipline and character-building of individuals on the basis of this doctrine, a vigorous spiritual force, a mighty moral courage rising above life and death, is cultivated in the minds of men. Seeing that it is more difficult to preserve a life than to throw it away, it requires great courage and a persevering spirit to cope with the struggle for existence. It is certainly a tremendously hard thing to attain enlightenment by getting rid of all worldly passions as one lives on earth. It requires indeed an indomitable spirit to attain perfect peace and enlightenment through the practice of Zazen.

The doctrine of the Zen Sect aims, on its temporal side, at inculcating in men's minds an unyielding moral force and an indomitable spirit, ready to face matters of life and death, trained on the Zen principle of self-reliance and realistic ideas. Such a spiritual courage makes itself strongly felt in times of national emergency. On the

occasion of the Mongul invasion in the year 1251, and during the Namboku-Chō Period, well known for the strife between the rival claimants to the throne, and for the frequent collisions between feudal lords, the Zen Sect exerted a significant influence upon the public mind, helping thereby to save the state and the Imperial House from critical dangers, and to establish the illustrious Imperial lineage on a firm basis.

Before giving proof of these facts, it may not be out of place to make a few remarks on the thought and sentiments of the military classes of the Kamakura Period. The newly-risen samurai classes, who had emphatically denounced the traditional thought and discarded the sentiments of the court-nobles, embraced the Zen Sect as their creed, and were brought under its potent influence. In order to clarify the ideas held by the samurai class of Kamakura, it would be well to search into the popular thought of the latter part of the preceding period, in opposition to which the new thought of the samurai class arose. It must be remembered that the general current of thought in ancient times was represented by the thought prevailing among the masses of the people as well as among the governing class of court-nobles.

The religious cults that swayed the minds of the court-nobles in the latter part of the Heian Period were those of superstitious practices. Instances illustrating how strongly superstitious practices swayed the sentiments of the court-nobles are given in profusion in the diaries kept by certain court people. In divination for example, its followers used to perform all sorts of superstitious services; and they believed in astrology on account of its supposed influence upon human and terrestrial affairs. The influence of superstition was amazingly great and extensive, affecting government affairs, Shintō services and festival observances, on the one hand, and everyday affairs of private individuals, including the ceremonies of coming of age, marriage, burial, ancestral worship, planning of journeys, construction of buildings, etc. on the other. Such deep-rooted super-

stitious conceptions and practices could not fail to render the mind spiritless and retrogressive.

In addition to such superstitious practices, what so seriously disturbed the national sentiment was the Buddhist apprehension concerning the foretold coming of an age of decadence. This apprehension being based upon a prophetic faith, the people's minds were alarmed at the alleged occurrence of what had been foretold. What was worse, the depressed minds of the court people were utterly disconcerted by the military domination of the samurai classes that had sprung up. A chronicle written by Kujō Kanēzane, chief adviser to the Emperor, is full of such incidents as reveal the spiritless and decadent sentiment of the court-officials.

At such a critical moment, there arose a vigorous, renovating spirit among the samurai classes, which greatly stimulated the popular sentiment and resuscitated the almost dying national thought. They expressed their flat disapproval of the superstitious practices, particularly the unreasoning attachment to oneiromancy, by which the court people had been possessed. It may be of interest to give here a few instances showing how oneirocritical practices were strongly denounced by military men. During the civil war of Hōgen, Minamoto-no Tameyoshi received a summons from the Imperial House, but he declined it on account of a bad dream he had. Startled at this matter, Fujiwara Norinaga remonstrated with Tameyoshi, saying that dreams were illusory and empty as taught in the sutras and that it was a serious disgrace to a military leader to be scared by a silly dream.

Another story in which fortune-telling is made light of is found in the *Konjaku-Monogatari*.¹ A Buddhist priest was scared by a fortune-teller that, on a certain night, a robber would break into his house, and that this might result in the loss of his life, unless he kept

¹ 今昔物語—An extensive collection of ancient Indian, Chinese and Japanese folklores and tales, the authorship of which is ascribed to Minamoto-no-Takakuni (源隆國) in the reign of the Emperor Gorōzei (1046-1068 A.D.).

himself purified and well guarded. So he shut himself up in his house for a certain number of days and nights, when his samurai friend Sadamori chanced to come on a visit. Upon hearing what the matter was with the priest, Sadamori stayed with him on purpose; in time the talked-of house-breaker came to be instantly shot dead by the warrior. This story is a proof that a realistically minded samurai, with confidence in his military strength, would put no store by nonsensical fortune-telling and, by implication, oneiromancy.

In the Gempei Seisuiki,¹ there is a story telling how a downpour of rain lasting for three days and nights came after a long spell of very dry weather, as if bestowed by the dragon, god of rain, in response to the earnest prayers offered by the suffering people. But this incident was scoffed at as a mere matter of chance or a natural phenomenon by the samurai General Taira-no Kiyomori.

In those flourishing days for Buddhist sects, many depraved priests of large monasteries committed all sorts of outrages, but the court authorities were not powerful enough to check their disorderly behaviour. Enraged at this intolerable state of affairs, Taira-no Kiyomori burned down their headquarters, thus dealing a crushing blow to them. Judgments may vary on this matter, but Kiyomori's resolute act is at least indicative of the rigorous samurai spirit based upon self-discipline and self-reliance.

When Yoritomo, chief representative of the Minamoto clan, rose at Kamakura in 1180, the court authorities in Kyōto, who had practically lost their governing power and were concerned only with their own welfare and security, could do nothing to suppress his rebellion. As it was, Kiyomori had to take command of a punitive army sent against the rebel clan. But in the ensuing year, Kiyomori died with the following message: "My regret is only that I am dying and have not yet seen the head of Yoritomo of the Minamoto. After my

¹ 源平盛衰記—A quasi-historical story of the two struggling clans of Genji and Heike, embracing the period from 1161 to 1185 A.D. It was written in the Kamakura Period, though the precise date of its composition is unknown.

death, do not make offerings to Buddha on my behalf nor read sacred books. Only cut off the head of Yoritomo and hang it on my tomb. Let all my people follow out my commands and on no account neglect them." In such instances as these, we may clearly see that the thoughts of the newly-risen military class and of the court people were fundamentally different and irreconcilable. The determined attitude taken by Taira-no Kiyomori to do away with superstitious notions and practices, and the independent and self-reliant spirit manifested by him are symbolical of the reactionary and renovating ideas entertained by the samurai class; this new idea was absorbed by Minamoto-no Yoritomo, to whom the credit of founding the military regime and of creating the lofty code of Japanese chivalry goes. It cannot be denied that this new tendency of samurai thought was in part stimulated by the essential principles of the Zen Sect.

The Zen Sect began to exert great influence upon the Kamakura samurai when the Regent Hōjō Tokiyori was initiated into its doctrine under the guidance of Dōryū (道隆), a Chinese priest (also known as Rankei (蘭溪)). Tokiyori treated him with great respect, spending all his spare time in the study and practice of Zen teachings. Shortly afterwards, Tokiyori built a magnificent temple for his master, and on the occasion of the completion ceremony Dōryū officiated, and Tokimune, son of Tokiyori, offered a set of Buddhist scriptures he had copied out himself. This solemn ceremony was in part intended as a mass for the departed souls of the Emperors, Shōguns and the samurai men of his clan. Some years later, Tokiyori entered the Buddhist priesthood. It was, however, through the personal influence of two great Chinese priests, Shōichi Kokushi (聖一國師) and Funei Gotta (普寧兀菴), that he gained a penetrating insight into the heart of Zen doctrine. In fact, there was a close spiritual communion between Gotta and Tokiyori, and they naturally respected each other.

In paying a tribute to Tokiyori's religious attainments, Gotta remarked as follows:—

"The Honourable Regent is an enthusiastic supporter of the

Kenchōji Temple and a very pious adherent of the Zen Sect, devoting all his spare time to reciting and copying the Buddhist scriptures, and has now grasped the esoteric truth of Zen philosophy, which is transmitted only from heart to heart. Judging from his wonderful mental faculties and so greatly developed temporal capacity, and his eager interest, as shown in erecting magnificent Buddhist temples, to provide the populace with adequate facilities for listening to Buddhist sermons, reciting the sutras, and practising Zazen, he cannot but be a reincarnation of Bodhisattva. The Regent has rightly understood Buddha's meaning of salvation, not only for his own benefit, but also for aiding his fellow men to attain enlightenment. He is really an extraordinary type of governor, spiritual and temporal, capable of bringing peace, prosperity and heavenly bliss upon the country and people."

Hōjō Tokimune, son of Tokiyori and one of the great heroes of Japanese history, was a far more devoted believer in, and a far greater supporter of, the Zen Sect than his father. He received instruction in Zen doctrine from many distinguished Chinese priests such as Shōnen Daikyū (正念大休) and Mugaku Sogen (無學祖元). Among these, Daikyū, besides delivering sermons on Zen doctrine, laid emphasis on the cardinal virtues of loyalty and patriotism, of governing the country with benevolence, and of causing the whole nation to live in peace and contentment. Thus Daikyū did his utmost to train Tokimune as a perfect master of Zen philosophy, by giving him the benefit of his profound teachings and frequently holding dialogues with him on matters of everyday occurrence.

Later, a preeminently learned Zen priest Sogen came to Kamakura from China at the special invitation of Tokimune. He was a man of a singularly brave heart and an iron will. It may therefore be easily imagined that Tokimune, under the able guidance of so distinguished a master, acquired extraordinary self-strength and moral courage equal to any occasion.

Early in the year 1281, Sogen gave an alarming prediction to the

Regent, saying that between spring and summer there would arise a serious commotion in Kyūshū on account of an attempted foreign invasion of Japan. But all the ships of the invader would be wrecked by the timely appearance of a terrible wind; so His Lordship should not worry his mind about it. Tokimune was deeply impressed by his teacher's encouragement and appreciation. Shortly afterwards, the predicted invasion by the Mongul hordes of Kublai Khan actually took place, and threw the entire country into terror and consternation. Then the whole nation, high and low, offered unceasing prayers to the gods to ruin their enemies and save the land of Japan. In the midst of a terrible contest which ensued, the attempted overrunning of Japan by the Tartar Armada was completely frustrated by a timely hurricane, or a "Divine Wind" as it is called.

Before such a grave national danger, Tokimune, wisely and courageously dealing with the situation, remained calm, with perfect belief in the security of Japan from foreign attack. It is said that even during this time of nation-wide agitation, Tokimune used to sit in contemplation to keep his mind in abstraction and vacuity, aloof from the evils of existence.

We have given above a summarized description of Tokiyori's and Tokimune's devoted faith in the Zen Sect and their cultivation of spiritual force and mental power. Such a tendency was commonly observed among the samurai classes of Kamakura. As a matter of fact, the number of military men attending lectures on Zen doctrine and practising Zazen notably increased, forming thus the fashion of the day. It is a question whether those samurai followers of the Zen Sect were intelligent enough to understand properly such profound philosophical teachings. It must, however, be admitted that they received valuable instruction on such points as straightforwardness, simplicity, chastity, character-building, and the calm facing of matters involving life and death. The characteristic traits of the Kamakura samurai are more than substantiated by the loyal sentiment and heroic fighting they displayed at the tragic end of the Kamakura Government.

It may be mentioned here that while most students of history are agreed that the Zen doctrines exerted an effective influence upon the building up of the samurai spirit, there are some who deny this interpretation, asserting that Zen philosophy was too deep and lofty to be comprehended by the illiterate mass of samurai. Seeing, however, that Zen is, unlike other branches of Buddhism, to be taught and transmitted from heart to heart rather than through written texts, it is undeniable that the spiritual discipline and humane culture imparted by the great Zen masters must have implanted in samurai minds a brave and intrepid sentiment such as made them calmly face death. In a word, the moral force and spiritual intrepidity manifested by Hōjō Tokimune at the time of the Mongul invasion is eloquently representative of the true spirit of the Kamakura samurai.

The present article would not be complete without some reference to the remarkable influence exerted by Zen doctrine upon the minds of the leaders of the Southern Dynasty (1333-1392). Above all, the Emperor Go-Daigo, who did his utmost towards the consolidation of the direct Imperial line and the overthrow of the military regime during his life-time, took a deep interest in Zen doctrine. It is supposed that the remarkably dauntless and persevering spirit he put forth was in good measure due to the religious inspiration he received from the study of Zen philosophy and practice. Certain court nobles possessed of highly loyal, brave and progressive sentiments, such as Hino Suketomo, Hino Toshimoto, Kitabatake Tomoyuki, who always waited upon the Emperor, participating in the deliberations for overthrowing the feudal government in favour of the Imperial rule, were also deeply inspired by Zen teachings.

Prince Morinaga, son of the Emperor Go-Daigo, and a brave and sagacious prince, who, upon discovering that Ashikaga Takauji was scheming to establish a military regime, attempted to punish him immediately with death, was also keenly interested in, and inspired by, Zen teachings.

It is likewise an undeniable fact that a military chieftain Kikuchi

Taketoki, who came up from Kyūshū bringing with him his clansmen to espouse the cause of the legitimate Imperial line, was strongly stimulated by the wisdom and discipline taught by the Zen masters. A close research into the records describing his career reveals that it was due to the Zen teachings he received from his master Daichi Zenji (大智禪師) that he became a staunch imperialist, raising a loyalist army in the cause of the Emperor Go-Daigo. The loyalism and pious sentiment developed by Taketoki was consummated by his great son Takeshige, who studied under the personal guidance of the saintly master Daichi. And he handed down to his descendants this established constitution of the honourable Kikuchi family.

In the preceding pages, we have given an outline of the doctrine and practices of the Zen Sect and its influence upon the social and spiritual life of the Japanese in ancient times. By way of concluding the subject under review, we deem it worthwhile to explain here why the Zen Sect, which lays so great an emphasis on the contemplative life, and which holds out the "white silence of truth" as the highest goal for pious men, should have had among its adherents a great many men of the military class.

Besides the reason that the Zen Sect made the military capital of Japan its centre of activity, there are two other reasons. One is that the Zen Sect has always shown itself in sympathy with Confucian ethics and made it a part of its practical teachings. From the earliest times, Confucianism has been a sort of religious philosophy for the military classes, and never has it been regarded in Japan as antagonistic to Buddhism. The vagueness of the God-idea in Confucianism is extremely congenial to the Zen mind, and the definiteness of Confucian ethics, especially the ethical teachings which deal with the relation of lord and vassal, formed a good substitute for the ethics of Buddhism.

The other reason for the popularity of Zen thought with military men is the fact that it stresses self-discipline and self-control, the primary qualification of any true soldier. Even the physical discipline

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of a student of Zen is Spartan, and the mental discipline is often such that men become indifferent to all dangers and face death without a tremor. It is not, therefore, too much to say that the amazing valour and loyalty which Japanese soldiers have invariably displayed in the field of battle, and which are rarely witnessed among alien nations, are in part the fruit of Zen discipline.

THE CAUSE OF THE FAR EASTERN CONFLICT

By KATSUJI DEBUCHI

[Broadcast by Mr. Katsuji Debuchi, Ex-Ambassador of Japan to the United States, to the South Pacific Countries on the 20th of November, 1937, from Tokyo Radio Station (J. Z. J.)]

MY friends in the Southern Pacific!

As I sit down at the microphone to talk to you, I look back with the happiest recollections upon the cordial reception which you were good enough to extend to me during my sojourn in your midst, the year before last. The kind words of welcome so spontaneously expressed to me and my party are still fresh in my memory. At this moment, it is a source of deep regret to notice that a cloud of misunderstanding to the prejudice of Japan concerning the present Sino-Japanese conflict is beginning to hover on the horizon of the Southern Pacific. Even between intimate friends misunderstandings occur from time to time through misinformation. No wonder it should happen between countries widely separated by a vast expanse of waters on the occasion of important international events. In order to secure friendly relations between individuals as well as nations, all such misunderstanding, even in the slightest degree, must be done away with without delay by the exchange of mutual views with the utmost candor. Animated solely by this genuine sentiment, I wish to ask you, my friends, to lend me your ears for a few minutes for what I have to say this evening.

In the first place, I shall try to describe briefly how the present unfortunate event happened. It was on the evening of July 7th that a small detachment of the Japanese troops lawfully stationed in North China, while engaging in customary manoeuvres in the outskirts of Peking, was most unlawfully fired upon by Chinese forces at a place called Lukoukiao. In order to avoid complications arising