

Author

**Daiko Matsuyama**

Deputy Head Priest of Taizo-in Temple in the Myoshinji Temple complex

**[Brief background]**

Born in Kyoto in 1978. Graduated from the Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, The University of Tokyo in 2003. After three and a half years of training at Heirinji Temple in Niiza City, Saitama Prefecture, he became Deputy Head Priest at Taizo-in Temple in 2007. He was selected as one of the "The Top 100 People of the New Generation" by Nikkei Business magazine in 2016, and has been a visiting lecturer at Stanford University since 2018. In 2019, he received the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award (Agency for Cultural Affairs) and the Shigemitsu Award (Japan Society of Boston). In 2022, he came a tourism ambassador of Kyoto. He has also had an audience with the former Pope in 2011, met with the 14th Dalai Lama in 2014, and had exchanges with various religious figures and leaders from around the world. His work extends beyond both boarder and religious boundaries.



In the "Biotechnology in Japan" series, we share contributions on Japanese culture and traditions.

In this fourth installment, we are pleased to have Mr. Daiko Matsuyama, Deputy Head Priest of Taizo-in Temple in the Myoshinji Temple complex and someone whose activities cross boarders and religious boundaries, write about the strengths and unique qualities of Japanese people, some of which they may not even be aware of.

Japan's presence in the world is declining. This has been talked for a while, but I feel that the uniqueness of the Japanese people can still be demonstrated as a strength in the world.

For example, when I teach zazen (seated meditation in Zen style), I am reminded that Japanese people are very patient and polite. Many Japanese children do exactly as they are

told. But children in other countries tend to be more like, "What's this? and they cannot sit still for very long. Of course, one of the main reasons for this is that they are not used to sitting still, but I think we should have more confidence in their ability to steal and imitate the good points of others and to do what they are told honestly.

Another characteristic of foreign students is



that they are willing to move if they have an idea of what is ahead, but they tend not to move unless they have a reason to do so. For example, in the world of Zen, if there is no proof or methodology that enlightenment can be attained in this way, many people will not be able to continue and will quit. There is no assurance that one will attain enlightenment even if he or she continues with rigorous practice. Even in such a situation, Japanese Zen monks still continue to seek enlightenment seriously. This kind of stance can be said to be uniquely Japanese. In the field of science, the research of Dr. Omura, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, is an extremely Japanese approach, a feat that could not have been achieved by Western research.

When we look around the world, we find that people have a different impression of us than we have of ourselves in Japan. For example, according to a survey on creativity conducted by an international organization, the most common answer to the question "Which country do you think is the most creative in the world?" However, when the same question was asked of countries other than Japan and the U.S., more than 30% of respondents answered "Japan," surpassing the U.S. as the most common answer. Japanese people generally consider themselves to be good at discipline and group behavior but lacking in creativity. Why, then, are the Japanese considered creative in other countries?

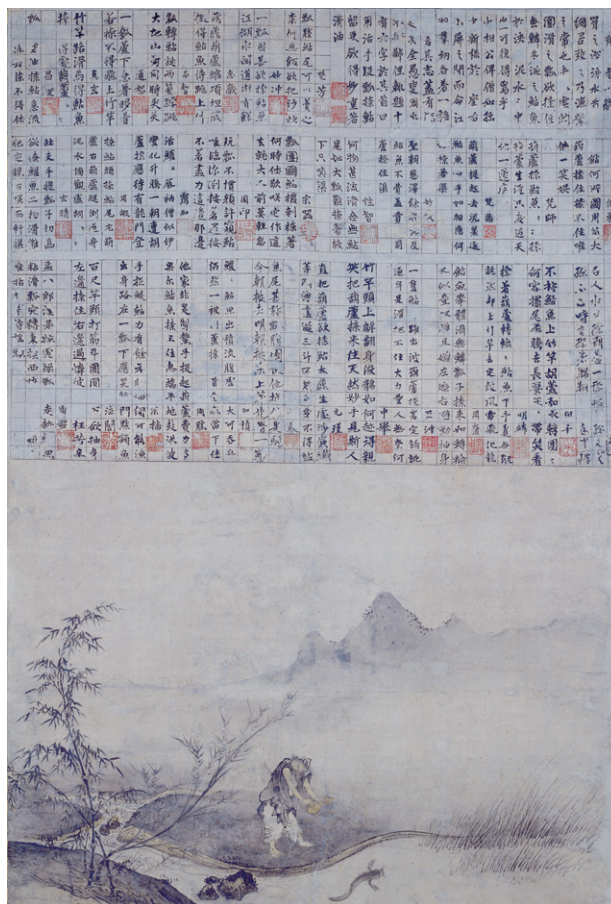
For example, in the U.S., the methodology for creating new things is very good, and the willingness to come up with ideas, even if they fail, and to create something creative is outstanding. However, sometimes the impact is shallow, and many things are produced that do not last long. In Japan, these ideas may be considered "interesting" or "crazy," but they are not considered truly innovative and full of creativity. I think the Japanese definition of creativity is something universal, something that will continue to be loved and have an impact 100 or 200 years from now.

For example, Sony's Walkman would fall into this category. In order to be considered creative in Japan, something must have universal value that transcends time. To achieve this, I think it is necessary to adopt the ancient concept of "Syu, Ha, Ri," which means to follow and master a good example. "Syu" means to imitate a good example. Learning the kata (pattern) and acquiring tradition. Once the kata has been

firmly mastered, the "break (Ha)" is then carried out. And finally, you must "let go (Ri)" of it as your originality. Only after following these steps can something truly creative be born. It is this kind of deep insight and respect for tradition that has enabled the Japanese to create things that have been loved and influential for hundreds of years since then.

The concept of time has become very short in many different fields. Of course, American-style creativity is necessary, but at the same time, I feel that Japanese-style creativity is also very meaningful. I believe that a person who can fuse these two concepts is a creative person in the true sense of the word.

Certainly, there is much to learn from other countries, and it is important to look outward. However, we cannot know our own true nature if we only look outside ourselves, and we cannot change what needs to be changed if we do not know ourselves. Although I do not agree with some of the recent trends that praise Japan so much, I feel that it is important to understand our own identity and uniqueness, and to preserve it.



National treasure Hyonen-zu by Josetsu. Owned by Taizo-in temple