
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Yinyuan's Thoughts on Home and Country: Cross-Ocean Patriotism and Cultural Integration

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the profound patriotism and cultural integration reflected in the poetry and life of Monk Yinyuan, a pivotal figure in Sino-Japanese cultural exchange during the Ming-Qing transition. The research employs textual analysis of Yinyuan's poetic works and a historical review of his journey to Japan and the subsequent establishment of the Obaku sect. By examining his literary expressions and religious activities, the study contextualizes his personal emotions within the broader socio-political landscape of the 17th century. The analysis reveals that Yinyuan's poetry is deeply imbued with a complex nostalgia for his homeland and a steadfast commitment to national righteousness. Despite the geographical distance, his founding of the Obaku sect in Japan served as a vital conduit for transmitting Chinese Zen Buddhism, Confucian ethics, and traditional culture. His efforts not only significantly enriched Japanese Zen culture but also fostered a deep resonance within Japanese political and cultural spheres. Yinyuan's cross-ocean journey transcends mere religious propagation; it represents a monumental act of cultural integration driven by profound thoughts on home and country. His legacy underscores the importance of cultural confidence and the role of individuals as bridges in cross-cultural communication, offering valuable historical insights for promoting cultural diversity and mutual understanding in the contemporary era of globalization.

KEYWORDS

Yinyuan; Thoughts on Home and Country; Obaku Sect; Cultural Integration; Zen Buddhism; Sino-Japanese Exchange; Ming-Qing Transition; Cross-Cultural Communication

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1. The Life of Monk Yinyuan and the Background of His Journey to the East

Yinyuan Longqi (1592–1673), respectfully known in Japan as Zen Master Ingen, stands as a monumental figure in the history of Sino-Japanese cultural exchange during the 17th century. Born into a peasant family in Fuqing County, Fujian Province, China, Yinyuan exhibited exceptional intelligence and a profound interest in Buddhism from a young age. In 1608, at the age of 16, he formally became a monk under the tutelage of the eminent Zen Master Jianyuan, embarking on a lifelong journey of Buddhist practice (Lin, 2010b). He subsequently traveled extensively, visiting renowned mountains and ancient temples, and seeking guidance from the leading Zen masters of his time, which solidified his profound Zen philosophy.

In 1654, Yinyuan led a group of disciples across the ocean to Japan, initiating the propagation of the Obaku (Huangbo) sect. His journey began at Kofukuji Temple in Nagasaki and gradually expanded across various regions of Japan. The religious beliefs and practices of overseas immigrants from Fujian, particularly the Chinese residing in Nagasaki, provided a crucial initial foundation for his reception (Lin, 2009). His Zen teachings were warmly received by both Japanese monks and the general public, attracting a vast number of followers. In 1659, Yinyuan founded Manpukuji Temple on Mount Obaku in Uji, Kyoto, which became the birthplace of the Japanese Obaku sect. The naming of the temple was a deliberate act to signify his enduring remembrance of **Copyright:** © 2026 the Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Published by Al-Kindi Centre for Research and Development, London, United Kingdom.

the ancestral temple of the Obaku sect in Fuqing, China. The establishment of Manpukuji not only propelled the spread of Zen Buddhism in Japan but also created a vital platform for Sino-Japanese cultural exchange during that era.

The mid-17th century in China was a period of severe turbulence marked by the Ming-Qing transition. Society was in upheaval, wars were frequent, and Buddhist Zen culture inevitably suffered significant shocks. Under these circumstances, religious activities in China were heavily restricted. However, Yinyuan never abandoned his mission to propagate the Dharma. Recognizing that the chaotic dynastic transition in China was un conducive to the spread of Zen Buddhism, Yinyuan accepted an invitation to travel to Japan in 1654. This eastward journey not only altered Yinyuan's personal destiny but also exerted a profound and lasting impact on Sino-Japanese Buddhist cultural exchange. At that time, Japan was governed by the Edo Shogunate, which enforced the *Sakoku* (locked country) policy, severely restricting external interactions. Nevertheless, the Japanese Buddhist community maintained a strong interest in Chinese Zen culture, particularly revering the teachings of the Obaku sect. The Edo Shogunate's invitation of Chinese monks, despite isolationist policies, highlights the unique cultural permeability of the era (Wu et al., 2017). Yinyuan's arrival perfectly aligned with this historical demand, and the characteristics of Fujianese expatriate monks spreading Chinese culture in Nagasaki provided a unique model of cultural transmission (Zhang & Yue, 2024).

2. Patriotism and Nostalgia for the Homeland

The poetry composed by Yinyuan during his time in Japan is deeply infused with a profound sense of righteousness and patriotism. The emotions he expressed were grand and expansive, concerning either the development of the Obaku sect or the trajectory of his homeland and society. In his poem *Chudao Boshan Chushi Zhong* (First Arrival at Mount Obaku, Addressing the Assembly), he wrote, "Ambitious and heroic spirits must focus their eyes; painstakingly, we uphold morality and justice together," calling upon people of high ideals to support the development of Zen Buddhism and the propagation of the Dharma (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3579). Furthermore, the lines "The great path is smooth and leads to true fruition; it does not disappoint the good men of the mortal world" demonstrate his belief that practitioners should not only seek personal transcendence and perfection but also cultivate positive virtues to become the backbone of society. Analyzing Yinyuan's poetry reveals his relentless pursuit of national righteousness and moral duty, a theme prevalent in his literary contributions to Buddhist literature (Lin, 2010a).

In *Huaijiu* (Nostalgia), Yinyuan wrote, "Carrying the new Obaku overseas with a staff, revealing the true face in an instant" (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3579). This reflects his confidence in promoting the Obaku Zen teachings; he believed that it would not take long for the Obaku sect to flourish in Japan. It also reveals his deep emotional attachment to the Obaku lineage he inherited and his acute awareness of the mission he bore to spread the Zen Dharma. He emphasized that regardless of location, the wisdom of "Zen" is unified, highlighting that his practice and transmission were not merely personal but universally shared between China and foreign lands.

Yinyuan's nostalgia for his homeland and recollections of the past are predominantly concentrated in his earlier poems. Works such as *Daoyu* (Praying for Rain), *Huaijiu* (Nostalgia), and *Songju Manyong* (Casual Chants at the Pine Residence) profoundly embody his thoughts on his home country. In *Huaijiu*, he expressed, "I am even more delighted that the family reputation often surpasses the past, bringing a smile to my face from thousands of miles away." Receiving news from his hometown while in Japan brought him immense joy; the "family reputation" could even soothe his daily melancholy and worries. In *Shuhui* (Expressing Feelings), Yinyuan lamented, "Leaving home for over ten years, it feels like several lifetimes have passed. Old friends have all turned to dust, and the younger generation acts wildly" (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3536). Through this contrast of time and space, he sighed that a mere decade away from his homeland felt like an eternity. Although personal emotional expressions constitute a small portion of his poetry collection, these poems not only showcase Yinyuan's literary talent but also reveal his complex emotions as a cultural envoy. In *Woyou Ganhui* (Feelings from Armchair Travel), he directly expressed his longing for his homeland: "Resting foolishly in the small tower all day. Dreaming of the homeland brings sudden sorrow" (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 2833). Having bid farewell to his country amidst turmoil, dreaming of his homeland would awaken him with renewed anxiety about the fate of his people and a desperate hope for news from home. In Yinyuan's heart, his homeland was a sacred entity to be deeply missed, yet he recognized that his mission to propagate the Obaku Zen philosophy held paramount importance.

3. Cultural Integration: The Spread and Influence of the Obaku Sect

3.1 The Establishment of Manpukuji and Religious Spread

Yinyuan's propagation of Zen teachings in Japan expanded gradually from Kofukuji Temple in Nagasaki to various regions across the country. His Zen methods were deeply embraced by Japanese monks and the general populace, drawing a massive following. In 1659, Yinyuan established Manpukuji Temple on Mount Obaku in the Uji area of Kyoto, which became the

foundational center of the Japanese Obaku sect (Kyoto Obakusan Manpukuji, 1917). In his poem *Lanpen Hui* (Ullambana Festival), Yinyuan wrote, "All virtues proclaim the profound meaning of the Buddha, whipping the back of the head to question the literary world," clearly demonstrating his unwavering determination and will to propagate the Dharma (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3571). The establishment of Manpukuji Temple not only significantly advanced the spread of Zen Buddhism in Japan but also constructed a crucial platform for Sino-Japanese cultural exchange during that period (Lin, 2017).

However, Yinyuan's activities after crossing to Japan were not confined to the religious sphere; he actively participated in cultural activities and Japanese social affairs. In 1661, Emperor Go-Mizunoo of Japan bestowed upon Yinyuan the honorable title of "Daiko Fusho Kokushi" (National Master of Great Light and Universal Illumination) to commend his significant contributions to Japanese Buddhism and culture. Proficient in poetry and highly skilled in calligraphy, Yinyuan interacted extensively with Japanese literati and scholars. In the *Yuntao Ji* (Cloud Waves Collection), there are numerous records of Yinyuan's correspondence with figures from various sectors of Japanese society (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3566). These interactions profoundly facilitated the deep integration of Sino-Japanese cultures.

In 1673, Yinyuan passed away in Japan at the age of 82. His death marked the end of a significant era in Sino-Japanese Buddhist cultural exchange, but the Obaku sect he founded and its cultural influence have endured to this day. Yinyuan's eastward journey and the establishment of the Obaku sect not only promoted the spread of Zen Buddhism in Japan but also made monumental contributions to the deep integration of Sino-Japanese cultures. His life and achievements have left an indelible mark on the history of cultural exchange between the two nations.

3.2 Widespread Influence: Resonance in Zen Culture and Political Spheres

Yinyuan's influence in Japan extended far beyond the propagation of Zen philosophy; it also encompassed cultural customs and political activities. In the cultural domain, the Zen practice models Yinyuan brought from China, the architectural style of Manpukuji Temple, and literary forms such as poetry became widely popular in Japan. Simultaneously, these cultural forms merged with indigenous Japanese culture, achieving remarkable development. The sectarian orthodox concepts introduced by the Obaku sect significantly influenced the structural and ideological evolution of Japanese Buddhism (Xie, 2022).

In the political arena, Yinyuan's immense popularity among religious followers garnered the attention and respect of the Japanese Emperor and the Shogunate government. While Yinyuan's passion for Zen Buddhism was the primary driving force behind his life and work in Japan, the support from the Emperor and the government was another critical factor that enabled him to successfully transmit and establish the Obaku sect. This political resonance provided a stable environment for the sect to flourish amidst a generally isolationist national policy.

4. The Cultural Connotation of Yinyuan's Thoughts on Home and Country and the Cross-Cultural Significance of Cultural Integration

4.1 The Cultural Connotation of Yinyuan's Thoughts on Home and Country

The Obaku sect originated in Fujian, China, and is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese cultural elements. Represented by outstanding figures such as Zen Master Duanji Xiyun of the Tang Dynasty and Zen Master Yinyuan of the Ming Dynasty, it centers on Buddhist culture while encompassing Taoist and Confucian philosophies. The fundamental driving force behind the Obaku sect's ability to flourish and achieve such remarkable success in Japan was the cohesive power of the Chinese nation and the symbolic representation of the thoughts on home and country residing within the hearts of Chinese monks. The patriotism revealed in Yinyuan's poetry is not merely a display of personal emotion but also a profound manifestation of cultural identity.

His poetry collection contains numerous traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as Confucian ideology, the concept of reclusion, and Buddhist doctrines. These elements form the cultural foundation of Yinyuan's patriotism towards his nation and home. In *Du Tao Jingjie Xiansheng Zhuan* (Reading the Biography of Mr. Tao Jingjie) and *You Yue Tao Gong Shiji* (Reading Mr. Tao's Poetry Collection Again), Yinyuan's admiration for Tao Yuanming and his deep identification with Tao's philosophy of pastoral reclusion are evident (Hirakubo, 1979, pp. 3618-3619). In *Shi Daocheng Xinshi* (Instructing Layman Daocheng), he wrote, "Illuminating the source reveals no duality; the parents as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are fully repaid. The orderly wind spreads across the great thousand worlds; when the parents' virtue shines again, the way of the child is complete" (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3580). Here, Yinyuan advises Layman Daocheng to value filial piety and repay his parents' kindness, asserting that filial piety is a virtue worthy of praise throughout the universe. Yinyuan's advocacy for children's filial piety highly aligns with the

Confucian ideology that "of all virtues, filial piety is the most important." These instances reflect Yinyuan's deep identification with traditional Chinese cultural elements.

The connotation of Yinyuan's grand thoughts on home and country lies in the belief that individuals should shoulder the great cause of the nation. In *Songju Manyong* (Casual Chants at the Pine Residence), he wrote, "Supporting heaven and earth makes a true iron man; being well-versed in the past and present is the current duty," and "When the heart is thoroughly at peace, the home and country are prosperous; wherever one goes, is it not natural innocence?" (Hirakubo, 1979, p. 3582). He believed that only by being indomitable could one be considered a "true iron man." His ultimate wish was for the prosperity of the country and the peace of the people. As a monk, he believed he must not only practice the Buddha Dharma but also concern himself with national affairs, contributing his strength to the prosperity of the nation and its people. This patriotism embodies an individual's loyalty and sense of responsibility to the country, demonstrating that his commitment to national and societal duties was paramount, even superseding personal desires.

4.2 Cross-Cultural Bridge: The Value of Yinyuan's Thoughts on Home and Country in Sino-Japanese Exchanges

It was precisely because of Yinyuan's profound identification with Chinese cultural elements and his deep nostalgia for his homeland that he was motivated to travel to Japan, propagate the Obaku sect, and accept numerous disciples. He utilized his ideological and lifestyle concepts to influence the local Japanese residents, generating emotional resonance with the Japanese public while simultaneously integrating these concepts with indigenous Japanese culture. He transformed his patriotism and nostalgia into a robust bridge for Sino-Japanese cultural exchange. On the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Zen Master Yinyuan's birth, Professor Seizan Yanagida of Kyoto University remarked, "The social development of modern Japan, no matter from which aspect you look at it, cannot be explained without the influence of Obaku culture" (Hanazono University International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism, 2009).

The poetry collections Yinyuan created in Japan, along with his daily missionary activities, provided the Japanese people with a vital window to understand Chinese culture. His interpretation of Zen doctrines and his grand ideology that individuals should bear the great responsibilities of their home and country also provided crucial spiritual support for the political exchanges between the two nations at that time. Upon arriving in Japan, he made extensive friendships, broadening his social network. His correspondence with these friends served as a dynamic process of exporting his cultural values.

4.3 Contemporary Enlightenment: Yinyuan's Thoughts on Home and Country and Global Cultural Diversity

In the context of contemporary globalization, the diversity of cultural elements has become an indispensable factor in national development. The transmission of Chinese cultural elements to Japan, represented by Zen Master Yinyuan, continued for over a century. In addition to the large number of monks involved, there was a massive community of lay Buddhists supporting them. Such a grand scale of cultural export and profound cultural integration is rare in history. The transformation and creation of "Obaku Culture" and the formation of the new Obaku network highlight the dynamic nature of this cultural exchange (Liao, 2023). Today, under the backdrop of globalization, cultural export remains a focal point of international attention. Different cultures possess complementarity and symbiosis. During a time of dynastic change when the development of the Obaku sect was constrained in China, Yinyuan decided to cross the ocean to Japan to export Chinese culture and propagate Zen teachings. Through various forms of cultural exchange, he promoted mutual understanding and integration between different cultures.

Furthermore, while spreading the Obaku sect in Japan, Yinyuan also introduced other forms of Chinese culture. Yinyuan's cultural export, embraced by the Emperor and the public, not only enriched Japan's cultural connotations but also laid a solid foundation for the cultural commonality between China and Japan. Today, we should vigorously promote the integration of different cultures, emphasizing cultural export and confidence, thereby advancing the diversification process of global culture.

Moreover, Yinyuan's thoughts on home and country highlight the responsibility that individuals should assume in cross-cultural communication. Through poetry collections, traditional ceremonies held in temples, and other forms, he successfully achieved cultural export. In contemporary society, we must also recognize the importance and responsibility of individuals in cross-cultural communication and actively participate in international exchange activities.

5. Conclusion

Monk Yinyuan is universally recognized as a pivotal figure in Sino-Japanese cultural exchange. His life experiences, his profound thoughts on home and country, and the enduring impact of his propagation of the Obaku sect in Japan continue to exert a profound influence in Japan today. His legacy provides invaluable experience for contemporary cultural exchange activities. His

patriotism reflects an individual's unwavering loyalty to the nation and a deep identification with national culture. His eastward journey and the activities surrounding the spread of the Obaku sect significantly promoted the deep integration and innovation of Sino-Japanese cultures. In the context of globalization, it is imperative that we value and respect the differences between diverse cultures while simultaneously establishing our own cultural identity and actively promoting cross-cultural communication.

The contributions Yinyuan made to cultural transmission hold not only historical significance but also profound practical value. By exploring the thoughts on home and country and the cultural integration evident in Yinyuan's works and deeds, we can gain a deeper understanding of the historical background and contemporary relevance of Sino-Japanese cultural exchange. Furthermore, it allows us to more clearly recognize the vital responsibilities that individuals must shoulder in the realm of cross-cultural communication.

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