

Toshi Ji'in no Shakai-teki Kino
(Social Function of the Buddhist Temple)

Edited by

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The state of Buddhist temples in Japan today is a matter of deep reflection for all Buddhists and others who are seriously concerned about the future of their faith in this country which historically has been so predominantly Buddhist. In a sense, there is nothing very unusual about the present situation. For decades, if not centuries, the temples have been subject to much severe criticism and their demise has been frequently predicted. Nevertheless, they have had a strange way in the past of surviving serious threats to their existence and have continued to exist

and at times even flourish. However, today there appears to be something about the situation that would seem to portend a more ominous future, if matters are left as they are. Therefore, this study of the *Social Function of the Buddhist Temple* in Tokyo and Osaka by a group of Buddhist scholars and promoted by a Buddhist organization is especially meaningful. The basic premise of the study is, we assume, that temples should perform some social as distinct from religious functions if they are to continue to exist in modern society. There is nothing startling in any

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of the findings of this study. Everyone who knows anything about the subject is aware that temple compounds are relatively extensive and have little or no activity, but it is helpful to learn that an estimated 15% of the temples in Tokyo, but only 5.1% of those in Osaka, have facilities for social service, primarily kindergartens or nurseries. These are means for religious education, but they also stabilize temple income. Much has also been said about the depleted financial resources and declining income, but it comes as something of a surprise that 26.9% of the priests in Tokyo and 19.9%

of those in Osaka have additional employment, mostly as teachers or workers in government offices. Apparently in some cases the priestly function is actually the side job, so to speak. This means that the temples themselves in many cases could not continue to function without some supplementary income.

Much detailed data is to be found within the pages of this volume, which should be read by all those who wish to be informed on this subject. Foreign readers will find the six-page English summary and the five area maps very helpful.

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