

## **Establishment of a harmonized nation created by the power of Buddhism**

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### **The existence of gods**

In the beginning of the ancient Jomon period (13 thousand years ago), people had lived in a single family unit. In the early Jomon period (10 thousand years ago), people gradually began to live in the same districts choosing better places on the criteria of weather, cultural climate and environment, which brought the new life style of living in a colony of several-families unit in plateaus advantageous for hunting.

In the late Jomon period (3 thousand years ago), agriculture arrived from China and people settled down in level farmlands more suitable to agriculture. The ancient people had worshiped and revered the sun, wind and water because they affected daily weather, and worshipped even hunted animals for appreciation and hope for fruitful life. Since rice cultivation started, based on settlement of farmland, people prayed for rich harvest worshipping the sun, water, forest, or land. When unexpected events such as convulsion of nature occurred, it is considered that the elder or bright person in each colony became a leader for devoting prayer to quell the unexpected events. Furthermore, some people became professional prayers.

In this period, battles arose for the purpose of gaining rich farm land or rich harvest from the farm land. This conflict might have led the movement that colonies with powerful leaders or prayers absorbed other colonies around the main colony and such colonies evolved into small states.

The time had passed to 100 B.C.-200 A.D., however, no letters (language) remained yet in Yayoi period. Nevertheless, according to Chinese old manuscripts (Han Dynasty), there were more than 100 independent small states throughout Japan. Each state had kept worship of nature and it would have been transformed to adoration of leaders as deities after their passing away.

Finally a big state emerged unifying all over Japan. Then it was necessary to emphasize the justification that the leader of the big state must have been the monarch of Japan. Consequently the ultimate scenario of the birth of Japan was created upon Japanese mythology. Amaterasu, the deity (goddess) in the heaven, sent her grand son, Hinohoninigi with three sacred treasures down to the earth to govern it. This is called “*Tensonkorin*” and the forth descendant of Hinohoninigi was the Emperor Jinmu, the first

Emperor of Japan.

The evidence of unification of Japan is large sized burial mounds (kofun) for monarchs. Burial accessories such as terracotta figures (*Haniwa*) set alongside burial mounds or buildings with independent big pillars (*Munamotibasira*) for shrine built on the mounds have been recently found in many cases, which are the obvious evidence of ceremony taken place at the sites.

However, since most of burial mounds are under regulation of Imperial Household Agency, it is difficult to research the detail. If the regulation changes, we could pursue further research on our ancient history which would drastically change the past (would make another history) including the story of Yamatai Kingdom.

### **Monotheism and polytheism**

As seen in worshipping of nature, Japan has assimilated much element of polytheism. However, in reality, monotheism adorning Emperors' family which had continued from Amaterasu, the descendant of deities in the heaven, must have dominated before the arrival of Buddhism.

The principle of the "Deities" in Japan or "Shintoism" is different from the gods of other monotheism such as Christianity or Islam. While these two religions are monotheism based on the principle that this world was created by a single god, Shintoism developed on the idea of deities of Japanese race mainly referring to traditionally religious practice evolved among Japanese people and to the support of the life attitude and its beliefs, according to the dictionary of religion written by Naofusa Hirai.

"Shintoism" neither indicates a man-induced pathway for life nor directly signifies deities themselves but does the pathway shown by deities. Thus, the pathways vary with the beliefs of each religion and Japanese monotheism from Amaterasu to Emperors' family would have included broad diversity for dedicating prayer even to Japanese native deities, deities of ancestors (ancestors become deities to protect us ) or deities of earth (the sun, the moon, stars, plants or stones).

### **The Kofun period; unification of Japan**

After the period of development of many small states, Yamato Court arose within Kinki area (region around Osaka) creating a unified nation called Japan. The most impressive symbol of the period was the large-sized burial mounds (kofun).

From the third to fourth century, people set priests or chiefs as a symbol of power in Kinki and Setouti areas. This step is considered as formation of political federation, Yamato Court.

From the fourth to fifth century, powerful leaders at the period built far larger burial mounds as warriors' tomb, which became common all over Japan. This tendency

must have been the evidence that power of the political federation gradually reached all over Japan. Subsequently in the late period, not only leaders but also farmers in power started building burial mounds, which led to the decline of building the large burial mounds.

It is considered that burial mounds were constructed right on the Shintō structure (built with logs or big stones) at that point and that ritual or other various events took place on the burial mounds with *Haniwa* decoration alongside the mounds with the spirit of buried monarchs.

### **The Birth of Buddhism**

Approximately 2500 years ago, Buddhism was born when Buddha reached self-enlightenment at the age of 35 in India.

At his first sermon, *Syotenbōrin*, Buddha referred to “neutral way of Buddhism.” He told that there were two useless acts in people, to limitlessly indulge in pleasure and to indulge in ailing themselves and that he ultimately reached self-enlightenment of neutral way of Buddhism discarding these two useless acts.

He also preached the Four Noble Truth: 1. this world is filled with various kinds of suffer; the Noble Truth of Suffering, 2. the origin of suffering is hunger for love or obsession; the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, 3. elimination of such desire leads to the ultimate state of cessation of suffering; the Noble Truth of Suffering of the Cessation of Suffering, 4. people should live on the Noble Eightfold Path for avoiding such suffer; the Noble Truth of Suffering of the Path that leads to the cessation of Suffering.

Buddha gave abundant precept to his followers or people and his final sermon at his last breath was “*Jitomyo* (to practice so that you can be the light of Buddhism) and *Hōtomyo* (to practice relying on Buddhism precept).” He explained this sermon as “Rely on yourself any time, do not rely on others and rely on Buddhism precept and this is the only path to reach the ultimate state.” Then he passed away leaving his last word, “Anything passes. Devote yourself to Buddhism precept.”

To pursue Buddhism is to become accurately aware of truth in this world and to devote yourself to Buddhism precept in order to reach the ultimate state.

### **The Propagation of Buddhism (Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism)**

In approximately 100 years after the death of Buddha, a conflict between the Theravada (conservative) sect and the common (revolutionary) sect emerged. The conflict had continued even during the period under the reign of King Ashoka that Buddhism was protected well and finally Buddhism was divided into more than 20 sects.

After this dividing movement, the new restoration movement occurred and Mahanaya Buddhism was born. Mahanaya Buddhism produced many scriptures, was also

related to the common (revolutionary) sect, and deepened the Hindu elements assimilating folk beliefs.

In the year of 67, Buddhism arrived at China (Later Han Dynasty). In the second century, the scriptures of Mahanaya or Theravada Buddhism were brought by priests from West Asia such as An Shiago or Lokaksema and were spread over a wide area.

The translation of Buddhism had continued after that. From the fourth to fifth century, Buddhism became more familiar among Chinese people through the effort accomplished by Dau An and Kumārajīva. Chinese priests went to the place of origin of Buddhism, India, Indian hierarchs came to China, the translation of Buddhism into Chinese became more advanced, and the utmost event was the construction of official temples under the authorized protection. The temple construction later influenced Japan that we followed the construction policy (model) approximately 300 years later. In Chinese Buddhism, 13 schools had developed in the aspects of scriptures of Buddha (sutra or sutta in Sanskrit), discipline of priests (vinaya) and theory (abhidharma).

In the Korean Peninsula, Buddhism reached Goguryeo Kingdom from China and Paekche Kingdom from West Asia in fourth century. Later, Silla Kingdom integrated the Korean peninsula and established Buddhism as a unified principle of centralized government on the national policy.

### **The Birth of Japanese Buddhism**

It has been said that Buddhism was formally introduced to Japan in 538 A.D. from Paekche Kingdom by the diplomatic mission and they brought Buddha statues and scriptures to Emperor Kinmei. At this point, existing deities (Japanese native deities and guardian gods) confronted the new arrived religion.

Among the imperial aides, a dispute arose between Mononobe family (*Ōmuraji*; the highest class of imperial retainers) with the conservative idea keeping Japanese native deities and Soga family (*Ōomi*; the most powerful family) with the advanced idea having close relationship with naturalized citizens. The dispute became a big battle. Since Soga family finally defeated Mononobe family, Buddhism started functioning as the unifying principle of the centralized government under the governmental protection and thriving as the national religion of Japan.

In 593 A.D. the Imperial Prince Shotoku had become a regent and issued the Seventeen-Article Constitution as the national principles for the first time in 604. Forty years later after the issue, the Reformation of Taika was carried out. The old regime based upon clans or families was transformed to a new regime with Japanese own precepts (law) evolved from the one used in Sui dynasty (China) or Silla Kingdom (Korea). Consequently the nation organized by the new regime started. The regime took a straight approach to formation of a rich country with moral and political order assimilating idea of

Buddhism, Taoism and legal ethics.

In the second article of the Seventeen-Article Constitution, the Buddhism principles were defined as “People should sincerely respect the three treasures of Buddhism, the teachings of Buddha, the precept of Buddhist law and the Buddhist priests. The treasures are the last refuge for any people alive and the ultimate norm over any countries as well.”

In the first article, the most valuable doctrine was defined as “Harmony is to be valued and the avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored.” This admonishes that the most valuable idea in our society is harmony and avoidance of conflict.

With this definition, Buddhism was advanced from a national religion to popular religion accepted by common people. As the essential principle of Buddhism is “Harmony is to be valued,” Japanese Shintoism and Buddhism started harmonious co-existence (syncretization) subsequently. Because of the principle of harmony, variously ramified religion has been born, has remained until the present day and has been accepted on the idea of co-operation and co-existence despite the difference in religion.