

## The Disruptors

(Part 2 of 2)

### State Buddhism

Buddhism, on the other hand, was basically non-political, but its natural influence on the masses was quickly exploited by kingly and imperial powers as means and memes of grounding and growing their influence on the masses and overseas. Buddhism, married to the emperor and the state, was relegated to the roles of imperial church and concubine of the ruling classes. This was THE 2<sup>ND</sup> BUDDHIST DISRUPTION: state-sponsorship of Buddhism.

Mahāyāna Buddhism—especially Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism—are the love-children of such feudalistic forced marriages. Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism paid dearly for this Second Disruption when new state powers insidiously and effectively emasculated and secularized Buddhism. Buddhism was forced out of the urban areas of Korea during the Yi dynasty of the Joseon period (1392-1909) in favour of Confucianism.

As a secular force to bolster the ruling hierarchy and its elite, Confucianism was meaningless to the spiritually famished populace, further bullied by the predominantly Shin (Pure Land) Buddhism of the Japanese occupiers (16<sup>th</sup> & early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). The arrival of western powers was darkly shadowed by Christianity which came at an opportune moment and went on to make South Korea the most Christian nation in Asia, second only to predominantly Spanish-rooted Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

### Christian Asia

China was evangelized by clever and cunning Jesuits like Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) who was willing to don Buddhist robes to reach out to the Chinese. He was advised by turn-coat Chinese that Buddhist monks were despised locally and mainly dealt with the dead. He should don the Confucianist scholar's robes if he were to go far. He listened and managed to weasel his way into the emperor's favour with bribes of advanced western clocks, better calendrical calculations, and other Greek gifts.

Ricci even managed to convert a number of inner-circle courtiers, and introduced Catholic rituals to displace Chinese ones. His successes, thankfully, were the root of his own failure. Besides the Jesuits, there were the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Augustinians who were bitter rivals, vying to Christianize the heathens and grab their lands for churches and Rome. They complained to the Pope about how Ricci was corrupting the Catholic faith. The Pope issued a papal bull to the Chinese with his orders. When the Chinese emperor received the bull (an ironic turn of word), he was not amused, and imperially banned all Christian activities in his realm.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On KOREA, see Piya Tan, **History of Buddhism**, Singapore 2004, 2009, Lecture 5 (esp Section 16-19): <http://sites.google.com/site/dharmafarer/home/books-by-piya-tan>.

<sup>2</sup> On Christianity in CHINA, see Piya Tan, **History of Buddhism**, Singapore 2004, 2009, Lecture 5, Section 20: <http://sites.google.com/site/dharmafarer/home/books-by-piya-tan>.

Japan was not Christianized despite the “Christian Century” (the 16<sup>th</sup> century)—with big names, such as Francis Xavier, working in Japan – mainly because the politically savvy Tokugawa shoguns and the Japanese elite learned the long and harsh lessons from the state Buddhist church, especially in the Heian period (794-1185).<sup>3</sup>

### **Nikujiki saitai**

With the westernization of Japan, the feudal state was abolished during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Japanese Buddhism, too, was effectively secularized by the “nikujiki saitai” (meat-eating and marriage) law of 1872, which decriminalized meat-eating and marriage. In other words, by law, Buddhist monastics need not be vegetarians and celibacy is inessential.

The Sangha as defined by early Buddhism was officially and effectively murdered by national legislation. Technically, there are no bona fide monastics of any Japanese Buddhism today, especially the Pure Land sects and the Zen sects—they are no more monks or nuns, but priests and priestesses.

This can be said to be THE 3<sup>RD</sup> BUDDHIST DISRUPTION where Buddhism has to follow the world, where the Buddhist passport is valid, it seems, for going only as far as some glorious Paradise, but has become persona non grata to nirvana. However, this disruption went on to encourage the Japanese to create made-in-Japan Buddhisms—but this is another story.<sup>4</sup>

### **Intelligent ignorance**

Today, most Buddhists live in the deceptive comfort of THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DISRUPTION—that of “intelligent ignorance.” Of course, the comfort is that most of us do not know this. We are very well informed of Buddhism, disseminated in talks and writings, in books, and various other media, especially the digital and the Internet. But these are merely a merchant's prospectus for fishing customers in the open Buddhist market of scarce resources.

Enter any Buddhist bookshop or Buddhist library today, and we are likely to discover that most of the books are not really about Buddhism—definitely not early Buddhism—but glossy volumes on the Buddha and Buddhism in the service of some race-based Buddhism, or the status and triumphs of some guru worthy of our economic support and bodily service.

Buddhism today comprises mostly near-facts (Buddhism in the service of a closed group) and fake facts (Buddhism defined or created by the wealthy and the elite). We only need to ask any “Buddhists” in any temple or centre on any Sunday a simple question: “What is Buddhism?” The answers will be as bewildering as those who answer the question.

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<sup>3</sup> On JAPAN, Piya Tan, **History of Buddhism**, Singapore 2004, 2009, Lecture 6 (esp Section 20): <http://sites.google.com/site/dharmafarer/home/books-by-piya-tan>

<sup>4</sup> **Monastics, sex and marriage**, SD 66.13 (esp 2.4): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/66.13-Monastics-sex-marriage.-piya.pdf>.

## Samsara

“Disruption” is another word of impermanence, a word highlighting the drive for power by selling comfort to those who are crushed by the realities of impermanence and seek some kind of assurance or succour of permanence: some Eternal Buddha, some Cosmic Bodhisattva, some Paradise, some Passport, some Guru, some God, some Thing.

Only the crowd easily falls prey to disruption. Disruption feeds on the crowd, especially the global crowd; in short, the world. In significant ways, the Buddha knows this all along – it is the Buddha who points out to us the way of out of the crowd and world. We need to rise above the crowd that feeds the Disruptors and avoid the Disruptors who feed the crowds. The crowds, in Buddhism, also refer to the subhuman planes.

## Disrupting the Disruptors

Every age has its Disruptors. The Buddha’s formula for us to keep safely away from the Disruptors and avoiding Disruption of its effects are clear. We need to practise them, thus:

- (1) we must understand that **Disruptions** feed and prospers on the crowds that feed on greed, hate and delusion.
- (2) We must understand how we can rise above and beyond the **crowd** conned by promises of permanence to become free and true individuals.
- (3) We are only liberated from Disruption when we understand **impermanence** and accept it.
- (4) We need to tell and teach **others** how all this is possible – only with the historical Buddha’s teaching.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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