

A Lineage of Social Practice in Japanese Buddhism

The term 'social practice' refers to social welfare activities conducted by Buddhists, such as spreading its teaching, aiding of the poor and the sick, preaching among prisoners, construction of bridges, roads, ponds, sewers, wells, harbors, and so forth. Not a few Buddhist priests who took it upon themselves to carry out such endeavors as their legitimate mission can be seen in Japanese history, e.g., Dōshō, Gyōgi, Saichō, Taizen, Kenna, Kūya and Sengan.

My immediate interests center around the historical conditions underlying the work of such priests, and the thought upon which their deeds were based.

Here, I should like to trace the historical conditions in which this phenomenon appeared in the period between the eighth and the tenth centuries, when the consummation and disorganization of Ritsuryō Seido 律令制度 or the institution of law and ethics took place, and consider the social factors which supported or regulated such deeds.

It may safely be inferred that for one thing their deeds were closely related to the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva's precepts expounded in the Bon-mō-kyō (*Brahma-jāla-sūtra*). I have thus sought to trace the philosophical basis of their deeds to the spirit of the Bodhisattva's precepts of the Bon-mō-kyō, to clarify how they accepted it, how they reacted to it, and furthermore what kind of logic emerged from this process.

Takashi NABATA