

RESEARCH REPORT ON THE SAIKOKU PILGRIMAGE IN JAPAN¹

The Saikoku^a Pilgrimage is Japan's most popular pilgrimage route. Focusing on the veneration of the Bodhisattva Kannon^b it wanders some 1000km around the Kinki region, passing through the ancient capital cities of Kyoto and Nara. This pilgrimage has a long history, with records presenting clear evidence of its existence in the 12th century. However, legends provide an earlier, unsubstantiated date of 987, when the tonsured Emperor Kazan^c is said to have visited 33 sites dedicated to Kannon, thus creating the pilgrimage. This oft-repeated and popular foundation story inspired a much publicized 1000th year anniversary celebration in 1987, which included exhibitions of temple art, posters and video films, all drawing extra attention to this popular route.

As part of the authors' individual research into various aspects of Japanese pilgrimage, we each visited the Saikoku sites during the celebration year, collecting data and interviewing priests and pilgrims. Through sharing information and observations over several months, we began to build up a general understanding of pilgrim activity; our interest moved towards finding ways of obtaining a broader sample of responses than our previous techniques had provided.

The outgrowth of our concerns was a questionnaire that could be distributed to pilgrims.² Specifically, we hoped to clarify such aspects as the motivations of pilgrims, the paraphernalia they carry, their activities at the sites, the means by which they travel and the company in which they travel. Other questions determined sex, age, residence, religious affiliation, the time spent on this pilgrimage and on what other pilgrimages, if any, those surveyed had been. Although one major sociological study of Saikoku pilgrims has been published, by Maeda Takashi in 1971,³ several of the issues we wished to explore (e.g. the company in which pilgrims travel) were not a part of that investigation. In addition, we were interested to see if any changes had taken place in the years since Maeda's survey.

In order to provide a reasonable sample, we decided to administer the questionnaire over a two day period, choosing Sunday, November the 22nd and

¹ We would like to thank our respective academic institutions, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina, USA, and Kansai University of Foreign Studies, Hirakata, Japan, for their financial support, which enabled us to carry out the survey described in this report. We wish to thank the officiants and staff at Mimurotoji in Uji, Japan, for allowing us to conduct the survey there.

² We would like to thank Dr. Kashioka Tomohide of Kansai University of Foreign Studies for his helpful comments and advice in compiling this questionnaire.

³ Maeda Takeshi: *Junrei no Shakaigaku* [The Sociology of Pilgrimage], Kyoto: Minerva Books, 1971.

Monday the 23rd for this purpose. Sunday is, according to information given to us by various temple officiants, the most common day for pilgrims to visit the temples, and the Monday in question was a public holiday, thus further enhancing the likelihood of visitors. In order to avoid interviewing the same pilgrims twice, we focused on one location, selecting for our purposes the tenth temple on the route, Mimurotoji^d in Uji, south of Kyoto. This temple was well situated for our purposes. Unlike some of the pilgrimage temples, it is not famous as a tourist destination, suggesting that most of those who normally visit it are involved in the pilgrimage. We required a site with only one entrance/exit, so as to give ourselves the possibility of encountering all who came along. Mimurotoji is one of the few Saikoku sites that met our needs. Fortunately, the temple officials there understood the value of our project and provided us with active logistical support.

In all, 449 responses were obtained over the two day period. At present we are working on the analysis of the data received but, on the basis of initial hand calculations, we are able to make some preliminary observations. Among our immediate conclusions is that people rarely perform this pilgrimage as individuals: only 8% of our respondents were travelling alone. By far the largest number (55%) was travelling with a spouse. Other high categories for companionship were family members (18%) and friends (20%). It should be noted that some people had multiple responses, such as travelling with a spouse and with friends. The high numbers performing the pilgrimage with spouse, family and/or friends leads us to suggest that this pilgrimage, at least, is very much an activity undertaken as a joint project with people in one's immediate circle.

The major means of travel is by private car, noted by 51% of the sample; other common means are train and bus. Only 19% cited walking as a means of travel, invariably used along with another means, such as train or bus. The preponderance of car travel reflects not only the fact that Japan now has a high automobile ownership rate, but may also relate to the social, familial characteristic found in the data cited above. Although there are many other pilgrimage routes in Japan, a majority of those surveyed (64%) had not participated in any of them. Of the other 36%, most had performed short pilgrimages such as those dedicated to the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (*Shichifuku-jin*^e). Only 9% had done the Shikoku pilgrimage, Japan's other major route. Our initial view is that the Saikoku pilgrimage represents, for very many people, both their initiation into the world of the pilgrim and their initial experience of a major pilgrimage.

One standard activity is to get the seal of each temple imprinted on an item carried specifically for this purpose. The three most commonly used are a hanging scroll (*kakejiku*^f), a special book for such seals (*nōkyōchō*^g) and a white pilgrim's shirt (*oizuru*^h). We found that pilgrims tended to carry more than one item: 71% carried a book, 55% a scroll and 40% the white shirt (which is rarely worn, but is carried along with all the other paraphernalia).

The pilgrims carried out a wide range of activities, although we found that a surprisingly large number (34% of respondents) stated that, apart from getting the temple seal, they did not do anything else. Many (49%) performed actions such as lighting candles or incense, a common and fairly undemanding level of religious action frequently observed in Japan, while only 11% stated that they chanted both the traditional pilgrimage song associated with each temple and chanted the Buddhist prayers associated with pilgrimage. It may be that this lack of overt religious activity correlates with the fact that many are on their first pilgrimage and are thus unattuned to the traditional ways of pilgrimage in Japan, which involve such actions as chanting pilgrimage songs and prayers. This is an aspect which we need to examine further.

At present we are preparing a computer analysis of the responses and feel that we cannot go beyond the preliminary remarks we have offered here. This is particularly true in connection with the critical issue of motivation, where so far few common themes have emerged. All we can do at present is note widely diverging motivations, ranging from religious memorials for ancestors to straightforward tourism. As analysis continues, we hope to produce more detailed results and to begin to make some comments on the patterns of activity and the attitudes of pilgrims. We are also continuing our broader research into the general historical processes involved in this and other Japanese pilgrimages, the contents of pilgrims⁵ diaries and the variety of religious activities and religious services performed by the temples on behalf of pilgrims with the aim of building up a more coherent view of this major Japanese pilgrimage.

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List of Characters

- | | | |
|-------|---------|---------|
| a. 西国 | d. 三室戸寺 | g. 納経帖 |
| b. 観音 | e. 七福神 | f. おいずる |
| c. 花山 | f. 掛け軸 | |

FORUM

**Seminar on Esoteric Buddhism in Japan
15–16th September 1988 (Aarhus University, Denmark)**

In conjunction with the Danish Association for the History of Religions, The Seminar for Buddhist Studies is to hold a two-day seminar in Aarhus, Denmark, with the title, “Esoteric Buddhism in Japan”. This is the first time that an appreciable number of scholars from various European countries is to gather to present and discuss the latest findings in this young but rapidly expanding field of study. The event will be introduced by two of the Seminar’s members, Per K. Sorensen and Ian Astley-Kristensen, after which the following researchers will present their work:

Robert Duquenne (*École Française d’Extrême Orient, Paris*), “The Transition from Exoteric to Esoteric Buddhism”

Aleksander Kabanoff (*Institute for Oriental Studies, Leningrad*), “Kangi-ten (Gaṇapati) in Japanese Mikkyō”

Charles Willemen (*Reijksuniversiteit, Gent*), “Abhiṣeka in the Chinese Hevajratāntra”

Anne-Marie Bonneux (*Reijksuniversiteit, Gent*), “On the Subāhu- pariṣcchāsūtra”

Pol Vanden Broucke (*Reijksuniversiteit, Gent*), “On The Yugikyō”

Michael Pye (University of Marburg (Lahn)), “Kawasaki Daishi: A Shingon Temple in Its Social Setting”

John Stevens (Tōhoku Fukushi University, Sendai, Japan), “Shingon Themes in Zen Art”

Ian Reader (Kansai University of Foreign Studies, Osaka, Japan), “Esoteric Elements in Japanese Mountain Religion”

The Seminar will close with a panel discussion and an informal gathering. A report will appear in the next issue of this journal, and it is hoped to publish the proceedings in the near future.

(IA-K)

**Visit from Priests at Daigoji, Kyoto
29th September–4th October 1988**

In conjunction with the opening of a major exhibition of the Esoteric Art of Japan at the Museum for East Asian Art (Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst), Cologne, Federal Republic of Germany (24th September–27th November), a

group of ten to fifteen Shingon priests from Daigoji in Kyoto will be visiting Europe. Led by the incumbent Director-General of this ancient and famous temple, Revd Nakada Junna, the group has kindly consented to visit Denmark at the end of September. We have arranged a half-day's event, consisting of three lectures on the Shingon tradition, followed by the performance of a *saitō goma*, an outdoor fire ritual (Skt. *homa*) which is intimately connected to the Shugendō tradition. Since this movement comes partly under orthodox Shingon theory and practice and partly under folk-based religious practices—in particular mountain asceticism—the proceedings promise to be both exciting and instructive.

The event is organized in co-operation with Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus, where both the lectures and the ritual will be held. There is no restriction on admittance and we are hoping to be able to film the *saitō goma*.

(IA-K)

**Report on the Proceedings of the
1st International Conference on Bojo's Thought
Songgwang Temple
8th–10th July 1988**

As one of the great masters of Korean Sōn Buddhism,^a National Master Pōjo^b (AD 1158–1210), better known as Chinul^c, has enjoyed a central position in the history of Korean intellectual history. Recent years have brought an upsurge in scholarly interest in his highly syncretic writings, which can be seen as a series of attempts at redefining the doctrinal basis for the reconstruction of Sōn Buddhism in the Koryō Dynasty of the late 12th century.

Organized by The Research Institute of Bojo's Thought (Pōjo Sasang Yōngu Wōn)^d, which was founded last year by a group of Korean scholars and Buddhist monks, the first internationally attended conference under the working title "The Historical Position of Pōjo's Thought" took place in Chinul's old temple Sōnggwang Sa^e, near Sunch'ōn in the South Chōlla Province. Local scholarship was represented by such luminaries as Prof. Han Ki-du of Wōngwang University, Prof. Ch'oe Pyōng-hōn of Seoul National University, Prof. Emeritus Yi Ch'ong-ik formerly of Tongguk University, Prof. Hee Sung Kil of Sōgang University *et. al.* The panel of foreign scholars included Prof. Kimura Sensho from Tokyo National University, professors Jan Yūn-hua from McMaster University in Canada, Peter N. Gregory from the University of Illinois, Urbana, Robert E. Buswell from UCLA, Park Sung-bae from State University of N.Y. at Stony Brook, and the undersigned from the East Asian Institute, University of Copenhagen.

Discussions centred around Chinul's development of the concept of "sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation" (*dono chŏmsu*)^f based on his study of the works of Guifeng Zongmi^g (780–841) and Li Tongxuan^h (646–740), his ambivalent attitude to the Southern Chanⁱ concept of "sudden enlightenment/sudden cultivation" (*tono tonsu*)^j, the various editions of Chinul's works with special focus on the *Pŏpchip pyŏrhaengnok chŏryo pyŏngip sagi*^k, the influence of the *Liuzu fabao tan jing*^l (*The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*) on the formation of Chinul's thinking, and his historical position within the larger context of Korean Sŏn, including his importance for modern Sŏn Buddhism, as well as more general observations on the development of the "sudden enlightenment/gradual cultivation" within the sphere of East Asian Buddhism. In this last respect a paper by Dr. Kim of Inch'ŏn University was particularly illuminating. The papers by professors Kimura, Jan and Gregory, which naturally took Chinul's indebtedness to his Chinese sources for granted, invoked some unwelcome jingoism from a few of the Korean participants.

Towards the end of the conference a heated debate among several of the participants took place, partly inspired by the papers given by Professor Shim Jae Ryong and Park Sŭng-bae. Here the focus was on the modern implications of Chinul's "sudden enlightenment/gradual cultivation" as against the "sudden enlightenment/sudden cultivation" of the reformed Imje School^m of the late Koryŏ Dynasty. This debate continues today as an ongoing polemic topic among two main "temple families" within the Chogyŏ Order.ⁿ The Ven. Pŏpchong, President of the Research Institute for the Study of Bojo's Thought, pointed out that the rekindling of this debate, a direct result of the Ven. Sŏngch'ŏl's highly polemic book, *Sŏnmun chŏngno*^o, with its one-sided and sectarian stress on "sudden enlightenment/sudden cultivation", had severely undermined the spiritual unity of the Order. Furthermore, he stated that Chinul's scheme of "sudden enlightenment/gradual cultivation" was in any case far more instructive and suited to the majority of people in the modern world than the exclusive path of "sudden enlightenment/sudden cultivation", which was only suited for a small minority of high spiritual capacity.

After the conference had formally ended on the 10th of July, a number of the participants went on an excursion to some of the temple locations connected with the life of Chinul.

The conference was very well organized and well attended, and it is hoped that it will set the standards for future gatherings of this kind.

(HHS)

- a. 禪佛教
- b. 普照國師
- c. 知訥
- d. 普照思想研究院
- e. 松廣寺
- f. 頓悟漸修
- g. 圭峰宗密
- h. 李通玄
- i. 南禪
- j. 頓悟頓修
- k. 法集別行錄節要并私記
- l. 六祖法寶壇經
- m. 臨齊宗
- n. 曹溪宗
- o. 禪門正路