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BUDDHISM THOUGHT IN DAILY JAPANESE VOCABULARY

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism has had a profound and lasting impact on Japanese daily life, influencing everything from social structures and personal values to rituals and aesthetics. The spread of Buddhism to Japan, beginning around the 6th century, introduced various philosophies, practices, and customs that continue to shape Japanese culture today. One of the most popular Buddhist sects among the Japanese is Nichiren, which has been quite active in spreading its teachings, even internationally. According to the official Nichiren website, 185 daily Japanese vocabulary terms are found to have been unconsciously shaped by Buddhist thought. Foreign learners of Japanese, particularly those who are not adherents of Buddhism, may face challenges in accurately translating these terms into their native languages. Based on this, vocabulary derived from Buddhist thought is analyzed.

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INTRODUCTION

In 552 or 538 by some calculations, King Seong of Baekje (523-554) sent emissaries to the ruler of Japan, either Emperor Senka or Emperor Kinmei. The emissaries presented the emperor with a Buddhist statue, the specifics of which are also variously interpreted, and a number of *sutras*. This marks the official introduction oft cited by historians as the introduction of Buddhism to Japan. However, before the date of this transmission, Buddhism had already been introduced to Japan through a mass influx of immigrants from Baekje as well as China (Green et al., 2018). Subsequently, Buddhism continued to evolve and has remained a significant historical milestone in Japan from century to century, spanning from the Asuka period to the present day. Various Buddhist sects also developed significantly, including *Tendai*, *Shingon*, *Amida*, *Nichiren*, and *Zen*.

Buddhism came to be valued for its insight into the world beyond, and for its ritual ability to meditate between the two. Buddhist ideas even found their way into a seventeen-article constitution created in the early 600s, for an entity now calling itself *Nihon*: the source of the sun (Harding, 2022). It has had a profound impact on daily life in Japan, particularly in areas like cultural practices, rituals, philosophy, and even language. Since its introduction to Japan in the 6th century, Buddhism has influenced various aspects of Japanese society, including the way people interact with one

another, the language they use, and the customs they practice. Below is an exploration of how Buddhism affects daily Japanese life, especially through the language.

One of the Buddhist sects that has flourished in Japan is the *Nichiren* sect. Founded by Nichiren Daishonin in the 13th century, this sect emphasizes the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and encourages its followers to focus on spreading the name of the sutra by chanting *Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō*. Currently, the religion which has the most adherents in Japan is a form of Buddhism espoused by Nichiren, a priest of the thirteenth century. The reason why his teachings are so popular is because his way of life offers courage and hope and has a strong humanistic appeal (Kobayashi, n.d.).

Buddhism continues to have a profound influence on Japanese society and culture today, manifesting in various ways, such as cultural and spiritual practices, mindfulness and meditation, art and aesthetic and so on.

METHOD

This study set to be a qualitative method. Qualitative research is used to describe and interpret problems or phenomena systematically from the perspective of the individual or population being studied as well as to produce new concepts and theories (Viswambharan & Priya, 2016). On the official Nichiren website, which serves as one of the online information platforms in Japanese, there are 185 vocabulary terms derived from Buddhist terminology (*bukkyō yōgo*). The study was conducted by sampling a portion of the vocabulary terms listed on the website, utilizing Slovin's formula. Slovin's formula for determining sample size is $n = N / (1 + N \times e^2)$ (Sugiyono, 2017). In this formula, e is set to 0.1 (10%) for large populations and 0.2 (20%) for small populations. Slovin's formula is used to determine a sample from a population whose size is known. This formula can be applied in both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. From this, 22 vocabulary terms were selected as samples to be analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a list of vocabulary found on the official Nichiren website, which serves as one of the Japanese-language online information platforms. It includes 185 terms derived from Buddhist religious terminology (*bukkyō yōgo*). Then, as mentioned above, 22 vocabulary terms were selected as samples to be analyzed, as seen in *Table 1 Familiar Buddhist Terminology*.

Table 1 Familiar Buddhist Terminology

あ行	愛嬌 / 挨拶 / 阿吽 / 阿闍梨 / 阿修羅 / あばた / 尼 / 甘茶 / 天邪鬼 / 阿弥陀 / 阿羅漢 / あり がとう / あわれ / 行脚 / 安居 / 安心 / 按摩 / 威儀 / 意地 / 以心伝心 / 韋駄天 / 一期一会 / 一 大事 / 一念 / 一味 / 一蓮托生 / 一子相伝 / 一心 / 薨 / 引導 / 因縁 / 有学・無学 / 浮世 / 有相 無相 / 有頂天 / 有耶無耶 / 盂蘭盆 / うろうろ /
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	永遠 / 会釈 / 縁起 / 演説 / 閻魔 / 往生 / 大げさ / おかげ / 送り火 / 億劫 / 踊り念仏 / 隠密
か行	我 / 開眼 / 開発 / 餓鬼 / 覚悟 / 学者 / 学生 / 火災 / 瘡蓋 / 我他彼此 / 我慢 / 歓喜 / 観察 / 堪忍 / 甘露 / 機嫌 / 鬼子母神 / 鬼籍 / 吉祥 / 吉祥天 / 喫茶去 / 敬礼 / 苦 / 空 / 久遠実成 / 苦行・荒行 / 恭敬礼拝 / 愚痴 / 工夫 / 供物 / 供養 / 袈裟 / 結界 / 玄関 / 香 / 業 / 講 / 小僧 / 根気 / 言語道断 / 魂魄 / 金毘羅 / 金輪際
さ行	砂糖 / 差別 / 作務 / 三学 / 山号 / 三途 / 三宝 / 持戒 / 止観 / 四苦八苦 / 地獄 / 実際 / 自然 / 娑婆 / 邪魔 / 沙門 / 舍利 / 自由 / 十王思想 / 出世 / 寿命 / 精進 / 少欲知足 / 凶に乗る / 誓願 / 禅定 / 相続 / 相對 / 卒塔婆・塔婆
た行	諦 / 退屈 / 大黒天 / 醍醐味 / 対治 / 大丈夫 / だるま / 端正 / 旦那 / 断末摩 / 智慧 / 知恩 / ちくしょう / 知事 / 中道 / 長老 / 追善 / 徹底 / 投機 / 堂堂廻り / どっこいしょ / 弔い / 弔い上げ
な行	南無 / 人 / 忍辱
は行	ばか・馬鹿 / 旗 / 鉢 / 花まつり / 般若 / 比丘 / 比丘尼 / 琵琶 / 無事 / 補処 / 布施 / 分別 / 弁才天 / 偏袒右肩 / 報恩 / 菩薩 / 法螺 / 本尊 / 本門
ま行	曼荼羅・曼陀羅 / 迎え火 / 瞑想 / 迷惑 / 滅 / 滅法 / 妄想 / 問答
ま行	油断
ら行	喇叭 / 利益 / 輪廻 / 靈魂 / 蓮華 / 六道 / 露地・露路

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ありがとう (arigatō)

The term ありがたしい (arigatashii) or ありがたい (arigatai), which means something rare or difficult to attain, is said to have originated from the phrase describing

something that is uncommon or seldom found. It is considered to be a term derived from Buddhism and is frequently used in Buddhist scriptures. For example, the existence of a human being is 難しい (*arigatashii*), or difficult to achieve, and the fact that a mortal being, despite the inevitability of death, can live for a certain period is also 有難い (*arigatai*) – as expressed in *Dhammapada* 182 (Mahathera, 2005). Thus, it is taught that even those things we take for granted in daily life are actually rare and valuable, and it is important to express gratitude for them.

挨拶 (*aisatsu*)

Both 挨 (*ai*) and 拶 (*satsu*) carry meanings related to pushing or approaching. These expressions first appeared in colloquial language around the Song Dynasty, referring to the act of pushing through a crowd. Scientist are of the belief that it originated from Zen Buddhism and therefore must have been introduced sometime during the medieval Kamakura period (1185-1333) (Persson, 2012). In Zen Buddhism, they are used to describe the practice of engaging in questions and answers to assess the depth of someone's understanding or enlightenment. Over time, in Japan, the term evolved to refer to exchanges of responses or greetings, and it came to encompass expressions or gestures of affection associated with encounters or farewells, which are generally referred to as 挨拶 (*aisatsu*) in Japanese.

安心 (*anshin*)

Generally, it refers to a state of calmness and the absence of worry. In Buddhism, it signifies the mental peace or the state of immobility attained through faith and practice (such as mental concentration, contemplation, and meditation), representing a tranquil or unshakable state of mind.

おおげさ (*oogesasa*)

In general, it refers to the act of exaggerating things beyond their actual nature. In the Zen school, there is a tradition of transmitting the *kashaya*. *Kashaya* is the Sanskrit word for *kesa* (or *okesa*) in Japanese. The *Kashaya* is the robe worn by the Buddha and his followers (Sugawara, n.d.).

The imposing appearance of this large *kesa*, with its dignified and formal presence, is thought to have contributed to the term's later association with the meaning of something exaggerated or ostentatious.

おかげ (*okage*)

This term is used to express gratitude, such as in the phrase "*okagesama de...*" (thanks to you...), in response to a favor received from others. Originally, it refers to receiving a favor from others, but it particularly denotes the gratitude directed toward various deities and Buddhas who save individuals from natural threats, illness, or social suffering, especially when life or livelihood is in crisis.

Acts of gratitude toward these deities and Buddhas are referred to as *okage-mairi* (gratitude pilgrimage) or *orei-mairi* (thanksgiving pilgrimage). The customs of pilgrimages to Ise Shrine and various temples, shrines, and sacred sites across the country are rooted in this concept.

我慢 (*gaman*)

It is one of the delusions, specifically the arrogance that arises from a strong sense of self-identity. In Buddhism, it is referred to as *māna* (慢), the inflated sense of self that arises from perceiving oneself as a fixed, independent entity and becoming attached to this perception. This leads to an attitude of superiority and disregard for others. Buddhist teachings analyze this mental state, categorizing it into the three, seven, and nine types of *māna*.

我慢 (*gaman*), which is one of the seven types of *māna*, has evolved in its contemporary usage. *Ganbaru* (effort), *kurō* (suffering), and *gaman* (persistence) are words that are widely used in the spiritual or character-building contexts ubiquitous to Japanese learning (Oka, 2013). Today, it is commonly understood to mean self-restraint or endurance, but this usage has developed through a shift in meaning, where it originally conveyed the idea of insisting on one's own will or stubbornness. This shift in meaning occurred in the later stages of the early modern period.

砂糖 (*satō*)

Sugar has become a commonly used sweetening agent in households, but it originally appeared as 砂糖 (*satō*) and was one of the foreign words introduced to Japan during the Nara period in the 8th century. It is a translation of the Sanskrit word *शर्करा* (*śarkara*), where 沙 (*sa*) is a phonetic transcription and 糖 (*tō*) is a semantic translation, making it a compound word derived from both Sanskrit and Chinese. After *śarkara* evolved into a colloquial term, it passed through Persian, Arabic, and Medieval Latin, eventually becoming the English word *sugar*. Thus, both the English word *sugar* and the Japanese term 砂糖 (*satō*) share the same linguistic root in Sanskrit.

自由 (*jiyū*)

The term is read as *jiyū*. In general, it refers to being free from constraints and acting according to one's own will. Historically, it was also used to describe behavior that was self-indulgent or capricious. In Buddhism, it is a translation of the Sanskrit word *svayam*, which means to be independent and free, existing by oneself. It signifies the state of being *self-relying*, indicating an existence that is not dependent on or leaning upon anything. This concept is also used to describe the state of *satori* (enlightenment), the realization of true freedom.

自然 (*shizen*)

In Buddhism, the term 自然 is read as *jinen*. Generally, it refers to everything in the world, such as mountains, rivers, grass, and trees, excluding human-made objects. It is often used to denote all natural things in the world. As a Buddhist term, *jinen* refers to things that exist by their own nature or inherently as they are.

Traditionally, the Japanese understanding of nature was not focused on an objective natural system existing outside of humans, but rather on what exists within, referring to the internal experience. This is the Buddhist meaning of *jinen*.

The modern term *shizen* came into use during the latter half of the Meiji period, when it was translated from the English or the French word of *nature*. In this sense, *jinen* represents a foundational concept in Japanese thought, whereas *shizen* is a loanword. As a Buddhist term, *jinen* conveys an ideal state of being, as suggested by its reading 自ずから然り (*onozukara shikanari*), signifying not an external, objective ecosystem, but an inward, aspirational state of *how one wishes to be*.

出世 (*shusse*)

In general, the term refers to advancing within a company or organization, acquiring the appropriate position or title. However, in Buddhism, it carries an entirely opposite meaning, signifying the act of departing from the secular world and entering the Buddhist path. From this perspective, monks are referred to as 出世者 (*shusse-sha*), or those who have attained the true advancement.

旦那 (*danna*)

The term can also be written as 檀那 (*danna*). In general, it is used by a wife to refer to her husband, by merchants to address their regular customers, or by a subordinate to address a superior. Originally, it is a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit word *dāna*, which means *almsgiving* or *charity*. The use of *danna* by a wife to refer to her husband derives from the idea that the husband works and brings home the family income. In other contexts, the term 檀那 (*danna*) is commonly used by those who receive alms to refer to those who provide them. Additionally, temples often use the term 檀家 (*danka*) to refer to the households of their benefactors.

馬鹿 (*baka*)

The etymology is not definitively established, but it is said to be a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit word *moha*, meaning ignorance or delusion. In Buddhist scriptures, it is transcribed as 莫迦, 莫何 (*māka*), signifying foolishness or ignorance. Ignorance or 痴 (*chi*) is one of the three poisons (greed, anger, and ignorance) in Buddhist teachings, referring to the fundamental ignorance that underlies delusion and suffering.

人 (*hito*)

Generally, the term 人 (*hito*) is used as the standard Japanese name for human beings in biological terms. In Buddhism, humans are viewed as beings that exist within the Six Realms and Ten Worlds, subject to the cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*).

The Sanskrit terms such as मनुष्य (*manuṣya*) and पुरुष्य (*puruṣya*) refer to humanity or human beings, distinguishing them from other life forms such as animals or gods. Additionally, the Sanskrit word पुद्गल (*pugdala*) refers to an individual existence and is a concept derived in relation to the Buddhist notion of धर्म (*dharma*), the essential elements that constitute an individual's being.

知事 (*chiji*)

Today, the term refers to the administrative head of a prefecture, province, or metropolis. Originally, it denoted a position responsible for managing the miscellaneous affairs and administrative duties of a temple, and it is a translation of the Sanskrit term *karma-dāna*. This role existed in ancient Indian monasteries.

The title 知事 (*chiji*) or *governor* is an abbreviation of 知院事 () Knowledge of Affairs, and it has various other names. When interpreted from Sanskrit, *karma* translates as *action* or *deed* referring to one's actions or behavior, while *dāna* means *charity* or *one who gives*.

Thus, the term can be understood as referring to someone who offers their actions or efforts as a form of service, a person who provides for the welfare of others, often referred to as a "governor." It is hoped that the current usage of the term aligns with its original meaning.

迷惑 (*meiwaku*)

In general, the term 迷惑する (*meiwaku suru*) refers to a situation where an action results in others experiencing harm, disadvantage, or discomfort, or describes the state of such circumstances. This term, originating from Buddhist terminology, was originally used to mean *to be confused* or *to be lost in reasoning*. It is used in this sense in Eisei Myoan's *Kōzen Gokokuron* as well (Yokogawa, n.d.).

In Buddhism, as seen in texts like the *lotus Sutra* (法華經), particularly in the chapter of 方便品 (*fangbianpin* or Skillful Means), it refers to confusion or wandering of the mind, and a deviation from the correct path or understanding. It is the antonym of 悟り (*satori*, or enlightenment) and signifies a state of ignorance, where one lacks true wisdom and blindly clings to actions or beliefs that contradict reason or truth.

大丈夫 (*daijōbu*)

In general, the term is often used to describe something that is extremely durable, stable, or resilient, and is also used to refer to a person who is notably strong-willed or determined.

Originally, the term 丈夫 (*jōbu*) was used in classical Chinese to praise a person who possessed qualities such as physical strength, wisdom, and virtue, or to honor the most outstanding individuals. Later, with the transmission of Buddhism along the Silk Road, the term evolved to 大丈夫 (*daijōbu*), a grand epithet, and came to be used as one of the titles for the Buddha.

There are generally ten different epithets used to refer to the Buddha, which are collectively known as the 如来の十号 (*Nyōrai no Juugō* or *Ten Titles of the Tathāgata*). One of these titles is 調御丈夫 (*Chōgojōbu*), which translates to *a person skilled in guiding others*, and is used as an alternate name for the Buddha. As a Buddhist term, *chōgojōbu* and *daijōbu* are both honorific titles used to refer to the Buddha.

無事 (*buji*)

In general, the term refers to a state where there are no notable changes or disruptions, and no danger, misfortune, or calamities occur. Originally, it signified the absence of any substantial entity or material basis (*s: vastu*). The term can indicate general tranquility or a state of having nothing to do, and it can be used in both a positive and negative sense. However, in Zen Buddhism and similar traditions, 無事 (*buji*) is revered as a natural state of being free from any artificial or deliberate actions. It refers to the notion of not seeking salvation or the Buddhist path externally. If one can encounter their own inner, pure soul (Buddha nature), they are both safe and noble. *Kinjin* (noble person) refers to someone who has attained peace of mind or enlightenment, not someone with a high social status (Tsuboi, 2021). This understanding is thought to be influenced by the Daoist philosophy of 無為 (*wu wei*) and 自然 (*ziran*), which emphasize naturalness and spontaneity.

退屈 (*taikutsu*)

In everyday language, the term refers to a state of boredom or weariness, where one becomes tired and uninterested. As a verb, it is commonly used in the form of 退屈する (*taikutsu suru*), meaning *to become bored*.

In its original Buddhist context, it describes a state in which one's spiritual aspiration or resolve 求道心 (*gudōshin*) diminishes or falters. It represents a feeling of

discouragement or exhaustion, where one becomes weary and disheartened in the pursuit of Buddhist practice.

In Sanskrit, terms such as *kheda*, meaning *sloth* or *laziness* and *hīyaṃana*, meaning *being abandoned* or *discarded* are often used to express this concept.

邪魔 (*jama*)

The term is used not only in expressions such as *jama mono atsukai* or *being treated as an obstacle*; *jama ga hairu* or *being interrupted*, but also in phrases like *Ojamashimasu*, which is used as an apology when visiting someone. Originally, it referred to the evil demon that obstructs enlightenment, specifically the demon 波旬 (*māra*), who appeared before the Buddha attained enlightenment. In this context, *māra* is associated with the hindrances to spiritual awakening.

It is worth noting that the character for 魔 (*ma*, or demon) in Chinese is a phonetic translation of the Sanskrit word *māra*. In order to represent the *ma* sound, the Chinese created a new character, and the term *māra* was translated as 魔羅. Therefore, the Chinese character 魔 (*ma*) itself does not have an independent meaning but serves as a transliteration.

うろろ (*urouro*)

The term *urouro* is commonly used to describe the state of being lost or wandering in confusion, unable to decide what to do. The character *uro* is written as 有漏 in kanji. This refers to a general term for various mental impurities, similar in meaning to 煩惱 (*bonnō*), or worldly desires. In Sanskrit, सास्रव (*sāsrava*) represents *that which flows out*, signifying the discharge or overflow of mental impurities.

When the afflictions or desires flow out from our six senses (five senses plus consciousness), causing the mind to become confused, it is referred to as *sāsrava* or *with leakage*. Over time, this has come to be expressed as *urouro*. On the other hand, a state free from the flow of afflictions or impurities is called 無漏 (*muro*). Thus, to describe someone who has attained enlightenment, the term *uro-uro* could be used.

玄関 (*genkan*)

Historically, the term 玄関 (*genkan*) referred to the northern gate or entrance, as well as the main entrance of a house. The character 玄 (*gen*) signifies the profound teachings of Buddhism, while 関 (*kan*) refers to a gate or threshold. Therefore, *genkan* can be understood as the entrance to the teachings of Buddhism. It is also used to refer to the entrance of a temple or Zen monastery.

分別 (*bunbetsu*)

Bunbetsu or *discrimination* is one of Buddhist foundational concept (Minoura, 2003). In general, when we say someone 分別がない (*bunbetsu ga nai* or lacks discernment), it refers to a person who does not understand things clearly or who is unaware of the proper course of action. This term is the opposite of 無分別 (*mubunbetsu*) which means *non-discrimination* or *non-discriminative wisdom*, which refers to the wisdom of enlightenment. Therefore, it signifies the ordinary, deluded thoughts and judgments of an average person.

It is a translation of the Sanskrit word *vikalpa*, which refers to a mistaken or illusory judgment. As one of its meanings, *vikalpa* can also imply incorrect or speculative

thinking, often leading to wrong conclusions. This is what is referred to as *bunbetsu* or *discrimination*.

CONCLUSION

The continental culture (*tairiku bunka*) originating from China was introduced to Japan during the 6th century (the Asuka period), encompassing Buddhism and the Kanji script. Since then, Kanji has been used in the Japanese language as a means of communication. Japanese vocabulary, including everyday terms, specialized terminology, proverbs, and others, contains many elements derived from Buddhist thought. Although it is often said that the Japanese people do not have a religion or belief system (*mushuukyō*), their culture, character, and thinking are significantly influenced by Buddhist teachings. Buddhism originated in India, which consequently had a profound impact on the Sanskrit language.

Certain vocabulary terms are difficult to translate directly, as they require more extensive explanations, making them not immediately understandable to foreign learners. Therefore, when studying traditional Japanese culture, it is often more beneficial for learners to understand the Japanese way of thinking, which is deeply influenced by Buddhist principles.

Buddhist thought has woven itself deeply into the fabric of Japanese daily life, influencing everything from ethics, behavior, and social structures to art, rituals, and personal philosophy. It has helped shape the collective mindset of Japanese society, emphasizing impermanence, mindfulness, compassion, and the interconnectedness of all things.

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