(E)ISSN: 2181-1784
6 (21), 14.03.2026.
www.oriens.uz

ELEMENTS OF BUDDHISM IN MEDIEVAL JAPANESE DIARY PROSE

https://doi.org/10.24412/2181-1784-2026-21-65-69

Gafurova Khakima Shavkatovna,
Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor
Head of the Department of Oriental Languages,
University of World Economy and Diplomacy
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
hakimaanor@mail.ru

ABSTRACT

This article explores the deep integration of the Buddhist worldview into the genre of Japanese diary literature (nikki). The paper analyzes the reception of Buddhist teachings in the context of Japanese diary prose. By analyzing selected diaries, the author identifies key theological and ethical elements that determined the worldview of the aristocratic class and were reflected in literary monuments.

Keywords: *Japanese diary literature, Buddhism, the concept of beauty, transience, "mono-no aware".*

要旨

本稿では、日本の日記文学というジャンルにおける仏教的世界観の深い浸透について考察する。日記文学の文脈の中で、仏教の教えがどのように受容されたかを分析し、特定の作品の検討を通じて、貴族社会の世界観を決定づけ、文学的遺産に反映された主要な神学的・倫理的要素を明らかにする。

キーワード： 日本日記文学、仏教、美意識、無常、物の哀れ（もののあわれ）

The penetration of Buddhism from China into medieval Japan, an island state that strictly controlled its borders, was completed by the end of the ninth century. Under the influence of Buddhism, a new administrative system was formed in Japan, and writing appeared. As Buddhism strengthened its position over the following millennium, it literally penetrated all spheres of Japan's cultural and social life.

It was precisely on the borrowed postulates of Buddhism that the "national idea" was created, expressed as a protest against caste distinctions, the equality of all before the Buddha, the striving for moral self-improvement, and the doctrine of

the world as a stream of alternating elements of matter and consciousness. Buddhism adapted to the Japanese environment and over time came to be perceived as a philosophy of its own.

Traditional forms of Buddhism, which settled in the consciousness of the Japanese, were formed on the basis of their combination with Shintoism. By the end of the tenth century, the synthesis of Buddhism and Shintoism as a cult of the forces of nature and as life in union with nature had been fully completed. The American researcher G. Claiborne notes that “the penetration of Buddhist attitudes and values into the Japanese soul was so powerful that it is still noticeable today in every aspect of modern Japan’s life” [1, 369].

Despite all the differences of Japanese Buddhism from its primary source—Indian Buddhism—as well as from its Chinese or Korean versions, Japanese Buddhist doctrines organically entered the spiritual life of the Japanese and throughout history have constituted the basis of a spirituality peculiar only to Japan.

Each of the three religions—Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—formed the philosophical and aesthetic principles of medieval Japan.

Thus, early Japanese Buddhism placed emphasis not so much on worldview questions as on the feeling of truth and on the incorporation of its elements into traditional norms of behavior and forms of culture.

Shintoism maintains in Japanese culture a cyclical concept of time, the visible image of which is the change of the seasons. According to Shintoism, the Japanese nation originates from the sun goddess Amaterasu. Buddhism, in turn, is associated with the eternal succession of generations, stages in human life, and destiny.

The Confucian doctrine of ancestor worship, their deification, and the honoring of parents was reflected in the saying: “Relations between the higher and the lower are like relations between wind and grass: the grass must bend when the wind blows.” It was Confucianism that gradually became reflected in the dominant ideology of the feudal household order.

The Italian scholar Fosco Maraini in his book Japan: Patterns of Continuity notes: “Thanks to the peculiar neighborhood of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, when none of these worldviews prevailed over the others and did not exclude them absolutely and finally, the idea of tolerance became deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Japanese. Each system of beliefs or views was regarded as a path—a path to the heights of wisdom, spiritual perfection, and inner enlightenment. A person had the right to try any of these paths. Unlike the West, Japan scarcely knew the persecution of heretics or the suppression of fruitful ideas

because they contradicted some sacred books or their subsequent interpretation" [Maraini 1971:321].

The elements of Buddhism, Shintoism, and partly Confucianism constituted the ideological foundation of Heian culture. The Heian era (794–1192) lasted almost 400 years and is characterized as a period of peace and tranquility, and of a flourishing of literature that in many ways determined the main features of Japanese culture in subsequent centuries.

At the intersection of the Shinto perception of life, the life-affirming cult of nature, and the Buddhist view of the inevitability of the cycle of the world, the basic aesthetic concept of Heian society was formed; it almost immediately found its reflection in literature and received the name "mono-no aware" ("the charm of things"). "Aware" is at once "charming," "exceptional," and also "sad" and "pitiful," that is, worthy of regret and compassion. In the Heian period, especially at the end of the tenth century when this culture reached its peak, a refined sensitivity to the charm of things and people, and the cult of beauty and emotion, became the most important features of Japanese aesthetics.

The bearers of the culture of the Heian era and the founders of diary literature were aristocratic women. Their works contain reports of certain events of the era, of the worldview of the medieval Japanese person, of the morals and customs of aristocratic society, and of the role and place of women within it. It is for this reason that monuments of diary literature serve as rich material for the study of the spiritual life of the Japanese.

A distinctive feature inherent in medieval Japanese aristocratic society was a love for everything refined, for both external and internal beauty. Everything "ugly," from the Heian person's point of view, was not permitted.

According to the well-known publicist V. Ovchinnikov, the measures of beauty for the Japanese are four concepts, three of which (sabi, wabi, shibui) go back to the ancient Shinto religion, while the fourth (yūgen) was inspired by Buddhist philosophy.

Sabi is a concept equating beauty with naturalness, including the mark of antiquity. Everything unnatural cannot be beautiful. Wabi is the charm and attractiveness of everything ordinary and simple, the "beauty of simplicity." Shibui is "primordial imperfection combined with sober restraint. It is the beauty of naturalness plus the beauty of simplicity" [Ovchinnikov 2011: 51–53]. It is characterized by a view of things as animate beings.

One of the famous writers of the Heian era, Murasaki Shikibu, the author of the well-known Diary of Murasaki Shikibu, appears before readers as a deep,

sensitive, and perceptive nature. She asserts that every element of a person's appearance must be beautiful: "Lady Senji is also small in stature, but very slender. Her hair is beautiful and very well cared for… In short, she is so lovely that in her presence one feels one's own awkwardness. When one thinks about what a woman should be like, one remembers her—so beautiful is she both in her heart and in her speech" [Japanese Medieval Diaries, 2001: 444]. In the time of Murasaki Shikibu, it was precisely in "mono-no aware" that the spirit of beauty was embodied.

The philosophy of "mono no aware" can be understood if one points to the element of Buddhism—mezurasisa, uniqueness, singularity. The combination of these two elements of Buddhist philosophy characterizes the ability to see beauty in the entire surrounding world, in each blade of grass.

The concept of "yūgen," introduced by Buddhism, implies listening to the unsaid and admiring the invisible [Ovchinnikov 2011: 51–53]. The exact translation of this term depends on the context. In traditional Japanese aesthetics, this term is understood as something "subtle," "the elusive depth of things," or "the sorrowful beauty of human suffering." The concept of "yūgen" is closely intertwined with another concept of Buddhism—that a person's destiny is determined by inner beauty. In this case, "beauty" means a sensitive soul capable of seeing beauty in everything: "It became visible how, under the furious gusts of wind, the miscanthus bushes under our window tremble and bend desperately, so that one cannot help but sympathize with them:

Probably it remembers autumn,
How I would like to know its thoughts! —
Dropped by the winter bad weather,
Dry miscanthus
With its leaves blown away" [Japanese Medieval Diaries, 2001: 517].

One of the features of the diary genre reflecting elements of Buddhism is the idea of the impermanence of our world. The Japanese title of The Diary of an Ephemeral Life is written with the characters 蜻蛉日記, where the character 蜻蛉 denotes a mayfly—an insect that lives only one day. If one moves away from the ideographic title of the diary and considers the meaning of the word "kagerō," it may mean "air shimmering from the heat." In the final chapter of the first book, the author said the following phrase: "I only think that everything in the world is fleeting, and these notes may be called a diary of an ephemeral life," so it may be assumed that the idea of ephemerality, airiness, and chance is perceived by the author as something fleeting, inherent only to the author's life.

The author of The Sarashina Diary, who calls herself the Daughter of Takasue, throughout the narrative constantly turns to the Buddha, makes pilgrimages to temples, and reads Buddhist sutras, which speaks of the author's own deeply personal perception of the Buddhist concept of the structure of the world.

In the Diary of an Ephemeral Life, the author expresses her attitude toward such a Buddhist concept as "seclusion." The author writes: "On the first day I called my son and began directly with the conversation: 'I am beginning a long seclusion…'" [Japanese Medieval Diaries, 2001: 269]. In this context, this meant that Michitsuna's Mother decided to fulfill one of the Buddha's precepts—to renounce everyday bustle and begin to think of the eternally living Buddha. "Until then, one religious prohibition after another had continued for me, and so it happened" (Japanese Medieval Diaries, 2001: 252). Entering a monastery, religious prohibitions, and seclusion were obligatory rituals performed in the aristocratic society of Japan: the reading of sutras and the performance of rites were considered mandatory for court aristocrats.

Analyzing medieval women's diaries, we came to the conclusion that pilgrimage to Buddhist temples, the reading of sutras, and the constant presence of Buddhist monks in the imperial palace were part of the regulated life of the aristocratic class of medieval Japan. It can be stated with certainty that Japanese medieval diaries are important historical material reflecting the medieval Japanese person's everyday understanding of Buddhism, his attitude toward piety, toward "seclusion," and toward the aspiration to withdraw from the world.

Thus, among the characteristic features of medieval diary prose one may note the presence of Buddhist motifs and the theme of the impermanence and variability of this world, which gives every reason to speak of the influence of Buddhism on the life of Japanese society and on the formation of its worldview.

REFERENCES

1. Claiborne G. Japanese and American rhetoric: A contrastive study. – Florida: University of South Florida, 1993. – 369 p.
2. Maraini F. Japan: Patterns of Continuity. – Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1971. – 321 p.
3. Tursunova, N. (2021). Scope of Negation: Theory and Double Negatives. *Bulletin of Science and Practice*, 7(7), 419-424.
4. Ovchinnikov V. Sakura and Oak. – Moscow: AST, 2011. – 605 p.
5. Japanese Medieval Diaries. – St. Petersburg, 2001. – 622 p.