



Watering and the Zen Culture in Japan

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Abstract. Watering, a term in Landscape Architecture, generally means knocking stone with a bamboo tube. It is based on lever principle: water keeps flowing into a piece of bamboo tube from the opening on the one end, and when the tube is full, the balance is broken, then the other end of the bamboo tube knocks the stone to make a noise. Watering is often seen in garden or courtyard with Japanese style, which perfectly manifests an implicit Zen culture in Japanese garden system.

Keywords: Zen · Master Huineng · Watering · Japanese Zen culture

1 Introduction

Watering is a common sight in Japanese gardens or courtyards. It is small and lovely, with the finest aura, just like the heart of the whole courtyard. The rhythm of the watering is constant, endowing the courtyard with spirituality. “Zen” spirit is also implicated in its loveliness, which reflects the implicit Zen culture in Japanese gardens. It is hoped that with the analysis of the Zen spirit in watering, traditional Chinese culture can be publicized and promoted, and our confidence in traditional Chinese culture can be further improved.

2 Origin of Chinese Zen

Originated in India, Zen was introduced into China by Bodhidharma from India during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Therefore, Bodhidharma is honored as the ancestor of Chinese Zen. The second ancestor is Huike, the third Sengcan, the fourth Daoxin, and the fifth Hongren. Zen was passed down to Huineng, the sixth ancestor, during the Tang Dynasty. After Huineng received the cassock and alms bowl of the Buddhist master Hongren, he followed the instructions of his master and began his public scripture preaching fifteen years later when the time was right. At that time, when he came to the Faxing Temple in Guangzhou, heard the monks’ dispute about “the wind moves the flag”, Huineng said: “It’s not the wind, nor the flag, but the heart of the benevolent.” A group of people were shocked, and the Indian monk asked, “I heard that the disciple of Huang Mei (Hongren) is coming from the south. Are you the one?” Huineng nodded modestly [1]. So Huineng became a monk there and officially publicized Zen Buddhism. Later, he moved to the Baolin Temple in Caoxi, Shaoyou, where he preached Buddhism for

more than 30 years and taught Buddhism to his disciples. As the sixth ancestor, he taught many disciples, which made Chinese Zen develop rapidly and developed into several sects. Among them, Linji Sect and Caodong Sect were very popular, which achieved the golden age of Zen.

Huineng has accomplished two great achievements in his life. One is to integrate Zen from India with traditional Chinese culture, laying the basic theoretical foundation of Chinese Zen and completing the sinicization of Buddhism. Secondly, Huineng has completed another Buddhist revolution, liberating the spiritual activity of a few scholars, such as Buddhism and Zen meditation, from the circle of scholars, making it penetrate into the hearts of most people and become their deep ideas and beliefs. Therefore, the sixth ancestor Huineng is the real founder of Chinese Zen. Since then, especially in the Song Dynasties, Zen Buddhism reached its peak in China and has been exerting influence so far. In the book “Zen and Life”. Japanese Zen master Suzuki Dazhuo praises the master: “The sixth ancestor Huineng is a great religious genius, and his career marks a milestone in the history of Chinese Zen.” [2].

Huineng’s Zen thoughts are recorded in the *Tanjing*, which is compiled by his disciple Fahai according to his statement and his Zen deeds. It affects the trend of Zen and even the whole Chinese Buddhist theory after the Tang Dynasty. On October 22, 1959, Chairman Mao said in a conversation with the Zen monk Erdeni Kejijian Zan, “I don’t know much about the Buddhist scriptures, but I think there are also differences in the Buddhist scriptures. There are the Buddhist scriptures of the upper class and the Buddhist scriptures of the working people. For example, the Buddhist scripture of the sixth ancestor in the Tang Dynasty, the *Dharma Pot Sutra*, is the work of the people.” [3] It can be seen that the important position of *Tanjing* in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

To sum up, Chinese Zen is the combination of Indian Buddhism and Chinese culture. Its characteristics can be briefly summarized into the following words: special teaching beyond the teachings of the Tathagata, direct to the heart of the people and becoming a Buddha. “Don’t just follow the scriptures and preach beyond the teaching” does not mean being completely separated from words and scriptures. It is not based on words and language in teaching. It advocates the teaching does not follow the words and language, but advocates communicating the heart with the heart and directly passing on the Buddha’s mind, that is, to make the disciples understand themselves with the great meaning of the Buddha. “Direct to the human heart and buddhahood upon enlightenment” refers to the deep study and thorough understanding of the origin of the heart and nature, so as to achieve buddhahood. The Zen method of meditation is also extremely simple. It neither meditates nor practices asceticism, neither chants Buddhism nor chants sutras, providing a simple and easy method of epiphany for the world.

3 Zen Going to the Eastern Area

When Chinese Zen rose in the Tang Dynasty, which was the peak of Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges, Chinese Buddhist sects such as Sanlun Sect, Faxiang Sect, Huayan Sect, Lvzong, Tiantai Sect, Mizong, etc. were introduced into Japan successively, and took root in Japan and blossomed and developed rapidly. However, it is difficult to find the trace of Zen. In fact, many foreign monks who came to the Tang Dynasty with the

Tang envoy had already contacted Chinese Zen Buddhism and tried to import and spread it to Japan, but they failed. The first reason was the resistance of the orthodox Buddhist sects in Japan at that time, and the second was that the purpose of Zen Buddhism, which did not establish words, worshipped Buddha statues and recited Buddhist scriptures, was difficult to match with the trend at that time, so it was difficult to hold a position in the Japanese Buddhist circle at that time.

During the Song Dynasties and the Late Heian Period in Japan Early Kamakura, the imperial power of the Mikado of Japan declined, and the samurai class began to rise on the political stage. After the dictatorship of the Ping family and the struggle for hegemony in Yuanping, the change of the Heian Kamakura regime and the constant coup led to frequent wars, social unrest, and the people suffered a lot. [4] In such a chaotic situation, people hoped to transform Japanese society and have new spiritual power and theories to provide guidance for them. This is an important prerequisite for Zen to enter Japan. In order to consolidate the new political power, maintain the ruling position, pacify and stabilize the people of the society, and also to break the royal political Buddhism that had existed for centuries, the warrior class just stepped on the political stage urgently needed the support of new ideology and establish new beliefs, which provided the political basis for the introduction of Zen.

Faced with the chaotic social situation, Japanese monks with a sense of responsibility went to the Song Dynasty to learn from the law in an attempt to save the lost Japanese society and save the hearts of the world. Among them, Rongxi, a Japanese monk, went to the Song Dynasty for the second time to seek Dharma, and finally returned with Zen (Linji Zong). And in 1198, he completed the book *On the Revitalization of Zen and the Protection of the Country*, which showed that his meditation was an act of “rejuvenating the waste and perpetuating the dead” and an act of protecting the country and benefiting all living creatures. It closely combined the relationship between Zen and the state, so it received the trust and support of the shogunate general. [5] Linji Zong was born as the earliest sect of Japanese Zen.

The founder of China’s Linji Zong is Linji Yixuan, the fifth generation successor of Nanyue Huairang, taught by the sixth ancestor Huineng. He believed that “Buddhism is useless. It’s just that we usually have nothing to do, such as to empty the bowels and urinate, wear clothes and have meals, and sleep when we are sleepy”. [6] Treat everything as a Taoist field, and daily actions can become an opportunity to extricate oneself from becoming a Buddha. This state is to demonstrate one’s mind at any time in life. Although the way of enlightenment of becoming a Buddha is simple and popular, people’s understanding is different, and their fate is also very different. There are not many people who really have insight. At the turn of the Bei Song Dynasty and Nan Song Dynasty, a Zen master named Dahui Zonggao appeared, and he proposed a new style of “Kanhua Zen”. He believed that the predecessors of Zen masters had many quotations and official cases, which were the treasure house of Zen thought and the crystallization of great wisdom. As long as you understand the “quotation” and “beginning” of the Zen case, you will be enlightened. At the same time, he also warned Zen scholars that they should not leave the tenet of Zen of “not to establish words”, and should not fall into the bondage of words and blindly pursue literal interpretation, but to follow the inner intuition to understand. Since the emergence of Dahui Zonggao, participating in

public cases and watching the conversation have become the mainstream of Linji Zong. The Zen Buddhism introduced by Japan from China is Linji Buddhism with the main feature of “comprehending the beginning of a sentence”. Kanhua Zen seems simple and enlightening, but it is still difficult to achieve the effect of becoming a Buddha after seeing one’s nature in the early stage of Kamakura Zen in Japan. Especially for those samurai with low cultural quality, it is not easy to participate in the case and see the beginning of the story, and it is difficult to understand the state of great understanding. [6] Therefore, in the early stage of dissemination, Japan’s Linji Zong paid special attention to the way of preaching with the help of famous teachers. Many Zen monks of the Southern Song Dynasty who went to Japan shouldered the important task of guiding the maze in Japan. Japan’s Linji Zong has always attached importance to the teaching of enlightenment. It can be said that China’s “Kanhua Zen” has developed into “Tinghua Zen” in Japan. Linji Zong in Japan has become the most powerful sect among the three Zen sects in Japan, and it is also one of the sects with a large number of people and great influence.

Caodong Sect of Japan was introduced to Japan by the Japanese monk Xixuan Daoyuan. He learned the Caodong Zen from Zen Master Rujing in Tiantong Temple, and introduced Mozhao Zen to Japan. The style of Mozhao Zen is “to practice meditation strictly and see nature silently”. Three years later, he wrote the General Advice of Sitting and Meditation, which laid the theoretical foundation of the Japanese Caodong Sect. After Daoyuan, Yingshan Shaojin was another outstanding monk of Caodong Zong. He made great achievements in the formulation of Caodong Zong’s rules and regulations, which made Caodong Zong further develop. Shaojin paid attention to the popularization of Zen, changed Daoyuan’s dull Zen style of only paying attention to meditation. He made great efforts to educate the lower class, popularized Zen to the general public, and gained the support of the lower and middle class warriors such as local lords [7] At the same time, Zen masters of the Song Dynasty were also important conditions for the prosperity of Japanese Zen. For example, Lanxi Daolong and Wuxue Zuyuan made contributions to the development of Zen in Japan. In modern Japanese society, Caodong Zong is also one of the largest religious groups in Japanese society.

In the 21st year of Shunzhi in the Qing Dynasty (1654 AD), during the Tokugawa Shogunate period in Japanese history, the Chinese Zen master Yinyuan Longqi, at the invitation of the Japanese Zen master, led his disciples to the east of Fusang, founded the Japanese Huangbaizong, and created the style of “Zen and Pure Cultivation”, which injected new vitality into the Japanese Zen. [8] However, its influence was far behind that of Linji Zong and Caodong Zong, which gradually develops into a unique Japanese Zen culture.

In this way, the Japanese Zen with the themes of Linji, Caodong, and Huangbai, stands at the top and has a long history. It has a broad and profound impact on all aspects of Japanese culture.

4 Watering and Japanese Zen Culture

Japanese Zen culture also has a great influence on Japanese garden art. The most representative one is the “dry landscape”, featured with a courtyard paved with white sand, with only a few stones as decoration, leaving most of the space undecorated. The green

moss is dotted around the stones, creating a sense of vicissitudes. Standing in the middle of the yard, one feels peaceful and tranquil, thus forgetting everything. [9] It reflects the proposition of Zen that “Everything is me, and my heart is Buddha”. [6]

However, the author believes that in the artistic conception of the dry landscape, there is too much emptiness and it has not enough aura. The watering in a yard just makes up for this. It can be said that it is a design with the most aura in the Japanese courtyard. It is small, lovely and moving, just like the heart of the whole courtyard. It keeps moving, thus giving life to the courtyard, and perfectly interprets the implicit Zen culture in Japanese gardens.

Watering is the academic term of gardening, which is generally referred to as knocking stones with bamboo tubes, or adding water. It was originally used by farmers to drive away birds and animals. The sound of bamboo knocking stones is to scare them away and protect agriculture grains from being eaten by them. Its movement is based on the lever principle. It uses a certain amount of running water to make the balance transfer at both ends of the bamboo tube, and then one end of the bamboo tube strikes the stone to make a sound. Often seen in Japanese gardens or courtyards, it perfectly reflects an implicit Zen culture in the Japanese garden system. Shixian Hall, the temple of Caodong Zong in Kyoto, has the most famous watering in Japan. Watering is often seen in Japanese gardens or courtyards, and the one in Shixiantang, the temple of Caodong Sect in Kyoto, is the most famous in Japan.

At one end of the small bamboo pressing plate is the water bucket. The water on the top is gathered in the water bucket drop by drop, and the water in the water bucket increases bit by bit. When the balance at both ends is broken, the bamboo pressing plate immediately sinks down, the water is poured out, the water bucket bounces, and the bamboo at the other end knocks on the stone with a ‘bang’ sound, which is thick and beautiful. This simple slow rhythm is repeated without limit. A small amount of water is released at once, and then the futility of doing nothing starts again. This limitless sense of futility is like our daily life. Every day is repeated, but every day is different. This is Zen.

Japan is surrounded by the sea at all directions. Its land is also rich in water resources, with many lakes and rivers and abundant rainfall. Therefore, the Japanese have a natural sense of familiarity with water. In the Japanese-style courtyard, you can often see artificial gurgling water, artificial waterfalls, pools, etc. But the most unforgettable thing is the watering: the knocking stones with bamboo tubes. The small and lovely shape and the never-ending banging sound make people feel the silence of the courtyard and the slow passage of time. Is it the flow of water, or the flow of time, or our hearts are moving? Your heart is watering, and watering is your heart. Self-awareness and self-enlightenment is achieved without reading or writing. This is exactly the embodiment of Zen’s “Not by interpreting the scriptures, but by understanding from heart to heart”.

In the western world, people have believed that man and nature are antagonistic and that man should conquer and transform nature from ancient times (represented by ancient Greece). When we walk in the squares of European or American metropolises such as Rome, we can see magnificent fountains everywhere, with different shapes, which are amazing. In westerners’ view, water is an object that can be transformed at will, and can be made into various shapes for you to enjoy. In appreciating the grand and spectacular

fountains, your heart will be released instantly. This way is the perfect embodiment of westerners' view of nature.

Japan is an East Asian country with a temperate marine climate and four distinct seasons. In ancient times, Japanese mainly obtained food from forests and oceans, thus forming a natural view of respecting, conforming to and loving nature. I think that what is pure and natural is the most beautiful. Chinese Zen also pursues nature, for nature is the medium of Zen enlightenment. The Japanese view of nature perfectly coincides with that of Chinese [10], and it is an indispensable part of Japanese Zen culture.

The Buddhist saying "flowing clouds and flowing water" means that we should follow the nature and everything should return to the state of nature, which means to return to the nature of things, also the nature of Buddha. Watering follows the objective law of water and lets it flow naturally, and we only need to listen to the hitting sound to taste the things flowing in the gap with heart. It can be said that watering is the highest level of Japanese appreciation of water. Therefore, it can be said that watering skillfully annotates the natural view of Zen and it is full of the artistic conception of Japanese Zen culture.

5 Conclusion

Chinese traditional culture is extensive and profound. It not only nourishes our Chinese nation, but also influences many countries around us, especially the influence of Chinese Zen Buddhism on Japan is so profound and extensive. Hopefully, in the 21st century, our traditional Chinese culture will shine again.

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