

SHIKOKU HENRO

*A study of Japanese and western pilgrims
on the Shikoku Eighty-Eight Sacred Places Pilgrimage*

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Abstract

This is a comparative study of Japanese and western pilgrims who performed the Shikoku Eighty-Eight Sacred Places Pilgrimage, on the island of Shikoku, in western Japan. The data was collected in the field on a four-page, thirty-five point questionnaire by two sociologists from Tokyo's Waseda University in 1996, and on a two-page, ten-point questionnaire by myself in 2000 and early 2001. The western pilgrims were contacted by e-mail and asked the basic questions from my survey; they responded during the summer of 2001. Some significant differences between the Japanese and western pilgrims were found, both in the age of the pilgrims, as well as in the motives, attitudes, experiences and performance methods of both groups. This thesis attempts to demonstrate that these differences are due to the different concepts of pilgrimage in both cultures, as well as to the different attitudes to religion and the idea of the sacred in Japan and the west.

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Introduction

Pilgrimage is an almost universal phenomenon of ancient origin, found in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, as well as ‘among peoples classed by anthropologists as “tribal”,’ (Turner and Turner, 1978:1). There are also secular pilgrimages, such as to Elvis Presley’s Graceland, or to European war graves (see Reader and Walter, 1993); and the word is often used as a metaphor for life itself. This dissertation is a study of one pilgrimage in Japan, and the people who perform it. As well as analyzing surveys of Japanese pilgrims, responses from a number of westerners involved in the research were also studied. This thesis will ask whether the concept of pilgrimage is the same in Japan and the west. Through comparing and contrasting the motives, impressions and performance methods of Japanese and western pilgrims, it will attempt to demonstrate that there is a significant difference in the idea of pilgrimage in the two cultures, and consider the reasons for this.

The original idea for this thesis grew out of conversations at temples and *minshuku* (family-run accommodation) and on the road in the spring and autumn of 1999; I was working in Tokushima city and, during vacations and long weekends, exploring the Shikoku Eighty-Eight Temples Pilgrimage route. I met several people from Tokyo and Nagoya – a few devout Buddhists, but mostly professing no religion – who were coming to Shikoku every year to spend their brief holidays walking sections of the pilgrimage. I became curious about the role of the pilgrimage in today’s Japan, and decided to investigate the motives and methods of contemporary pilgrims.

In 1996, Professors Osada Kōichi and Sakata Masaaki, of the Sociology Department of Waseda University, undertook a major study, interviewing a total of 1,237 pilgrims. While I was aware of this, I was unable to obtain a copy of their report before I had to leave Japan. (I later found we had asked identical questions, but their survey was much longer and more detailed). I conducted my own field research in Kōchi prefecture from late March to early April 2000, as well as at Kōyasan and around Tokushima city in February and March 2001. I interviewed a total of 161

pilgrims but, due to time constraints and other commitments, my 2001 research was carried out on weekends and public holidays, when many people are just out for the day, so statements about distances and plans may not be strictly representative. It thus began as a comparative study between Waseda's respondents and my own, to see if I could detect any significant differences over five years.¹

After comparing my questionnaire results to Waseda's, I went through the free comments pilgrims had added to both surveys, and decided to focus on pilgrims' individual experiences, as a response to Barbara Aziz's plea for researchers to listen to what pilgrims actually say. I then discovered a way to add another dimension to this research: I contacted a number of non-Japanese people who had performed the pilgrimage who, by allowing their e-mail addresses to be listed on a web site, had indicated a willingness to provide information to prospective pilgrims. Fifteen responded and, although it was a statistically very small sample, I decided to compare their comments with my existing respondents, to see how far their attitudes and experiences reflected or differed from those of the Japanese pilgrims. As I explored their responses a new theme emerged, which has become the final topic of the research, as indicated above. This somewhat convoluted gestation may have influenced the structure of the final product.

Current research and literature

Pilgrimage studies involve a number of disciplines, including theology, sociology, anthropology, history and geography. The ideas of academics from different backgrounds often conflict: historians study details of individual pilgrimages over time and resist the generalizing approach of anthropologists who, in their turn, may deny the notion of sacred space described by geographers. (See Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 196-208). Some anthropologists see pilgrimage entirely in terms of conflict, as in the title of Eade and Sallnow's work, *Contesting the Sacred: The anthropology of*

¹ With regard to research methods, it can be argued that surveys are not really random; participants self-select by deciding to fill out the form. As a naturally shy person, I sometimes had to force myself to talk to strangers, and to time my approach so as not to intrude on their private worship was sometimes difficult. The most interesting-looking prospects often refused to comply. There were some I could not bring myself to ask, such as the girl who struggled out of her wheelchair and dragged herself up the steps to the Daishidō at Temple 8, or the sad-faced pilgrim sitting begging beside the *henro michi* near Temple 24.

Christian pilgrimage. Compared to the multiplicity of studies of Christian pilgrimage, the literature in English on pilgrimage in Japan is relatively sparse, perhaps because it does not conform to the theory that ‘sacred travel *outside* one’s home culture is . . . a defining characteristic of the way pilgrimage has developed in the world religions.’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 206).

The most well-known book in English on the Shikoku pilgrimage is Oliver Statler’s *Japanese Pilgrimage* (1983), which combines fictional accounts of the historical origins with recollections of the author’s own experiences; while being an excellent read, and the inspiration for many western pilgrims, it cannot be considered an academic study. The two people who have published most frequently in English on the Shikoku pilgrimage over a number of years are Ian Reader, a scholar of Religious Studies who works primarily on Japan, and Hiroshi Tanaka Shimazaki, a cultural geographer. In the past few years, more scholars have begun to study Japanese pilgrimage, and the Fall 1997 special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* contained articles by several younger writers, some still graduate students, such as Nathalie Kouamé. Since reading Japanese is still a very slow process for me, I have not been able to access Maeda Takashi’s *Junrei no shakaigaku* (1971) or works by Kondō Yoshihiro. However, I have read Japanese articles by Hoshino Eiki and Satō Hisamitsu, as well as a number of Hoshino’s works translated into English.

The tradition of pilgrimage

Defined as ‘the journey to a distant sacred goal’ (Barber, 1991:1), pilgrimage in Europe and the Americas is usually linear; in Asia, however, it may also involve circular motion: either circumambulating the sacred space – as at the sacred shrine of the Ka’aba in Mecca, or in the Hindu practice of circumambulating stupas, temples or burial pyres; or the entire pilgrimage route may be a circle – as in the subject of this study: the Eighty-Eight Sacred Places Pilgrimage on the island of Shikoku, Japan.

While varying across cultures and continents, there are aspects of pilgrimage common to all the major religions. In mediaeval Europe the Catholic church sometimes imposed pilgrimage as a penance, but generally – with the exception of

the Islamic *hajj* to Mecca, which every Muslim is enjoined to perform once in his or her lifetime – pilgrimage is a voluntary undertaking. Barber sees pilgrimage as ‘a phenomenon with its own culture, which crosses religious boundaries,’ and observes that there is:

a historical progression in all religions, from pilgrimage as the preserve of the influential or exceptionally determined . . . to pilgrimage as a mass movement, generated and sustained by the needs of the ordinary believer. (Barber, 1991:132)

Pilgrimage routes – like those that crossed Europe to Rome, Venice (and thence by sea to Jerusalem), or over the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela – laid the foundations for networks of trade and communications between nations. The first travellers were pilgrims, and the intermingling of peoples as they passed through foreign lands, led to the introduction of new ideas and skills; while markets and inns established to serve pilgrim traffic contributed to the development of urban centers.

Turner and Turner (1978) call pilgrimage a ‘liminoid phenomenon,’ similar to rites of passage in tribal cultures, but in more complex societies usually ‘generated by the voluntary activity of individuals during their free time.’ (Turner and Turner, 1978:231). Pilgrims step outside the structure of their everyday lives and enter a situation where conventional relationships and hierarchy are suspended or inverted. They encounter *communitas*: ‘a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship,’ (Turner and Turner, 1978:250). Pilgrims frequently wear special clothing or carry certain objects that identify their role and mark them as different from other travellers. The staff is probably the most universal (and most practical) item and has a special significance in Shikoku. In many religions, giving to pilgrims is thought to earn merit for the donor, and pilgrims may benefit from acts of kindness or hospitality from people whose territory they pass through. On some pilgrimage routes, such as the *camino* to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, special refuges offer free accommodation to walking pilgrims. There are associations that provide information to prospective pilgrims, and confraternities of former pilgrims. Some find the pilgrimage experience addictive – perhaps due to its liminal quality – and return again and again.

Of course, pilgrimage is not the only liminoid phenomenon: tourism and pilgrimage have much in common. As Urry has pointed out, ‘in much tourism everyday obligations are suspended or inverted’ (Urry, 1990:10), while Graburn explains:

Because the touristic journey lies in the nonordinary sphere of existence, the goal is symbolically sacred and morally on a higher plane than the regards of the ordinary workaday world. (Graburn, 1978:24).

In his analysis of Tokugawa era guide books to the Saikoku pilgrimage, Foard reviews the elements of itinerary: ‘(1) the places to be visited, (2) the legends that gave these places meaning, and (3) the behavior required at each place’ (Foard, 1982:242), compared to lists which, while also describing ‘places . . . narratives . . . and . . . behavior associated with those places’ (p. 241) are options to be selected according to the individual’s interest. When he arrives at the present, he concedes:

True, it is difficult to distinguish clearly tourism from pilgrimage, but one way might be to say that tourism represents the triumph of list over itinerary . . . Moreover . . . the explicitly cultural and historic elements come to the fore: an image of Kannon is now an example of late Tempyō sculpture. (Foard, 1982:248).

Pilgrimage has always included the profane as well as the sacred and some actions of contemporary pilgrims in many ways resemble those of tourists, such as bringing back souvenirs. As Coleman and Elsner point out:

A pilgrimage is not just a journey; it also involves the confrontation of travellers with rituals, holy objects and sacred architecture . . . One important aspect of the objects of pilgrimage – relics, talismans and amulets – is that they help to reconstruct the sacred journey in the imagination. (Coleman and Elsner, 1995:6).

Pilgrimage destinations contribute to the economy in the same way as tourist attractions, a fact which local authorities are well aware of, and eager to exploit.

Chapter One: The Shikoku Pilgrimage

The English words ‘pilgrim’ and ‘pilgrimage’ have their roots in the Latin words ‘*peregrinus*,’ meaning ‘foreigner’, or ‘stranger,’ and ‘*peregre*,’ abroad – from *per*, through, and *ager*, field. (*Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, 1983:948, 971). The implication therefore, is of a stranger passing through. In Japanese, however, there are over a dozen terms referring to pilgrimage and visits to sacred sites, illustrating the diversity, complexity, and prevalence of pilgrimage in Japan.

The first Japanese pilgrims were monks journeying to China to seek wisdom from the source of their faith (Buddhism having reached Japan in its Chinese, rather than its original Indian manifestation). However, it is within Japan itself that pilgrimage ‘has been a dominant religious activity since . . . the early Heian period’ (Reader and Swanson, 1997:225), when retired emperors began making visits to sacred sites outside Kyōto; in the tenth and eleventh centuries this custom spread to the aristocracy. In the Tokugawa era (1603–1868), due mainly to improvements in the economic situation of farmers, pilgrimage changed from an activity of the elite to an enterprise of the masses. In the *okage-mairi* of 1705 – a large-scale pilgrimage to the Grand Shrines of Ise – ‘as many as 3,620,000 individuals ultimately joined in, coming from as far away as Edo and Hiroshima.’ (Davis, 1992:49). People of all classes came together – some left their work places without asking permission – swept along by rumors of amulets falling from the sky, and aided by ‘the largesse of almsgivers who supported indigent pilgrims.’ (Davis, 1992:48). While some have seen these cyclical movements as signs of mass hysteria or rebellion, Davis argues that, ‘far from aiming at insurrection, the *okage-mairi* and *nuke-mairi* – like the Shinto festival – had as their purpose the magicoreligious restoration of productive energy.’ (Davis, 1992:77). Japanese pilgrimage can be seen, therefore, as fulfilling the function of renewal.

Foard believes pilgrimage contributed to a ‘vision of national *communitas*’: the bonds all Japanese feel with all other Japanese regardless of their place in Japanese social structure. These bonds . . . also come to the fore in those stages of the life and annual cycles that became in the Tokugawa fixed, nationwide rituals

in which all Japanese participated. Thus pilgrimage impressed on the pilgrim that he belonged to a nation: he was Japanese and the Japanese tradition was his. (Foard, 1982:247).

He sees this *communitas* also evident in modern high school trips, noting their obvious ‘initiatory overtones’ as well as their ‘antistructural rambunctiousness’ and comments:

These students are not, of course, being brought to revere Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and kami, but to make the Japanese tradition their own. (Foard, 1982:248)

Thus, in contrast to the idea of foreigners passing through, for Japanese people, pilgrimage can be an encounter with their own national history and identity.

Kitagawa has identified three types of pilgrimage in Japan:

(1) the pilgrimage to the sacred mountain; (2) the pilgrimage to temples and shrines, based on faith in the divinities enshrined in those sanctuaries; and (3) the pilgrimage to sacred places based on faith in certain charismatic holy men who are believed to have hallowed those places by their visits. (Kitagawa, 1987:128).

The Shikoku Eighty-Eight Sacred Places Pilgrimage is the most famous of the third type of pilgrimage. It is most frequently referred to as *henro* – a term specific to this pilgrimage – or *meguri*, which literally means ‘to go round,’ but ‘is most widely used in cases where the sites on a pilgrimage route are not united by their dedication to a single figure of worship,’ (Reader and Swanson, 1997:233). Other terms sometimes used for this pilgrimage are *junrei*, *reijō* or *junpai*. (Reader and Swanson, 1997:237).

The centre of the island of Shikoku is mountainous, and the temples are located mostly around the perimeter, although some are at or near the summit of mountains. The route is about 1,200 kilometres, if just the eighty-eight numbered temples are visited, but there are also about twenty *bangai*, unnumbered temples, some of which are considered obligatory by the more devout pilgrims. If all these are also visited, the distance is about 1,500 kilometres, which would take about two months on foot (just the eighty-eight can be walked in around six weeks). The numbering system is designed for travellers coming from the east. Temple 1 is located in Naruto city (formerly Muya), the port at which pilgrims would have disembarked after taking a ferry from Wakayama (the port closest to Kōyasan). The route is clockwise round the island, but some pilgrims travel anti-clockwise (*gyaku-uchi*), which is considered more meritorious as the mountain paths are thought to be steeper (and the signs are

all designed for those travelling clockwise, so it is easier to get lost). In fact, because it is a circle, there are no rules about where one begins and traditionally, pilgrims began at whichever temple was nearest their home, or where their ferry docked. For those unable to travel to Shikoku, there are replicas of the pilgrimage circuit, on a much smaller scale, at many locations elsewhere in the country.

Kōbō Daishi: the central figure

Among the ‘charismatic holy men’ referred to by Kitagawa in his third category of Japanese pilgrimage (1987:128), probably none is more famous than the monk Kūkai – better known by his posthumous title, Kōbō Daishi – literally ‘the great teacher who spread the law [of Buddhism]’ (Reader, 1993a:113). Founder of the Shingon sect of esoteric Buddhism, he is revered by Japanese of all faiths for his scholarly, artistic, humanitarian and technological prowess, and has acquired an almost epic stature in Japanese folklore. He was born into a prosperous family named Saeki in 774, near the present-day town of Zentsū-ji in what is now Kagawa prefecture. At the age of fourteen, he was sent to the new capital at Nagaoka to study, first with his maternal uncle, then (from 791) at the university, where training was directed towards entering government service. This was a turbulent period in the capital (which was moved again, to what is now Kyōto, in 794) and a scandal involving a Saeki relative cast doubt on his future prospects. He had also developed an interest in Buddhism; deciding to become a monk, he abandoned his studies and began a period of wandering in the mountains, searching for the ultimate truth. Later, in his *Sangō-shiiki*, he described this time, when he performed austerities – enduring cold, hunger and thirst, while chanting the mantra of Kokuzō Bosatsu (Morning Star Meditation) a million times – at several places in Shikoku: notably Mt. Tairyū (in present day Tokushima prefecture, site of Temple 21) and Cape Muroto (southeast Kōchi prefecture, site of Temple 24).

This may be the only written evidence positively linking him to temples of the pilgrimage which tens of thousands annually undertake in his name, yet he figures in foundation legends (*engi*) of almost half the temples on the circuit – he is reputed to have carved many of the principal images – while others have stories of miraculous

events that occurred when he visited. In fact, little is known about his life between 797 and 804, so he could have been in Shikoku during those years. In 804, at the age of thirty-one, he was chosen to travel to China as a student monk. At Ch'ang An (now Hsian), there was an Indian named Prajña (Eliot, 1969:236), with whom he studied Sanskrit before meeting Hui-kuo, the patriarch of esoteric Buddhism, who 'recognised immediately that Kūkai was the person to succeed him.' (Awa 88, 1993:16). He proved himself so adept that within three months he had mastered all the secret knowledge passed on by the patriarch. When Hui-kuo died in 806, Kūkai returned to Japan to begin his mission of introducing the new teachings to his countrymen.

The rest of his life was spent mostly in Kyōto, where he became head priest of Tō-ji (making it the chief temple of the Shingon sect) and at Kōyasan, the monastic centre he founded in the mountains south of Nara. He was active with administrative duties, and wrote extensively on the principles of Shingon – the only sect to claim one can achieve enlightenment in this lifetime. The quality of his calligraphy was unsurpassed and, besides bringing Buddhist art from China, he is also reputed to have produced many paintings and sculptures himself. However, he was not only an artist: he also organised the reconstruction of a reservoir (Mannō no Ike) in his home province in 821, demonstrating a knowledge of engineering, and in 828, he established the first school to provide an education for common people (near Tō-ji). The hiragana syllabic script has also been claimed as his invention.

He died at Kōyasan in 835, at the age of sixty-two. When his followers opened the tomb, in 921, to put in the Emperor's decree bestowing his posthumous title, they reported that his knee was warm; from this came the belief that he is not dead, but sitting in eternal meditation. This story increased his fame and led to the idea of *O-Daishi-sama* descending from the mountains to become a perpetual wanderer, aiding pilgrims, who might meet him on any road in Japan. (Reader, 1993a:114). A great cemetery grew up around his mausoleum, Okunoin, since many people wanted to be associated in death with such an illustrious figure. Pilgrims visit his tomb to pay their respects before and/or after completing the pilgrimage.

The origins of the Shikoku pilgrimage

Although one tradition claims Kūkai founded the pilgrimage in 815, this is highly unlikely, since he would have been far too busy in the capital to have undertaken such a long journey that year. The most well-known legend relating to its early history concerns Emon Saburō, a rich and miserly man who refused to help a ragged monk who came begging at his door. When all his children died on eight successive days, he realised the monk must have been Kōbō Daishi and, giving away all his possessions, he set off around the island to ask his forgiveness. He is supposed to have gone round clockwise twenty times, then reversed direction in hopes of a better chance of meeting the saint. He collapsed on a mountain path and as he lay dying, Kōbō Daishi appeared and forgave him. Some claim Emon was the first pilgrim, although his can be seen as a cautionary tale, warning people to be generous to travellers in need.

Other theories refer to priests travelling around the coast, or to wandering holy men coming down from Kōyasan to visit places associated with Kōbō Daishi's life. Hoshino states that the pilgrimage 'came into existence . . . during the Muromachi period (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries).' (Hoshino, 1997:276). Tanaka saw a scribbled message from 1528 at Kokubun-ji (80) that mentioned five pilgrims travelling together, indicating that group pilgrimages might have begun by then. (Tanaka, 1975:48). Another idea is that the south coast of Shikoku 'was considered close to Fudaraku Jōdo or the "Pure Land" which was believed to lie to the south beyond the sea' (Tanaka, 1975:218), making it a popular destination for pilgrimage. The term *henro* is not used for any other pilgrimage; Tanaka suggests that '*hen*' usually refers to going around, but the kanji can be translated as 'fringe,' so perhaps 'there is a direct relationship between the present pilgrimage and the early practice of travelling around the fringe of the island.' (Tanaka, 1975:219). Probably the exact origins will never be known.

There is no agreement either about the number eighty-eight. Theories include: the number of worldly desires; the sum of the unlucky years (*yakudoshi*) for men (42), women (33) and children (13); or the kanji for eight, ten and eight superimposed

making the kanji for rice (*kome*). It is not known when the sequential numbering was established; a journal by Kōyasan priest Jakuhon, published in 1689, suggests that Zentsū-ji (75), as Kōbō Daishi's birthplace, should be visited first. However, the current order is referred to as early as 1715. (Tanaka, 1975:202). The temples are irregularly spaced around the island. At the two extremes: Temples 68 and 69 in Kan-on-ji (Kagawa prefecture) share the same site, while Temples 37 and 38 in Kōchi prefecture are almost eighty-seven kilometres apart – a three-day walk.

In the Tokugawa era, travel was strictly controlled by the authorities and pilgrims had to obtain passports from their local temple before setting out on their journey. The duration of the pilgrimage was also controlled; for example, 'they had to cover the 400 kilometres of . . . [Tosa] province within thirty days' and 'it was strictly forbidden to stop at the same locality for more than one night' (Kouamé, 1997: 416). It appears 'that the pilgrimage sometimes provided a cover for fugitives. As a result the pilgrimage itself came under suspicion,' (LaFleur, 1979:273-4). However, this repression apparently increased its attraction, and groups formed to help pilgrims date from this time. LaFleur refers to Turner's theory that:

social relationships can operate on . . . two different modalities: the one consisting of structure, order and hierarchy; and the other characterised by anti-structure, lack of order and *communitas*. (LaFleur, 1979:274)

Despite the restrictions and regulations imposed by those concerned with keeping order (structure), local people came forward to offer help and hospitality: 'a perfect expression of a situation in which not only hierarchical social relationships but also usual economic procedures are in abeyance.' (LaFleur, 1979:275).

Symbolism in the Shikoku pilgrimage

There are a number of aspects of the pilgrimage which are rich in symbolism – particularly its association with death. The clothing worn and items carried by a pilgrim indicate that he or she is 'dead to the world' (Reader, 1993a:107); in fact, the word Shikoku (four provinces) when written with different kanji, can be read as 'the country of death.' The short white pilgrim's robe (*hakui* or *oizuru*) represents a shroud (white being the colour of death in Japan), and is tied left over right, as for a corpse; the conical bamboo hat (*kasa*) is symbolic of a coffin, and the pilgrim staff

(*kongōtsue*) represents a grave stone. In the past, when pilgrims (particularly sick and destitute ones) did die on the mountain paths, they were buried where they fell, with the staff marking the spot. The staff also represents Kōbō Daishi; it must be treated with respect, and washed as soon as the pilgrim arrives at a lodging for the night. On it are inscribed the words *dogyō ninin*, ‘two people one practice’ (Reader, 1993a:111), implying that the pilgrim walks always accompanied by the Daishi. These kanji may also be seen on signs tied to trees on steep paths, to encourage and remind pilgrims that they are not alone. The staff must also be carried over bridges, since legend says that one night, when no-one would give him lodging, Kōbō Daishi had to pass a night under a bridge; it was so cold and uncomfortable that it felt like ten nights. (Tōyoga-hashī, Ten Night Bridge, in Ehime, is now the site of a *bangai*). Thus the pilgrim must not tap the ground with the staff while crossing a bridge, since the Daishi might be sleeping underneath.

Among other items carried, the *osamefuda* and the *nōkyōchō* have acquired special significance. The former is a slip of paper on which the pilgrim writes his or her name and address and any prayers or wishes. The colour of the paper differs according to the number of times the pilgrim has completed the circuit: white for the first six times, red for the seventh to twentieth, silver for the twenty first to forty-ninth, and gold for fifty or more. One of these papers is deposited in a box in front of both the main hall and the Daishi hall at each temple. An *osamefuda* should be given in return for gifts or acts of kindness – *settai* (see below). The recipient may collect these, considering them a way of participating in the pilgrimage vicariously. They were also considered to have great spiritual powers, and people sometimes hung them in their home, to ‘act as a protective amulet’ (Moreton, 2001:30). The *nōkyōchō* is a book with a page for each numbered temple, which the pilgrim presents at the *nōkyōjo* where, for a fee (currently 300 yen) the priest or a temple employee stamps the temple seals then, with a brush, writes the names of the temple and its principal image (*honzon*) in both Japanese and Sanskrit. Pilgrims may also carry a scroll (*akejiku*) or *hakui* for the same purpose. The completed scroll will usually be placed in the *tokonoma* (alcove in the tatami room), while the *hakui* may be worn for cremation. Statler recalls his feelings of panic and failure when asked to visit a sick

child. He was not aware that he should have waved his *nōkyōchō* over her since, by containing the stamps and calligraphy of the temples, it is thought to have healing power. (Statler, 1983:190-193.)

The word *settai* has a special meaning in Shikoku, signifying particular acts of kindness towards *henro* (pilgrims). The practice of helping pilgrims was once widespread, but has mostly died out on other pilgrimage routes. Perhaps Shikoku's remoteness and fewer commercial services contributed to its persistence, or maybe it is that faith in Kōbō Daishi, as a potential pilgrim in disguise, remains strong. The number of folk tales with themes of punishment for cruelty to pilgrims, or conversely, reward for treating them charitably, may also have been a factor: the idea of *karma*. Nowadays the help is usually in the form of money, drinks or food (particularly seasonal fruits); sometimes it takes the form of service, such as the offer of a ride, and there are still a few *zenkonyado* – free lodgings for walking *henro*. *Settai* may have made it possible for the large numbers of poor or sick people to undertake the pilgrimage – some of whom were lepers driven from their communities. Some became professional pilgrims, since they had no other place to go. Today there still exist charity groups (*settaikō*) who travel to Shikoku every spring and hand out small gifts to pilgrims.

Nowadays, with the majority of Japanese living in cities, the island of Shikoku itself has acquired significance as *kokoro no furusato* – spiritual homeland – a slogan used frequently in promotional material by bus companies involved in the pilgrimage. The implication is that, although city dwellers, the Japanese really belong amidst nature. Reader sees 'a deeply nostalgic element in the continuing popularity of pilgrimage in Japan' (Reader, 1987b:291), particularly the wearing of white clothing. It is a 'search for spiritual roots' (Reader, 1987b:292) in a highly industrialised society. However it is a romanticised longing for the past: 'one does not find pilgrims returning to the actual *form* of the pilgrimage as it was in earlier times' (Reader, 1987b:293) – in fact, the pilgrims who dress the most scrupulously in white from top to toe are almost certain to be travelling by luxury air-conditioned bus or taxi and staying in comfortable hotels.

Shimazaki has described the concept of ‘Shikoku as a Buddhist dōjō, or holy place of learning and practicing.’ (Shimazaki, 1997:276). Each prefecture has its own symbolism within the pilgrimage circuit. The modern prefectures, Tokushima, Kōchi, Ehime and Kagawa, were previously known as Awa, Tosa, Iyo and Sanuki.

Awa stands for *hosshin* (awakening the Buddha mind), Tosa for *shugyō*, (the practice of the austerities required to attain awareness), Iyo for *bodai* (opening of enlightenment) and Sanuki for *nehan* (full, absolute enlightenment). (Reader, 1996:271)

This idea may have contributed to, or grown out, of the practice of *ikkoku-mairi*, pilgrimage to one prefecture. Those unable to travel the whole route in one trip can perform one section at a time and gain spiritual merit, until all four prefectures have been visited and the pilgrimage is complete.

Performing the pilgrimage also used to symbolise a rite of passage, in local pilgrimages primarily performed by Shikoku residents: for example, in Tokushima prefecture, the local pilgrimage from Temple 1 to 17; up to the outbreak of World War Two ‘it was the custom . . . for youths of both sexes to do . . . [it] . . . prior to becoming eligible for marriage.’ (Reader, 1993a:123). Another local pilgrimage is to the first ten temples; these all used to be visited by pilgrims in one day’s walk – a distance of almost thirty kilometres. (Awa 88, 1993:73). A third is between Temples 13 and 17, a distance of less than eight kilometres. Local pilgrimages in the other prefectures are: in Kōchi, the temples surrounding Kōchi city, (28 to 34, or 28 to 36); in Ehime, the eight temples (46 to 53) in Matsuyama city, and the five (54 to 58) in and around Imabari city; in Kagawa, Temples 71 to 77 in and around Kōbō Daishi’s birthplace of Zentsūji. (Shimazaki, 1997:280).

Pilgrimage seasons

Haru kara shoka no Shikoku ji wa, hachijū hachi ka sho reijō wo meguru sanya ni suzu no oto ga wataru. (From spring to early summer, the mountains paths and plains of Shikoku echo to the sound of pilgrims’ bells). (*Asahi Shinbun*, 1990.2.3, quoted by Satō, 1990:30)

In the 1890s, Lafcadio Hearn wrote: ‘during that season when the growing rice needs least attention hundreds of thousands of the poorest [farmers] go on pilgrimages.’ (Hearn, 1927:156-7). The tradition of springtime pilgrimage continues today, with April bringing the most pilgrims, followed by March then May. (Satō, 1990:42-3).

Autumn pilgrimage has also become popular recently – it is generally much drier than, certainly making walking more pleasant – but the numbers are well below the spring months.² This may be related to the Japanese love of cherry blossom time; a walking pilgrim I surveyed in March, on his way back to Ryōzen-ji (1), referred to the crowds of bus pilgrims scornfully as ‘*hana henro*’ (flower pilgrims).

Performing the pilgrimage: past and present

From its origins until the outbreak of the Second World War, the pilgrimage was always performed on foot. Immediately after the war, there were very few pilgrims, people being more concerned with matters of survival. Bus tours began in the nineteen-fifties, initiating an era of group travel in what, for those outside Shikoku, had previously been primarily an individual practice. (Reader, 1987a:138). In the nineteen-sixties, with increasing car ownership due to the improved economy, people began to travel by private car. Since 1998, there has even been the additional option of performing the pilgrimage by helicopter – chanting sutras while hovering over the temples (Seki, 1999:77). A minority still walk it in the traditional way – some sleeping outside.

More detailed information on contemporary travel methods will be found in Chapter Four. Next, the profiles of the Japanese pilgrims surveyed by Waseda and myself will be compared with those of the westerners who participated in this research.

² A table of average numbers of pilgrims over an eleven-year period shows 6,092 in April, 5,408 in March and 5,270 in May. The other peak months are: October, 4,042; September, 3,871; and November, 2,805. Figures for other months were: June, 2,368; August, 2,067; July, 1,991; February, 1,356; December, 1,342; and January, 941. (Satō, 1990:42)

Chapter Two: The Pilgrims

Because of the variety of ways in which to participate, it is difficult to assess accurately the number of people who annually undertake the Shikoku pilgrimage: the temples optimistically suggest as many as 100,000; bus companies claim to carry around 60,000 (Reader, 1993a:133); while statistics gathered at an Ehime temple in 1988 (probably the most credible data, by avoiding duplications) reported 46,000 – and showed a steady annual increase from the 19,000 counted in 1978 (Satō, 1990:34). This is probably because ‘better communications and greater economic wealth have enabled people to travel more’ (Reader, 1987a:140). Japan’s economic success has come at a price – both to the people whose lives have been consumed by work, and to the environment that has become increasingly polluted. Thus the relatively unspoiled Shikoku countryside is one attraction: rural Japan, while sometimes regarded as backward, is also viewed with nostalgia. With improved travel, Reader explains:

[I]t is now possible to leave a city-based lifestyle, don the pilgrims garb, do a pilgrimage and, in so doing, feel both a return to spiritual roots and an accompanying sense of renewal, but still be able to return to the aforementioned city life in a matter of days. (Reader, 1987a:140).

Since the above figures were collected in 1988, numbers have risen more dramatically with the ending of Shikoku’s physical isolation; however, I have not been able to access any reliable data. The first bridge (from Okayama to Kagawa prefecture) was opened in 1989, with two more (connecting Tokushima to Hyōgo and Ehime to Hiroshima prefectures) completed in 1998 and 1999 respectively. It is since 1998 that the increase has been reported, probably because the Akashi Kaikyō Bridge opened Shikoku to easy access from Osaka. These communication links have provided an important boost to the local economies, and Shikoku tourist authorities, keen to capitalise on access to a wider market, issue brochures that prominently display photos of white-clothed pilgrims in scenic surroundings, and list the numbered temples in their areas. NHK (the national television network) regularly runs programmes on the pilgrimage, which also help to promote interest.

Who goes on the pilgrimage?

This chapter will introduce some basic statistics about the pilgrims, their companions, and their religious or spiritual affiliations. Succeeding chapters will report on their motives and impressions, as well as the manner in which they perform the pilgrimage. There will of necessity be some overlap between these; in fact, with my own research I categorised the results according to the method of travel chosen. I found the most homogeneity among bus pilgrims and the most diversity among walkers.

The first impression on encountering a group of pilgrims would be that there are very few young people: three-quarters are over the age of fifty. Pilgrims on bus tours tend to be older – mostly in their sixties and seventies – while those travelling by car are mostly in their fifties and sixties. Not surprisingly, walking pilgrims who intend to complete the whole route at one time (*tōshi-uchi*) are younger than those who plan to walk it in sections (*kugiri-uchi*), the former being mostly in their fifties (although I met one over seventy). There are about equal numbers of males and females, but twice as many women travel on tours in large-size buses as do men. Waseda's figures showed three times as many of the men walking as women – twenty-four percent to eight percent (Waseda daigaku dokūkan kenkyūkai³, 1997:55, 59). However, twenty-eight percent of the men I surveyed were walking, and eighteen percent of the women⁴.

Travelling companions in my survey also varied by mode of transport: bus pilgrims were more often travelling with friends, while those in cars were usually with their spouses (this is presumably due to the bus pilgrims being mostly older women, many of whom are probably widows). According to Reader, 'there has been a growing trend towards family groups of parents and children doing the pilgrimage by car.' (Reader, 1993a:108). However, I saw very few nuclear families; of those I surveyed almost half were just with a spouse, twenty-two percent were with friends, and of the twenty-one percent with relatives, these were most often a mother, sister or grandchildren. Walking pilgrims are the most likely to be travelling alone: almost sixty percent of them. Friends are their most frequent companions – for twenty-two

³ To save space, hereafter referred to as Waseda.

⁴ All but one of the women I surveyed were walking it in sections.

percent. None of the walkers I surveyed was travelling with family members other than a spouse – eleven percent. The Waseda survey showed sixteen percent travelling with *kōnakama* – fellow members of pilgrim clubs. They also asked about guides (*sendatsu*): forty percent indicated they were travelling with a guide, forty-one percent without (and seven percent were guides). Other companions included people met on the road or on the bus (Waseda, 1997:67).

Although not encountered during my field research, there are pilgrims who are accompanied by animals. In May 1999, on a *henro michi* (pilgrim path) in Ehime, I met a young pilgrim couple with a dog that was wearing boots, and a recent issue of *Shikoku Henro*, the magazine for walking pilgrims, ran a feature on another couple walking with a dog (Kitano, 2001:21-23). A journalist with NHK Tokushima television news (29 March 2000) interviewed a pilgrim at Yakuō-ji (23) travelling on horseback. (I later heard that he had a support vehicle, and wasn't riding all the way).

Where do the pilgrims come from? Again, the answers seem to vary depending on how they are travelling. Almost three-quarters of the bus pilgrims in my survey were from the Kinki region – forty-six percent of them from Osaka prefecture. Other regions represented were: Shikoku (sixteen percent), Chūgoku (ten percent), and one person from Kantō (Tokyo)⁵. Car pilgrims tend to be more local: over sixty percent of them were from Shikoku, with just over twenty percent from Kinki (almost half of those from Osaka). They also came from Chūgoku (nine percent), and a few each from Tōkai, Chūbu and Kyūshū. Walkers came from nine regions: Kinki provided thirty-six percent, Kantō twenty-two percent, Shikoku nineteen percent, and one or two people each came from Chūbu, Chūgoku, Tōkai, Kyūshū and Hokkaidō. This might indicate that the challenge of walking the route is an attraction for people throughout the country, whereas the bus companies primarily draw on the closest area with a large population. I suspect the predominance of local people travelling by car relates to their way of doing the route in sections on short trips, as will be seen in Chapter Four.

⁵ She was probably the only member of her bus tour who answered the questionnaire.

Religion

Before considering the religious affiliation of the pilgrims, it is necessary to be aware of the nature of religion as it is practised in Japan. In Europe and North America, at least since the industrial revolution, there has been a clear separation of sacred and secular but, as Davis observes, Japan is ‘a culture in which the sacred and profane are not understood as categorical opposites.’ (Davis, 199:246). It may appear to be a very secular nation – inasmuch as the Japanese consistently score low on international surveys on religious beliefs – but Davis explains:

While belief naturally seems to be an appropriate index of religiousness to the westerner . . . by itself it tells us only part of the story. The reason for this is that religious praxis (*shugyō*) and feelings (*kimochi*) and not belief per se form the core of Japanese religion. (Davis, 1992:236).

Ritual is not confined to the religious arena, but pervades every aspect of society, which is fundamentally concerned with the preservation of ‘harmonious social behaviour and group loyalty’ (Fitzgerald, 1993:320). Yanagawa (quoted by Fitzgerald) states that ‘people often belong to religious organisations without any strong sense of the particular creed with which the organisation is affiliated’ (Fitzgerald, 1993:320). On the other hand Davis, commenting on a study by Basabe, stresses that ‘those calling themselves “unbelievers” or “indifferent to” religion *continue to do religious things.*’ [italics in original] (Davis, 1992:235).

The *danka* system of households registered with a local Buddhist temple (a requirement and means of control in the Tokugawa era) was officially abolished in the Meiji era, but appears to persist to the extent that families turn to that temple in times of need – such as the death of a family member. When confronted with the question on my survey about their faith, couples would often consult each other as to which was their family sect; one woman marked the sect to which her family was affiliated, then said she personally was interested in a different one (some indicated this on the form). Another woman told me which sect she had been born into and which she had joined on marriage. Thus, ticking a certain sect on a questionnaire does not necessarily indicate strong feelings for or knowledge of the doctrines or practice of that sect. Although eighty of the temples belong to the Shingon sect, the

pilgrimage has always been considered non-sectarian; the cult of Kōbō Daishi transcends sectarian boundaries.

The question on Waseda's survey asked respondents to choose the one religion they had the most faith in, or which they had a deep interest in, and included Islam and Christianity as options. (Waseda, 1997:130). Over forty percent chose Shingon; the next most frequent response was '*toku ni nai*' (no special religion), fractionally ahead of Jōdo Shin (both at almost fourteen percent). Zen had nine percent interest (Waseda did not distinguish between Rinzai and Sōtō), while Jōdo was at seven percent. None of the other eight choices had more than three percent support. (Waseda, 1997:139-40).

The results of my own question on faith, classified by mode of travel, showed bus pilgrims as almost equally Jōdo Shin (forty percent), and Shingon (thirty-eight percent). The only other sects chosen were Jōdo (at sixteen percent), and Tendai (one person). Jōdo Shin was also first among walkers, at thirty-three percent, while Shingon was at nineteen percent, just ahead of 'No religion' (seventeen percent). The next was Sōtō, at eleven percent, and a couple of people each checked Jōdo and Rinzai. Car pilgrims showed the most diversity of religious affiliation, and the most support for Shingon, at forty-four percent, with almost thirty percent Jōdo Shin.⁶ The larger numbers of car pilgrims affiliated to Shingon is probably due to more of them coming from Shikoku, 'where Shingon is still the predominant sect,' while the preponderance of Shingon affiliations in the Waseda survey could be due to the larger proportion of bus pilgrims, since the tours are 'more likely to be organised by Shingon temples (given the connection of Kōbō Daishi to Shingon).' (Reader⁷). The relatively high percentage of walkers with no religion would confirm the impression I received when I initially became interested in the pilgrimage: there are quite a number of people who have little knowledge of or interest in Buddhism, but who want to spend time walking in the Shikoku countryside.

⁶ Others were Sōtō (9 percent) and Jōdo (6 percent), while two people each indicated Nichiren, Shintō, and 'No religion,' and one Tendai. Tenrikyō and Christian were the only 'others' – one person each.

⁷ Personal e-mail communication, 7 June 2000.

Non-Japanese pilgrims

People from other countries account for only a very small minority of pilgrims. In Kōchi in the spring of 1999, a shopkeeper at Dainichi-ji (28) told me she hadn't seen any foreign pilgrims recently, but a few years previously there had been several groups of them. For the fifteen non-Japanese pilgrims who agreed to participate in my research, I added an initial question as to how and where they had first heard about the pilgrimage, and what made them decide to do it. Oliver Statler's book *Japanese Pilgrimage* was the impetus for four of them, while two others knew him personally. (One had been a student of Statler's – and walked with him on the Kōchi section of his pilgrimage – while the other went on Statler's recommendation). Two others cited brief mentions in guidebooks (*Fodors* and *Lonely Planet*) that piqued their interest. There were as many other answers as people, ranging from a book of haiku poems, to teachers and fellow students, to chance encounters with Japanese in Asia. For some it was a long process, as an Australian woman who walked it in 2001 relates:

More than twenty years ago a Japanese back packer arrived at my house in Indonesia and while watching the afternoon monsoon rains, he told me the skeleton story in Indonesian about being able to walk around an island and sleep in a temple each night. It literally translated as 'short walk long time' and absolutely resonated with me . . . For many years I either could not remember the name of the island, or find any information in a language I could read, so I just had to wait. It all came together a few months before departure when I had jet lag on a trip to the US and surfed the web on a hunch, found David's site, e-mailed and called that same day, and bingo. It all took me to Shikoku.⁸

The reasons they chose to do it are in many cases the same as their motives, so will be considered in the next chapter.

The most noticeable contrast with the Japanese pilgrims is their youth. At the time they walked it, four were in their twenties, three in their thirties, six in their forties and two in their fifties; there were twelve men and three women. Eleven travelled alone (or alone for most of the way), two with one companion, and two in small groups. Ten (all male) were from the United States⁹, while one each was from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Holland and Switzerland. Seven were living in Japan at

⁸ Personal e-mail communication, 19 August 2001.

⁹ Two each were from California, New York and Chicago, and one each from Alabama, Connecticut, Hawaii and Michigan.

the time they undertook the pilgrimage. The large number of Americans could be due to the fact that the web site from which I got the names was generated there.

With regard to religion, five said that at the time they began their pilgrimage they had no religion (but four added that they were searching, leaning towards, or were interested in: Hindu, the Quakers, Shingon or Zen Buddhism). Of the five who identified themselves as Christian, two were Roman Catholic, one Episcopalian and one each had been raised Methodist and Christian Scientist (but no longer considered it their faith); one was Jewish (but non-practising); and of the four who considered themselves Buddhist, two said 'non-sectarian' and two Zen. Ways in which the experience of walking the pilgrimage caused a change in or an expansion of religious orientation will be examined at the end of Chapter Three.

In this chapter, it has been seen that while most Japanese people perform the pilgrimage after retirement, the western pilgrims I surveyed were all much younger. Statistically, they were not noticeably more religious than the Japanese, but it is necessary to be cautious in using the word 'religion' due to its different connotations in Japanese and western culture (see p.18). Although almost half the westerners either said they had no religion, or no longer identified with the religion of their upbringing, most of them did indicate some form of spiritual search, which might have led them to undertake the pilgrimage; this could have had some influence on how they experienced it. Future chapters will compare and contrast the motives and impressions of both Japanese and foreign pilgrims, as well as the different ways they performed the pilgrimage, in an effort to determine whether the concept of pilgrimage has the same significance in Japan and the west.

Chapter Three

Pilgrim Voices: *Motives and impressions*

Barbara Aziz has argued that Turner's theory of *communitas* among pilgrims and subsequent studies of 'large groups of pilgrims' by demographers and sociologists, have led us to 'think of pilgrimage only as a massive, almost anonymous assembly.' (Aziz, 1987:247). She believes that groups of pilgrims 'are not as coherent or homogeneous as Turner's model suggested,' and that:

The quintessential mythic and personal experiences which are engendered by one's sacred journey have been forgotten by many of today's researchers. Yet that is the plane which still holds clues that will deepen our understanding of pilgrimage. (Aziz, 1987:247)

She asserts: 'People on pilgrimage . . . can articulate their aspirations, their choices, feelings and assessments of that experience,' (Aziz, 1987:260). However, Reader (1993c), while acknowledging that 'everyone had their own story to tell,' believes that 'research into what pilgrims . . . think and feel has . . . been hampered by the very fact that pilgrims tend to be rather inarticulate about their pilgrimages and motivations.' (Reader, 1993c:237). This chapter, therefore, in addition to reporting survey results, will use the pilgrims' own words, to see whose theory they conform to.

What brought them

As well as their motivation, the Waseda study asked people what had caused them to come on the pilgrimage (Waseda, 1997:128). The answers differed by gender: for men it was most frequently retirement, whereas for women it was a health problem; the next most frequent female response was the death of someone close. (Waseda, 1997:32). This might indicate that the pilgrimage is being undertaken during a period of transition, between work and retirement, or on becoming widowed. Almost twenty percent do it every year; for some the pilgrimage has become a hobby. Reader (1993a) interviewed pilgrims on a bus tour in 1990, one of whom 'stated that he had been for the last three years on Iyo pilgrimage buses, and that he would continue to

do the pilgrimage at the same time of year with them until he died.’ (Reader, 1993a:126)

When asked what drew them to the pilgrimage, westerners resident in Japan responded: ‘it seemed like such a different and interesting way to experience the country,’¹⁰ or ‘to get out of the stressful “Big City” Japan . . . and see the real Nihon for a while.’ An American on a study-abroad programme ‘had heard that some kids in previous classes had done a lot of hiking outside of Kyoto instead of going to classes,’ and decided earning credit this way was an excellent idea, since he ‘was much better at hiking than . . . at reading and writing Japanese.’ A Swiss woman who read about it in a magazine at a temple wrote: ‘The pictures immediately caught my attention and I thought, that is a road I want to walk. It looked all so perfectly Japanese.’ Those who came from overseas often mentioned Oliver Statler’s book; a Flemish student cited:

The feeling of age-old tradition harking back to the Heian period . . . The attraction of the white robes, like they use in Shugendō [mountain asceticism] . . . The mysticism of austerity, meditation, of Shingon Buddhism with its intricate rituals . . . everything I always thought of as being Japanese. [Ellipses in original]

Some were attracted to it as an exercise in austerity: ‘good religious/spiritual training/discipline,’ as a twenty-one-year-old American defined it. He added: ‘I have long enjoyed doing adventurous things on my own which help to build self-reliance.’

Motives

Barber divides pilgrims’ objectives into two groups: ‘those who went out of religious devotion, and those who went in pursuit of a solution to a secular problem’ and concludes that ‘the majority of pilgrimages probably fall into the second group.’ He then adds a third group, for those who ‘went from curiosity or a love of travel.’ (Barber, 1991:152). All of these motives can be seen in the Shikoku pilgrimage.

Memorials for ancestors

When asked for their main motivation for undertaking the pilgrimage, many Japanese cited prayers for ancestors, or the memorial for a dead person: more than half of the

¹⁰ Quotations by non-Japanese pilgrims are all from personal e-mail communications in response to the questionnaire I had sent them. Replies were received during August and September 2001.

Waseda respondents and exactly half of my own. Multiple motives were common, but ‘to pray for the repose of the soul of a deceased person’ far exceeded the others; almost three-quarters of bus pilgrims in my survey gave this as their motive. A walking pilgrim in his sixties ticked all the motives on my survey, but then told me he was primarily doing it for his wife, who had died the previous year. The Buddhist tradition of memorials for the deceased at regular intervals could be one reason for this motive’s predominance; being recently widowed could be another. The Waseda survey’s next most frequent response (for almost half) was ‘for family safety.’ (Waseda, 1997:133). Although not an option on my survey, several people added this as ‘other’.

Health and harmony with nature

Almost thirty percent of Waseda’s pilgrims gave ‘to pray for health’ as a motive; for eleven percent it was ‘recovery from illness.’ (Waseda, 1997:133). Among those I surveyed, eleven percent were praying for another person’s recovery from illness, and eight percent for their own, while seven percent were giving thanks for their own recovery from illness. ‘To improve my health by walking in the fresh air’ was the second most popular response I received (almost forty percent). This was in fact the first choice (for almost half) of car pilgrims – which surprised me until I reasoned that even motorised pilgrims have to walk from the car park, often up steep paths, and that most temples have a flight of steps up to the main hall (with over three hundred steps at temple 10, Kirihata-ji). Among walkers, this answer was tied first with the memorial for a loved one (at forty-two percent). The third most popular motive (for thirty percent) was ‘to get away from the congestion and be in harmony with nature in the beautiful Shikoku countryside.’ This would seem to confirm the importance attached to nature by many Japanese.

Ascetic training

Thirty-two percent of Waseda’s pilgrims indicated ‘Faith or ascetic training’ as a motive (Waseda: 1997:133). Since they did not distinguish between the two, it is hard to compare with my own survey option: ‘To deepen my faith through enduring hardship.’ This was chosen by almost twenty percent of car pilgrims and walkers, but

by only eight percent of those travelling by bus. It would appear that those who participate in bus tours are not very interested in asceticism – which may be why they are travelling by bus; in fact, the bus companies promise a ‘completely safe and comfortable’ journey. (Reader, 1993a:124). However, since only one bus pilgrim indicated that he had no religion, it is reasonable to suppose that many were travelling for reasons of faith. Ascetic training or discipline was also added to the ‘other’ motives section on my questionnaire, such as this comment from a motorcyclist in his fifties: ‘*Shinshin tanren no tame*’ (to discipline my body and spirit). Three of the western pilgrims cited faith or spiritual discipline; a twenty-one-year-old American wrote:

I did it to strengthen my devotion and my will, and my aspiration, and also to learn about Japanese Buddhism, since I was strongly considering becoming a Buddhist monk at that time.

Self-discovery

Another recurrent motive that pilgrims added to my options, was self-discovery. A car pilgrim in his sixties wrote: ‘*Jibun wo hajime kara minaoshitai*’ (I’d like to re-examine who I am). A walker in her twenties had come ‘for self-discovery, self-reflection, to learn about the enlightenment of Buddhism.’ (*Jiko hakken, kaeri miru tame, bukkyō no satori wo aratamete shiru tame*). One in his sixties, praying ‘for the repose of a loved one’s soul’ wrote: ‘*Kongo no jinsei ni tsuite kangaetai*’ (I want to contemplate my life from now on), perhaps indicating that his pilgrimage was due to being widowed. An American in his forties, whose main motive was ‘to write a book and articles,’ added: ‘To sort out where I was and what I was doing with my life;’ for another, in his thirties, it was ‘a spiritual and physical exercise to help me find my path in life.’

History

The historical significance of the pilgrimage is an attraction for young Japanese pilgrims, as one walker in her twenties commented: ‘*Rekishiteki ni yūmei dakara*’ (because it’s famous historically); a teenaged girl wrote: ‘*Junsui ni kyōmi ga atta kara. Rekishi wo kanjitagatta.*’ (Because I was purely interested in this. I wanted to

sense the history). History is among several motives expressed by this woman on a bus tour:

Nanbyakunen mo tsuzuite iru no de go-senzo-sama he no kansha no kimochi to Kenzai watashitachi ni gokago ga arimasu yō ni, yakudoshi na no de toku ni omoimasu. (Because it has continued for a long time, I came to pray for my ancestors and to pay respects to them. Also I want to pray for my life right now especially, as this is my unlucky year [33]).

An American interested ‘in Japanese history and . . . in traditional . . . architecture, particularly that of temples and shrines,’ undertook it partly out of ‘a historical curiosity about the lore and mystic [sic] of the Daishi and the founders of the pilgrimage.’

Other Japanese pilgrims’ motives

Ten percent of Waseda’s respondents indicated they were ‘sightseeing’ (Waseda, 1997:133). Some I surveyed professed no special reasons other than pleasure, ‘*tanoshimu,*’ as one car pilgrim in his fifties put it, while another wrote: ‘*Tada nan to naku, nonbiri to nani ka aru ka*’ (I have no specific purpose, to relax, to see what’s going to happen). A walker in her twenties was also open-minded: ‘*Mushin ni natte, aruita ato ni, nani ka mieru mono ga aru yō na ki ga shita kara*’ (I thought it’s possible to see something new after emptying my mind and walking the route). A car pilgrim in his sixties added ‘*purasu kamera satsuei*’ (plus taking photographs). Others wanted to meet people, like a walker in his seventies: ‘*Aruki henro to kōryū suru*’ (to communicate with walking pilgrims); a car pilgrim in her sixties wanted ‘to get to know and feel one with the local community’ (*chiiki hitotachi to no shinboku no tame*).

Other westerners’ motives

Rather than choose from the options on my Japanese questionnaire (since I suspected health issues and memorials for dead people might not be relevant for westerners) I suggested the non-Japanese pilgrims simply state as many motives as they liked. A Dutchman’s motives were ‘private.’ An Australian woman in her forties wrote: ‘Very simply, to give thanks. I have a remarkable life and wanted to offer something to say thank-you.’ A thirty-year-old Swiss woman wrote: ‘I wanted to see whether walking on such a spiritual trail would put me in touch with my own religious feelings.’ For

his *o-bon* holiday¹¹, a twenty-five-year-old American living in Tokyo, ‘decided on the *Michi* on the spur of the moment. I had no idea what to expect and was woefully unprepared.’ Some responded with lists, like this one from a Canadian woman in her fifties, who completed the pilgrimage over three years while resident in Shikoku:

Fascination with the idea of pilgrimage in the modern era; love of nature and hiking outdoors; rewarding experiences with the people I encountered (including *osettai*); wanting to learn everything I could about the pilgrimage; wanting to finish what I’d started; wanting to get all the stamps.

The list of a Belgian who wrote his Bachelor’s thesis on the pilgrimage reads: ‘a. to find some spirituality in my life; b. to learn about Japanese culture in general; c. as a hiking holiday in nature; d. to do research,’ while an American in his fifties listed:

1. spiritual discipline; 2. the joy of having a different experience of Japan (different from most tourists or businessmen); 3. the appreciation for Japanese traditional culture.

Having read all the non-Japanese pilgrims’ motives, I decided to examine my own, and came up with: curiosity and a wish to see the country; the chance to speak only Japanese (opportunities at work being limited); to feel what it is like to be a pilgrim.

Petitions

Another way to discover pilgrims’ motives is to read the petitions on the *osamefuda* left in the bins beside the *hondō* and *Daishidō*. Both Tanaka and Reader chose this method. Tanaka had felt that in his conversations with over 1,500 pilgrims, ‘questions concerning motivation seldom elicited anything but the most superficial response’ (Tanaka: 1975:26). After examining 1,552 *ofuda* left at two temples in 1973 he found:

[P]ilgrims pray for such things as safety for the family, prosperous business and/or improved financial situation, freedom from traffic accidents, good health (strong body, relief from liver, heart, stomach and other ailments), pregnancy, safe delivery of baby, world peace, and the ability to pass university entrance examinations. Some give thanks for successful entrance into university and restored health. (Tanaka, 1975:26)

In 1991, Reader examined 3,164 *osamefuda* left at a Tokushima temple, of which 569 ‘had specific requests inscribed on them’ (Reader 1996:274). The requests were for:

Good health (179), for the ancestors (92), family safety/welfare (70), healing of illness (58), travel safety (47), help in studying/success in education (47), finding

¹¹ Four-day summer festival, 12-15 August. It is believed ancestral spirits come home then.

a spouse/having children (27), business prosperity (15), good luck/attainment of wishes (15), memorials for dead babies (11), prevention of danger (8), and others (various uncategorisable requests) (12). (Reader: 1996:274)

From this Reader identifies both ‘veneration and memorialisation of the dead . . . in other words for benefits in the other world (*kōsei* or *raise riyaku*)’ as well as ‘a particular and prevalent concern for benefits in this world, *genze riyaku*.’ (Reader: 1996: 274). On my survey, a bus pilgrim in her seventies added these wishes:

Musume no kaiun ryōen kigan. Musuko no yome no anzan kigan. Kanai anzen, shison hanei, saiki jokyo. (Pray for good fortune, that my daughter can find a good husband; safe childbirth for my son’s wife; safety of my household; prosperity of my children and grandchildren; relief from misfortune).

Returning to Barber’s theory of pilgrims’ objectives, I would suggest that the majority of Japanese pilgrims fit in his second group (seeking solutions to secular problems), while western pilgrims are in either the first (religious devotion) or the third (curiosity and a love of travel). The motivations with which the pilgrimage is undertaken may determine the experiences; the following section will consider these.

Impressions

At the end of Waseda’s survey, pilgrims were invited to write any thoughts or opinions they might have about the pilgrimage: ‘*Henro ni tsuite no go-iken ya o-kangae ga areba, nandemo jiyū ni o-kaki kudasai,*’ (Waseda, 1997:130); 297 people (twenty-four percent) responded. My own survey question asked pilgrims to write what impressed them most: ‘*O-henro meguri wo shite mottomo kokoro ni nokkota koto ga arimashitara hitokoto o-kaki kudasai*’ and received a response from seventy-one people (forty-four percent). The different questions produced a corresponding difference in the comments. Some of the Waseda responses were highly critical; they will be examined in the next chapter, in the context of conflict in pilgrimage.

Since the Shikoku pilgrimage is a circle with many sacred places, it is not likely to generate the same sense of climax as a linear pilgrimage to a single sacred goal. It is on the approach to ‘the sacred centre’ that Aziz sees ‘a growing dissociation from others around them, as opposed to the idea that there are increased feelings of oneness.’ (Aziz, 1987:253). The tendency to complete the pilgrimage in sections over

a number of months or years would also lessen the emotional impact. Also, as most of the comments were written on questionnaires, in many cases filled out in haste, it is unreasonable to expect much philosophical insight; for that one would need to examine pilgrims' journals or recollections written at leisure. The non-Japanese pilgrims were able to respond in their own way – one took the time to think about my question and replied to it separately a few days later.

Remarks made during the course of a pilgrimage are unlikely to reflect the degree to which the experience of pilgrimage can change someone; however, some of the western pilgrims did comment on this, as do those profiled in Hoshino Eiki's article on the 'new age' of walking pilgrims; this aspect of pilgrimage will therefore be examined at the end of this chapter. Aziz emphasizes the individuality of pilgrims (Aziz, 1987:260); nevertheless, I found their comments fell into a number of themes, and I have grouped them in this way below.

The beauty of nature

Many pilgrims' comments in my survey concerned nature: '*Shizen no utsukushisa koto ga dekita*' (I realised the beauty of nature), as a car pilgrim in his fifties noted. A bus pilgrim in her seventies, who had come to get away from the congestion, and improve her health in the fresh air explained: '*Tokai de kurashite orimasu no de shizen ni shitashimarete kibun ga yoi*' (Because I live in the city, it's such a wonderful feeling to be in close contact with nature).

Nature also impressed western pilgrims: the Flemish student (one of whose motives had been a hiking holiday in nature) listed first, 'the hiking in nature and the kind of nature mysticism,' while a thirty-one-year-old American cited, 'the beauty of Kōchi's mountains and waterfronts and the serenity of temple life.' The Swiss woman wrote: 'My strongest impression is the beauty of nature I walked in, how tranquil some of the temples were and how well I was received everywhere.' Not all were quite so positive though, as this comment from a twenty-five-year-old American shows: 'the countryside is beautiful (well, except for that loooooong trash-covered coast on the way to Muroto).' The Canadian woman praised 'the beauty of the mountains and the mountain trails' but added a more disturbing impression:

the way that the environment is being ruined (e.g., the building of the cable at temple 21 and the destruction of the place where [the] Daishi meditated from which there was a wonderful view).

The kindness of people

Another common theme was the people, primarily their kindness. A cyclist in her twenties wrote: ‘*Jimoto no hito ga totemo shinsetsu ni shite kudasari totemo arigatta*’ (I was so grateful for the kindness of the people in the community). ‘*Hito to no yasashisa no deau, kokoro no iyashi*’ (the encounters with people’s kindness made my heart feel cared for), wrote a car pilgrim in his fifties. One compared the local people with the temple officials and concluded that ‘people met on the way were kinder,’ (*tōrisugari no hitobito no hōga yohodo shinsetsu de atta*). (Waseda, 1997:144).

Western pilgrims also mentioned the people of Shikoku; for example, this comment from a forty-five-year-old American:

Without question, they were the most important part of the trip. I met some absolutely wonderful people. To actually live on the streets from morning to evening, seven days a week, for 54 days was a blessing. To meet people from every walk of life, every background, and to have the chance to talk to them was a thrilling experience. I can still see some of their eyes and faces if I try hard enough.

Another American, in his fifties, was impressed by ‘fellow *henros* . . . I really respect the people who make this pilgrimage.’ He extended that respect to motorised pilgrims:

Not everyone can walk it. Some of those people were very old and it was a tremendous effort to do it in a van. It’s the spirit in which it is done that is important to me . . . They were extremely friendly and had a very positive mood.

However, a twenty-one-year-old American distinguished between walkers and others:

Pilgrims who had walked the pilgrimage many times were among the kindest and most selfless people I had ever met. . . . Car and bus *henro* on the other hand, while sometimes kind and generous, were also often completely lacking in the virtues of selflessness, kindness, compassion, true devotion, or even simple manners! At some temples the atmosphere was more that of a zoo than a pilgrimage site.

The Belgian pilgrim’s list continued with: ‘the friendliness of the people, giving you money, hospitality and food; related to this, the (short) friendship among *henro*.’

The twenty-five-year-old American quoted above, was unprepared for *settai*:

I was also floored by the amazing friendliness of the locals . . . people were constantly giving me food, drink, supplies, money, etc. I was especially taken aback because I didn't know about this aspect of the pilgrimage before I started.

Some were moved to tears, like this thirty-four-year-old man: '*Samazama na hito kara o-settai itadaki namida no deru omo desu*' (tears flow at the thought of the *settai* I've received from various people). (Waseda, 1997: 146).

Feelings of peace and purification

Expressions of cleansing and calmness came up repeatedly in the comments on my survey – from over twenty five percent, including, walkers, bus, car and taxi pilgrims: '*Kokoro ga kiyoraka ni naru*' (I felt my spirit become pure), '*Jibun no kokoro no heian*' (my own heart's peace), and '*Kimochi ga akkiri shimashita*' (I feel cleansed) are typical. A walker in her fifties, whose motive was '*shinshin wo kitaenaosu*' (retrain and strengthen body and spirit) wrote:

Hitori de arukeru koto no sugasugashisa. Shizen to yukkuri nani o aete kokoro ga sunao o ni nareta koto. (I feel refreshed walking alone. Being with nature, I feel my heart calmed and quiet).

Another stressed the calming action of nature: '*Shizen no naka de kokoro ga odayaka ni natta*' (In nature my heart became very calm). On the Waseda survey, a sixty-eight-year-old man wrote: '*Fushigina yasuragi to jūjitsukan ni hitaru koto ga dekiru*' (I can feel flooded with a strange peace and a feeling of fulfilment). (Waseda, 1997:143). These comments outnumbered remarks about nature and people, and appear to indicate one of the main functions of the pilgrimage for the Japanese – one of spiritual purification and physical renewal. This represents a major contrast to the western pilgrims, none of whom made such remarks.

Travelling with the Daishi

Although the pilgrimage is undertaken in his memory, only a few mentioned Kōbō Daishi. A car pilgrim in his seventies commented on his greatness: '*Kōbō Daishi no erasa.*' A forty-three-year-old woman wrote: '*Daishi-sama no arukareta michi, tsuchi no yawarakasa mi ni shimete kanjimashita.*' (On the paths walked by the Daishi, I felt as if the softness of the earth penetrated my body). (Waseda, 1997:144). An American in his forties wrote that although 'it looked like I walked alone and in silence . . . I did pray to Kōbō Daishi and Dainichi Nyōrai every day, in fact, they

were my constant companions.’ It was ‘the emerging statue of Kōbō Daishi at temple 12 after a long day of walking in the mountains’ that most impressed a Dutch pilgrim in his forties.

The simplicity of the experience

Some pilgrims encapsulated their experience in a minimum of words, such as ‘*Mushin*’ (empty mind), from a taxi pilgrim in his seventies, or ‘*Kyō wo seiippoi ikiru*’ (live today to the utmost), from a walker in his fifties. A bus pilgrim in his twenties reversed a well-known proverb: ‘*Raku areba ku ari*’ (If you have an easy time, there will be difficulties). Others emphasized the simplicity of their intentions in longer statements, like this thirty-six-year-old man who signed himself *Shikoku henro gyō* (Shikoku ascetic pilgrim):

Nani mo motomeru koto mo naku risuru koto mo naku ushinau koto mo naku tokusuru koto mo naku hakarau koto mo naku satorō to suru koto mo naku tada tada aruite aruite ano yo made negawaku wa Daishi no futokoro ni dakare shi konsei no waga inochi. (I’m not asking for anything; I’m not profiting from anything; I’m not losing anything; I’m also not getting anything; I don’t want to consider anything; nor do I want to attain enlightenment; I’m simply walking, walking until that time when, in this life, I will be embraced in the bosom of the Daishi.) (Waseda, 1997:146)

The Australian woman wrote: ‘It is such a simple exercise – get up each day and walk!’

Too much to put into words

In contrast to the previous comments, for some, the experiences were too many or too powerful to condense; an American in his forties wrote: ‘A few sentences won’t come close to explaining my impressions, much less a few hours of writing.’ A walker in his twenties (a remarkable young man on his third circuit, sleeping out and wearing sandals he made from string and rubber tyres), whose motive was ‘*Jinsei shūgyō*’ (ascetic training for my life), wrote: ‘*Arisugite kakenai*’ (too much to write about). The Australian woman admitted: ‘I have had difficulty trying to articulate my experience.’ Perhaps these kinds of people create the impression that pilgrims are inarticulate.

Change in outlook during the pilgrimage

Those who start out without any particular beliefs or religious feelings often find this changes as they progress. A forty-five-year-old American described the process:

I was surprised that within a day or so I started wondering about the religious underpinnings of the pilgrimage more and more. As someone told me when I was there, ‘Don’t look for the men of old, look for what those men sought.’ That became a part of the pilgrimage as well but not until after arriving and actually starting to walk. It has become more religious for me since finishing.

A seventy-two-year-old woman wrote on the Waseda survey:

Hajime no uchi wa kankō hanbun no kimochi deshita ga, dandan kokoro hikare, tadaima wa hotokesama wo oshitai suru kimochi to zange senshin no omoide kenmei ni doryoku shite imasu. (At first, I felt like [my trip] was half for sightseeing but gradually [my feelings have changed] to now [wanting to] strive hard to have thoughts of cleansing my heart, repenting and to have the feeling of wanting to adore the Buddha). (Waseda, 1997:165)

Hoshino (1999) profiled several walking pilgrims who claimed not to be doing it for reasons of faith. He quotes, a ‘*dangaiseshiki*’ (baby boomer) he calls Mr. A :

Boku wa reijo de hannya shingyō wo tonaeru keredomo boku no henro wa kihon teki ni wa shumi henro de aru kara, boku jishin wa bukkō de wa nai. (At the sacred places I chanted the heart sutra but mine was basically a hobby pilgrimage, because I am not a Buddhist). (Hoshino, 1999:52).

Mr. A reported being shy at first and chanting quickly in a whisper (*kogoe*).

However, one early morning, on arriving at an empty temple compound:

Kyō wa boku hitori na no de, yukkuri to ōgoe de tonaeta. Wazuka 1–2 fun no dokyō no aida ni ikki ni ikai ni botsunyū suru yō na kankaku ni ochiiru . . . Sekai ni jibun hitori to iu kanji. Jibun ga uchū no naka no chūshin no yō na ki ga suru. (Today, I was alone, so I chanted slowly in a loud voice. In just the space of 1 or 2 minutes of reciting the sutras, I lapsed into the feeling of being completely absorbed into another world . . . It felt like I was the only person in the world. It seemed like I was the centre of the universe). [emphasis in original] (Hoshino, 1999:60).

A woman in her twenties whom Hoshino calls Ms. E, who undertook the pilgrimage because she loved walking and wanted a feeling of accomplishment, said in an interview afterwards: ‘*Shinjite ireba o-Daishi-sama wa mimamotte kurete kanarazu sukui no te wo sashinobete kureru koto.*’ (As long as one believes that the Daishi is watching over us, surely he is stretching out a saving hand). (Hoshino, 1997:61).

Those already spiritually inclined found their feelings deepened. A Buddhist American in his forties, wrote: ‘afterwards, I started meditating daily and went much deeper into studying Buddhism.’ An American in his twenties who undertook the

pilgrimage as ‘religious/spiritual training/discipline,’ found that he ‘grew in devotion a great deal.’ An American in his forties described a revelation:

I grew up a Christian – Episcopal, but finished the pilgrimage as a part Christian, part Buddhist, part Taoist and part Confucianist. All of this came to me while walking one day. Amazing day.

A life-altering experience

Several western pilgrims wrote in superlatives about the total experience: ‘One of the most intense experiences of my life,’ and ‘by far the hardest thing I’ve ever done,’ were the comments of two twenty-five-year-old Americans. ‘One of the most amazing things I have done in my life, and I have done A LOT,’ wrote an American in his forties. The Australian woman found it ‘a sublime experience that permeates every pore.’ The American who was unable to explain in a few sentences, added: ‘If I must say some- thing brief, I found the pilgrimage to be life-altering, exhilarating, painful, silent . . . Every day, I think about the pilgrimage and something that happened to me.’ An American in his thirties who slept out, recalls:

how empowering it was. I wanted to quit at one point and was seriously thinking about it and then told myself that if I could do this I could do anything . . . I now feel like I can do anything I set my mind to do and I owe that feeling of empowerment to the pilgrimage. It literally changed my life.

In fact, he has become a Shingon priest, and is on his third pilgrimage, *kugiri-uchi*.

Summary

From the comments reported above, it can be seen that motives and impressions fell into a number of themes. Japanese pilgrims’ motives generally centred on prayers for ancestors, and on practical issues such as health or family safety; they also appeared to welcome the opportunity to spend even a short time in nature. They mostly expressed their experiences in terms of their feelings – such as being calmed, cleansed or refreshed – thus demonstrating Davis’ assertion, quoted earlier, that ‘praxis . . . and feelings . . . form the core of Japanese religion.’ (Davis, 1992:236). About a fifth of western pilgrims came for religious or spiritual motives; for others it seems the pilgrimage represented something quintessentially Japanese which they wanted to participate in; others came in a spirit of adventure, or to enjoy hiking in nature. Some appear to have been powerfully affected by their experiences.

Although not inarticulate, the Japanese pilgrims do not show much evidence of ‘the idea of “becoming the hero” through pilgrimage experience’ (Aziz, 1987:257), in contrast to some of the western pilgrims, whose final comments above, perhaps do indicate some sense of this. Yet pilgrimage may not have heroic implications for Japanese people. It has been said that, ‘To be a Buddhist in Japan is hardly separate from occasionally (or often) undertaking a pilgrimage.’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 185). If this is so, and pilgrimage is seen as an activity to be engaged in on a regular basis – as seems probable given the fact that almost twenty percent of Waseda’s respondents perform the Shikoku pilgrimage annually (Waseda, 1997:134), and almost half had been on other pilgrimages too¹² – then it probably does not have the same implication of an epic journey, which seems to be a western idea. The implications of this will be explored in detail in the conclusion.

Perhaps, too, the way the pilgrimage is performed by the majority of Japanese pilgrims today does not lend itself to heroic feelings. Cousineau refers to the trivialisation of modern pilgrimage, and reports that ‘when travel is too easy, people often don’t appreciate their experience and certainly don’t understand the mythological nature of certain kinds of travel.’ (Marler, quoted in Cousineau, 1998: 110). The next chapter will review those travel methods, as well as some attitudes towards the modern manifestations of the pilgrimage.

¹² The figures for other pilgrimages undertaken were: Saikoku pilgrimage (33%), Chichibu pilgrimage (14%), Bandō pilgrimage (13%), mini Shikoku (12%), and other (16%). 46 percent had not been on any previous pilgrimage, and 5 percent did not respond. (Waseda, 1997:140).

Chapter Four

Performing the pilgrimage: '*communitas*' and conflict

Considering the approximately 1,200-kilometre distance to be travelled in order to complete the Shikoku pilgrimage, it is not surprising that a number of performance methods have developed over the years. While some walking pilgrims – westerners among them – may feel strongly about how it should be performed, for many Japanese this appears not to be an issue. According to Hoshino, 'The greatest emphasis in the pilgrimage is placed on visiting all the pilgrimage sites on the route' (Hoshino, 1997: 289); how this is done is up to the individual. Reader (1996) explains:

There are no pre-ordained routes or rituals that must be followed: each pilgrim determines his or her own manner of travel, forms of behaviour and styles of prayer and action at the sites. (Reader, 1996:271).

This chapter will report on the various methods of performance chosen by those surveyed, with reference to the anti-structural nature of pilgrimage; it will end with a study of conflict, most noticeable in the comments by walking pilgrims.

Communitas

LaFleur (1979), in a paper based on essays by Hoshino, notes 'an indifference to structure and order' (p.275), and refers to Turner's theory of *communitas*:

[T]he Shikoku pilgrimage, in contrast to some others in Japan, is characterised *on all levels* by an intentional suspension of all notions and expressions of order and hierarchy. One needs, therefore no credentials or qualification to undertake it, since 'qualification' is an idea that applies only to daily life in a structured society. [Italics in original] (LaFleur, 1979:275)

Whether monks or deeply religious lay people walking it as a rigorous exercise in ascetic training, or families enjoying themselves on day trips in the comfort of bus or car, all are considered pilgrims. Although a number of walking pilgrims reject this idea, Hoshino, as reported by LaFleur, argues, 'an acceptance of a diversity of styles is congruent with the *communitas* which is the central point of the event,' (p. 276):

The usual judgment from outside, namely that the more ascetic practitioners are the 'real pilgrims' while those travelling in comfort are only 'tourists,' is a judgment which again interjects an element of hierarchy and prestige (in this case

spiritual prestige) into the very situation which is designed to reject and circumvent all notions of such differentiation. (LaFleur, 1979:276)

However, Reader (1993b) argues that the temples do, in fact, attempt to structure the pilgrimage through their organisation (*Reijōkai*), and through ‘the *sendatsu* [guide] system that . . . offers them a potential mechanism for organising, controlling and influencing the behaviour of pilgrims’ (Reader, 1993b:4-5). This influence is aimed primarily at increasing the number of pilgrims, who provide a valuable source of income to temples that would otherwise struggle to survive, many of them having lost their local congregations due to rural depopulation. Guidebooks often advise would-be pilgrims to go in a group with a *sendatsu*, some of whom have their own travel companies with close links to the temples, and ‘act as local agents and proselytisers of the cult of pilgrimage.’ (Reader, 1993b:34). Repetition of the pilgrimage is also encouraged, in order to provide a stable future revenue source.

Travel modes

In the Waseda survey, motorised pilgrims accounted for eighty-three percent of the total, in the categories: ‘mainly car or bus,’ (seventy-nine percent), and ‘mainly car or train but sometimes walking,’ (almost four percent). Those ‘walking only,’ made up almost eleven percent, with five percent ‘mainly walking, but also using cars or trains.’ The breakdown by vehicle type was: forty-five percent by large bus, twenty percent by car, seventeen percent by mini-bus, nine percent by taxi, and five percent by public transport. Motorbikes and bicycles were in the same category, making up two percent. (Waseda, 1997:137). In my own survey, motorised pilgrims totalled seventy-six percent; pilgrims walking only comprised nineteen percent, those mainly walking (also using public transport or car, or sometimes accepting rides as *settai*) made up three percent, with two percent by bicycle. The breakdown by vehicle type was: fifty-six percent by car, forty-one percent by bus, three percent by taxi, and one motorcyclist.¹³

¹³ The difference in percentages on bus tours between Waseda’s figures and mine is due to the difficulty I had in gaining the participation of bus pilgrims, whose schedule was so rushed that to stop and fill out even a short questionnaire could leave them without enough time to complete their worship before they had to get back on the bus. I eventually overcame this by positioning myself at a shop between the temple compound and the car park at a temple – Anraku-ji (6) – that was often the last stop of the day. By then, many were glad of a chance to relax.

Of the fifteen non-Japanese pilgrims, eight performed the circuit entirely on foot, four occasionally accepted offers of rides as *settai*, and three combined walking with other modes: one hitchhiking, one taking buses, and the other ‘walking, cycling, train, bus.’ Thus travel mode provides a striking contrast to the Japanese pilgrims; for the majority of westerners, performing the pilgrimage means walking it; this is its main attraction, and they want to perform it in the traditional way. While recounting his frustration with a priest who suggested he ‘take a bus or train round the pilgrimage,’ Marc Pearl, an American who sent me a collection of essays compiled from his journal, explains: ‘Couldn’t he see that as I was not a follower of this religion, the Walk was the main point, the means and the goal?’ (Pearl, 1993: Days 8/9, p. 2).

Continuous or interrupted travel

Continuous travel around the eighty-eight temple circuit is known as going *tōshi-uchi*, while interrupted travel (part-time) is called *kugiri-uchi*. The nature of work in Japan means people have few and very short holidays, so it is impossible for most of them to undertake a trip of several weeks’ duration. Osada Kōichi, writing on the Waseda survey he undertook with Sakata Masaaki, reported that twenty-three percent of all pilgrims were visiting Temples 1 to 88 in one trip, and one percent (all walkers) were doing the entire circuit, returning to Temple 1. (Osada, 1999:15). Forty-three percent of walkers were going *tōshi-uchi*, but only twenty-five percent of motorised pilgrims. (Osada, 1999:9). Among those I surveyed, a third of walkers were doing the entire circuit, but only three car pilgrims and two bus pilgrims indicated this intention (many didn’t answer the question).

Ten of the fifteen western pilgrims walked the whole route in one trip, one completed it in sections, and four only did parts of it (one of whom is still completing it). This two-thirds majority going *tōshi-uchi* shows another contrast with Japanese pilgrims. For those who came from overseas with the sole intention of walking the pilgrimage, it is natural they would travel continuously, although five of the ten were living in Japan. The time taken varied from thirty-four days, for a male in his thirties, to fifty-seven days for a forty-three-year-old female who visited all the *bangai* too.

Three of the American men slept out; one describes where: ‘I slept in bus shelters, phone booths, under the awnings of schools or out in the open air. Part way through I was given a tent that I slept in the rest of the way.’ Another one camped; the third wrote that, ‘the biggest difficulty . . . was finding a place to sleep and enduring the difficulties of essentially living like a “bum” or a “hobo” for six weeks or so.’ An American in his forties walked it alone in winter in reverse direction (*gyaku-uchi*) then, after resting for three weeks walked it again, clockwise (*jun-uchi*) in spring with his wife. He was the only one I surveyed who went anti-clockwise. The Waseda survey found only two people travelling *gyaku-uchi*, among those doing the complete circuit.

Those people unable to travel continuously often choose to visit all the temples in one prefecture (*ikkoku mairi*), or do local pilgrimages, as described in Chapter One. Reader and Swanson have found that even retired pilgrims often prefer the *ikkoku mairi* format as, ‘they still felt constrained not to spend too long away from their homes and families’ (Reader and Swanson, 1997:241). For those committed to walking only, breaking it into segments is one way to make it possible. On 30 April 1999, at a *minshuku* near Temple 40, I met a young man from Nagoya, a devout Shingon Buddhist, who was walking exclusively but could only come in Golden Week¹⁴ each year. He was in his fourth segment, having started that morning at Temple 39, the last in Kōchi prefecture, where he had finished the year before. This ends up being the most expensive option since, in addition to accommodation costs on the road, one has numerous train fares, increasing in price the further across the island one has to travel to commence the next section.

Recently an even shorter method has become popular among motorised pilgrims: the one-day pilgrimage. Of the bus pilgrims I surveyed, two-thirds were out for the day only. I asked them to estimate how long it would take to complete the whole pilgrimage: responses varied from six months to ten years. Forty-four percent of car pilgrims, almost all Shikoku residents, were also just making a one-day pilgrimage. A woman told me that she and her husband went out one Sunday every

¹⁴ Four national holidays fall within the week: 29 April, 3, 4 and 5 May, and it is a major holiday season.

month and visited a few temples – apparently a fairly common practice (Reader and Swanson, 1997:242).

Both the *ikkoku mairi* method and local pilgrimages seemed to be popular among the walking pilgrims I surveyed. Twenty-one percent were doing just the Tokushima temples (1 to 23), travelling for between four and eleven days. Twenty percent were on a two-day local pilgrimage – mostly from Temples 11 to 17 – with one- and three-day trips the next most popular (thirteen percent each). The thirteen-kilometre *henro michi* (pilgrim path) between Temple 11 and 12 involves a strenuous hike over three mountain ranges, so combining this with the stroll between Temple 13 and 17 gives first-timers a taste of the two extremes of the route.

Waseda's results showed twenty-three percent of pilgrims doing a one-prefecture pilgrimage (*ikkoku mairi*); however, sixty-seven percent chose 'other,' and a table in Osada's report indicates great diversity in the segments pilgrims were travelling. (Osada, 1999:16). Twenty-six percent were on a two- to three-day trip, just over fifteen percent were out for four to five days, and almost fifteen percent five to six days. Twelve percent were on six- to seven-day trips. (Waseda, 1997:131). Only three percent were on day trips – indicating that my figures, mostly having been collected on Sundays and public holidays, probably over represented day trippers, unless they have become more common since 1996. The four non-Japanese pilgrims visited Temples 1 to 44, 1 to 12, 33 to 40, and the last one went from 1 to 21 on his first trip, 21 to 30 on the second, and plans to finish all the Kōchi temples on his next vacation.

Ritual behaviour at the temples

Although not obligatory, there are a number of 'ritual steps' (Miyata, 1996:15) at the temples. These include ritual purification (washing the hands and rinsing the mouth); offering the *osamefuda* and 'osaisen (offertory coins)' (p. 16), lighting incense sticks (*senkō*) and candles (*rōsoku*) in front of both the *hondō* and *Daishidō*, and chanting sutras – the heart sutra (*hannya shingyō*), and the sutra for the *honzon* (principal deity). At the *Daishidō*, they should also chant 'Namu Daishi Henjō Kongō' (Homage

to Kōbō Daishi) ‘at least 21 times’ (Miyata, 1996:16). Prayers are offered at both halls.

The final step is to proceed to the *nōkyōjo* to obtain the *hōin* (temple seals) and an image of the *honzon*. Reader explains how the meaning of this ritual has changed:

Once seen as recognition for performing an act of piety at a temple, this has come to represent, in the mind of the modern pilgrim, a symbol of having performed the pilgrimage and of the merit that goes with this. A scroll or book with the *hōin* of all 88 temples is believed to bring the bearer great benefit . . . to the extent that it is not uncommon to meet pilgrims for whom the most important part of the pilgrimage is the completed book or scroll. (Reader, 1987a:143-4)

Since the temples gain materially from the fees charged for the service, they do not discourage this notion. Reader reports a priest saying that ‘whatever his personal feelings might be, it was not his place to state them openly: it was up to pilgrims to determine what they wished’ (Reader, 1987a:147). He describes meeting a young man driving the route: ‘[he] advised me to get a car; it would enable me to obtain all the *hōin* in one-sixth of the time it took me to walk’ (Reader, 1987a:144). Apparently, one can even buy completed scrolls; Reader quotes a newspaper advertisement offering them, ‘for a sizeable fee’ since ‘to perform a pilgrimage such as Shikoku, even by bus, is difficult and time-consuming’ (p. 144). The implication that the ‘external symbols of its completion’ (Reader, 1987a:144) are more important than actually performing the pilgrimage, has led some walkers to refer to ‘whirlwind *henro*’ as ‘stamp collectors’ (McLachlan, 1997:166). The situation of walkers will be described in detail below.

While the liminality of pilgrimage has so far been defined as taking pilgrims outside their usual place in society, Barber points to its other aspect: ‘it is also liminal because it takes him out of this world and puts him in touch with the world beyond.’ (Barber, 1991:155). A walking pilgrim in his sixties, returning to Temple 1, wrote: ‘I was away from the material world and came to the spiritual world for about fifty days.’ (*Yaku 50 nichikan ‘mono no sekai’ wo hanare ‘kokoro no sekai’*). Apart from the lack of structure in *communitas*, there is also the sense of equality, seen in the acceptance of all performers as genuine pilgrims no matter their travel mode, and of fraternity which, in Japan, Foard (1982) observes, ‘is that of a clearly bounded group, namely the Japanese people’ (Foard, 1982:240):

[T]he very paradigms that the *communitas* of the pilgrimage leads the pilgrim to encounter are those that would make the pilgrim aware of his bonds with all other Japanese through his sharing in the common national past. (Foard, 1982:241).

Foard is writing about the Saikoku pilgrimage, which includes some of the nation's most famous cultural icons. However, the symbolism of Shikoku as a spiritual homeland (*kokoro no furusato*), representing nostalgia for an idealised, rural past is a significant part of its attraction to urban Japanese, for whom dressing in pilgrim's clothing and performing the pilgrimage can give a sense of returning to their roots – real or imagined – and perhaps of reinforcing their Japanese identity.

Conflict

Another theory of pilgrimage, mentioned briefly in the introduction, is that of conflict. Generally, this implies conflict between pilgrims and religious authorities; as Turner and Turner point out, 'orthodoxy in many religions tends to be ambivalent toward pilgrimage.' (Turner and Turner, 1978:31). Among the reasons they cite is that 'pilgrimage is too democratic, not sufficiently hierarchical' (p.31). They consider that 'there is something inveterately populist, anarchical, even anticlerical, about pilgrimages in their very essence.' (Turner and Turner, 1978:32). Reader (1993b) defines this populist nature of pilgrimage:

[T]he ordinary participants, the pilgrims, are able to express their own needs, wishes and views, sometimes, though not necessarily, in conflict with, and over and against, the religious hierarchies, the priests and clerics who officiate at pilgrimage sites and frame the dogmas that surround them. The tensions between what pilgrims want . . . and what the ordained religious officiants and religious hierarchies would like them to take away from the pilgrimage . . . are rarely far from the surface in any pilgrimage. (Reader, 1993b:3-4).

The belief that a completed *nōkyōchō* or scroll 'serves as a passport to the Pure Land' (Reader, 1996:272) – a notion with no 'scriptural or ecclesiastical justification' (Reader, 1987a:143-4) – provides one example of a populist idea regarding the pilgrimage.

The Waseda survey free comments section contained over a hundred complaints or negative comments (thirty-seven percent). Frequent comments concerned the materialism of the temples – what one American called '*Bukkyō Keizai*,' the big business of Tourist Buddhism.' One person complained that the pilgrimage places are not being run properly, that faith is being forgotten as they

become merchants: ‘*Reijo mattaku tarun de iru moyō . . . Shinkō wo wasure shōnin to nari tsutsu ari.*’ (Waseda, 1997:143). This shows conflict between ideas of sacred and secular. One man wrote:

Saikin ji-in wa sarariiman kashite shuinkei no hito ga kōman ni natte henrojin wo nan to omotte inai. (Recently the [people] at the Buddhist temples have changed into office workers, and the attitude of the people in charge of the red stamps has become arrogant; they think nothing of the pilgrim). (Waseda, 1997:146)

However, Reader reports ‘priests complaining about unruly behaviour from pilgrims,’ and notes one function of the *sendatsu* system is ‘for defusing or lessening potential sources of conflict that may occur between priests and pilgrims.’ (Reader, 1993b:5).

Issues for the walking pilgrim

Apart from conflict between pilgrims and religious authorities, there is also conflict between different groups of pilgrims. Although identified only by gender and age, it is clear that many of the critical comments come from walkers. Most of their remarks concerned two areas of tension: temple lodgings (*shukubō*) and the *nōkyōjo*. Perhaps behind these complaints is a conscious or unconscious desire for some recognition of their efforts. Kushima Hiroshi – who runs reputedly the best Japanese web site on the pilgrimage – gave the following response to my questions on this topic:

Many walking *henro* complain about not receiving any respect from the temple people. I think *henro* using bus[es] and cars are not so conscious of this . . . Temple people (including priests and employees) are not concerned about whether a *henro* is walking or driving a car. That might be because most of them haven’t walked [it] themselves. Everybody who has ever walked [it] seems to be very respectful to walking *henro*. Also, from the religious standpoint, pilgrims by car and on foot may be equivalent, they would say. (Kushima¹⁵)

After his difficulty in explaining to the priest why he needed to walk (see above), Marc Pearl asked himself, ‘Is this walk just an ego thing?’ He wondered if he was being hypocritical, since he was ‘not praying or constantly studying the sutras.’ He decided that walking was his prayer, and concluded with the following suggestion:

Maybe to graduate from the Shingon Buddhist University, before one can become a Jushoku Head Priest, before one can ‘own’ a temple, it should be a requirement to do the 88 Sacred Temples Pilgrimage by WALKING!’ (Pearl, 1993: Days 8/9, p. 2)

¹⁵ Personal e-mail communication, 15 December 2001.

Highways and henro michi

Reader (1987a) considers ‘recent developments have served to discourage the foot pilgrim.’ (p. 142). New highways have replaced many of the old *henro michi* (pilgrim footpaths), so that in some places ‘the route is neither quiet nor particularly safe.’ (Reader, 1987a:142). Tunnels have been bored through mountains – some over a kilometre long. Most of them have no provision for pedestrians, and to walk through one with the roar of traffic, the exhaust fumes, and the fear you might be hit, is a thoroughly unpleasant experience. In the meantime, the old mountain passes have in many places become overgrown. Thus, a number of comments on the Waseda survey were pleas for the protection of the *henro michi* – ‘*dōzo kono michi wo mamotte kudasai*’ (Waseda, 1997:144) – or for their maintenance, while preserving their atmosphere: ‘*Henro no michi wa ima no funiki wo nokoshinagara seibi shite hoshii.*’ (Waseda, 1997:142).

Accommodation

Fewer pilgrims on foot have led to deteriorating conditions for walking, which serves to discourage potential walkers, in a spiral of decline, as Reader (1987a) describes:

The older structure that supported the walker has eroded with the disappearance of many of the old pilgrims’ lodges that catered for walkers. This is due both to a lack of walkers and to the fact that the simple facilities they offer are unacceptable to modern pilgrims for whom increased convenience and comfort have led to higher expectations and demands. (Reader, 1987a:142).

One of the main complaints in Waseda’s comments section concerned the difficulty lone pilgrims face in being accepted at temple lodgings (*shukubō*). The temples appear to prefer the more predictable and free-spending bus parties. Priests urge ‘*sendatsu* to get their parties to stay at temple lodging houses (*shukubō*),’ according to Reader (1993b), ‘because this would allow closer contact between temples and pilgrims and encourage deeper religious behaviour.’ (Reader, 1993b:27). Whether this is really an effort to improve pilgrims’ religious outlook, or merely an economic interest in the money the bus parties bring to the temples is unclear. Outside the peak pilgrimage seasons almost all the *shukubō* close. One man wrote:

Dōka shukubō wo motareru ji-in de wa jiki wo towazu aruki henro no tame ni shukubō wo kaihō shite itadakitai to omoimasu. (For the sake of the walking

pilgrim, I would like the temple lodgings to be kept open whatever the season). (Waseda, 1997:143).

Kushima thinks *shukubō* do not welcome walkers travelling alone, since:

[L]one *henro* are tiresome guests for them. They don't make [a] reservation or often cancel it. They don't come at the same time and don't depart at the same time. Sometimes they depart too early, before the attendants leave their bed[s]. The bath is, [as] you know, public bath style [so] to accept few guests they have to consume a lot of energy (= cost) to keep [up the] temperature of the big bath tub. . . . Only a few temples, [where the] *shukubō* is managed as a youth hostel, can provide their service to lone *henro*.¹⁶

Nōkyōjo

With the increasing emphasis on acquiring the tangible evidence of having performed the pilgrimage (*nōkyō*), some pilgrims present more than one item at the *nōkyōjo*.

Waseda's results showed that while forty-one percent carry just the *nōkyōchō* (book), thirteen percent each carry either the *nōkyōchō* and a scroll (*kakejiku*), or the scroll and *hakui* (robe), and fifteen percent carry all three. (Waseda, 1997:132). To stamp and inscribe all these takes time. With the bus pilgrims on a tight schedule, the driver takes all the passengers' *nōkyō* materials to the *nōkyōjo* while they are performing their *mairi* (worship). There are usually only two (or at most, three) priests or temple employees on duty, so when two or more bus parties arrive at a temple simultaneously (a not uncommon occurrence during spring or autumn), lone pilgrims may have to wait a long time for service. This causes frustration for walkers who are trying to reach a particular destination by a certain time and is one of the major complaints on the Waseda survey. A fifty-eight-year-old walker wanted preferential treatment: '*Nōkyō toki, dantai yori kojiri no aruki wo yūsen shite hoshii.*' (When getting the *nōkyō* I want walking individuals to be given preference over groups). (Waseda, 1997:157).

A common complaint on Waseda's survey concerned the hours of operation of the *nōkyōjo*: seven a.m. to five p.m. Twenty-three percent of respondents thought they close too early (Waseda, 1997:135); many asked that they be kept open until six p.m., or requested seasonal extensions when daylight hours are longer. Other comments from walkers included complaints about bad-mannered drivers on narrow

¹⁶ Personal e-mail communication, 15 December 2001

roads and requests for better signs on the *henro michi*; these are mostly small red stickers (either arrows or an image of a walking *henro*) placed by *Henro michi hozon kyōrokukai* (co-operative association to preserve the pilgrim paths).

Attitudes to walking and worship

We passed a lone pilgrim – it may have been the one I saw earlier – and Saburō gave his approval. ‘That man is a real traveler. He has the spirit of Kōbō Daishi. Today’s pilgrims, *bah!* They travel by bus, they stay in hotels. I call them “instant *henro*.” Just add water, like Cup Noodle.’ (Ferguson, 1998:136)

On the Waseda survey, one question contained opinion statements which pilgrims were asked to agree or disagree with. (Waseda, 1997:129). The first was: ‘The essential meaning of the pilgrimage is to walk, performing austerities on the way.’ (*Henro wa toho ni yoru dōchū shugyō ni koso honrai no imi ga aru*). Just over forty-two percent of respondents strongly agreed, and over thirty-one percent agreed somewhat. Twelve percent disagreed somewhat, and only nine percent disagreed strongly. (Waseda, 1997:138). Thus almost three quarters of the pilgrims agreed that walking pilgrims perform it in the most meaningful way. However, only eleven percent of pilgrims were actually walking exclusively (and five percent were mainly walking).¹⁷

Another statement, ‘Because worship at the temple has the most meaning, the different methods of travelling the pilgrimage don’t matter’ (*Henro wa, reijo junpai ni imi ga aru kara, idō shudan no chigai wa mondai de wa nai*), (Waseda, 1997:129), produced a more mixed result, with fifteen percent agreeing strongly and thirty-four percent agreeing somewhat; while twenty-eight percent disagreed somewhat and seventeen percent disagreed strongly (almost the same percentage – possibly the same people – as those walking). (Waseda, 1997:138). Thus almost half thought travel methods are less important than worship. The priest who suggested Marc Pearl take a bus or train told him: ‘*Inori* (prayer) is really 90% of the Pilgrimage. *Shugyō* (walking discipline/austerities) is only 10% important, if at that.’ (Pearl, 1993: Days 8/9, p.2).

¹⁷ Kushima questions Waseda’s figures of 11 percent walking. He thinks that walkers probably make up only ‘1 or 2 percent of the total.’ (Personal e-mail communication, 6 January 2002)

Walkers' attitudes

Most walking pilgrims do not agree that method does not matter. A fifty-six-year-old walker commented, 'pilgrims who use vehicles are just sightseeing aren't they?' (*norimono wo riyō shita henro wa tannaru kankō ni sugine?*) (Waseda, 1997:146-7). Some non-Japanese walking pilgrims insist: 'The temples themselves are not the experience.' (McLachlan, 1997:120). Statler asserts that they 'provide places of worship; they define the route; they are milestones of a sort. The temples punctuate the pilgrimage but they do not constitute it.' (Statler, 1983:298). McLachlan wonders what Kōbō Daishi would have thought of today's motorised pilgrims, and continues:

The experience is in overcoming the physical and mental hardships required to complete the pilgrimage. Battling fatigue, sore feet, the elements. Ascetic practice. Kōbō Daishi believed in ascetic practice. The hardships are faced between the temples, not at them; and those who sit in an air-conditioned bus between them are defeating the whole purpose. But this is only the opinion of a self-righteous walking *henro*. Me.(McLachlan, 1997:120)

For these pilgrims, the difficulty of the walk appears to have the most significance. However, as Reader (1987a) observes, 'the increasing ease with which pilgrims can get between sites and the removal of the barriers of hardship and effort formerly necessary' have meant that for the motorised pilgrim, 'the focus is now falling largely on the sites, with the spaces between to be completed as fast as possible.' (Reader, 1987a:143).

On the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, the method of travel defines the pilgrim: 'Even if one is religiously motivated, pilgrim status is reserved for those who get to Santiago by foot or pedal.' (Frey, 1998:18). In Shikoku, as seen above, there are no such requirements – all are considered pilgrims. However, it seems that some regard themselves as better than others, as McLachlan explains:

I was beginning to realise that there is a hierarchy within *henro*. Or at least, a perceived hierarchy. Walking *henro*, doing it rough as we were doing, consider themselves most *erai* [great]. They look down on walkers who stay in *yado* (accommodation houses). Next come 'bicycle *henro*' who are at least making some physical effort. Then come 'motorbike *henro*', 'car *henro*', 'taxi *henro*' and 'bus *henro*' who make no physical effort at all unless they have to. (McLachlan, 1997:50).

This hierarchy is of course, 'only important to walkers. The harder you make it for yourself, the more *erai* you must be!' (McLachlan, 1997:65). A twenty-one-year-old

American who slept out, stressed his ‘entirely different experience,’ from ‘those who just walk it and stay at inns every night;’ yet he insisted this was the whole point:

Without the difficulty of walking it and camping out, you’re missing out on a giant portion of the pilgrimage. That’s why the car/bus *henro* were so dramatically different from the walking *henro*. The difficulty purifies the *henro* of his foolishness, arrogance, selfishness, etc. Car and bus *henro* miss out on that and in many cases only do the pilgrimage superficially.

Frey explains the attitudes of those who perform the Santiago pilgrimage, which may be reflected also in some of the comments by Shikoku walking pilgrims:

[W]hen bus pilgrims are labeled ‘tourists’ by foot or bicycle pilgrims it is not a pejorative statement about their motives but their movement choices. Tourists, understood to be frivolous, superficial people, travel en masse by bus, car or plane. Pilgrims, understood to be genuine, authentic, serious people, walk and cycle. (Frey, 1998:27).

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is tightly controlled: pilgrims must carry a credential which is ‘only for those who go on foot, bicycle or horseback and who “desire to make the pilgrimage in a Christian sense, even though it may only be a general searching”.’ (Frey, 1998:67). It must be stamped along the way and presented to receive the *compostela* (certificate of completion). McLachlan’s ‘perceived hierarchy’ is institutionalised on the *camino* to Santiago, with the volunteer-run free refuges (which offer accommodation on a first-come, first-served basis) giving preference to walkers over cyclists. All of this seems the very antithesis of the totally unregulated Shikoku pilgrimage. Perhaps walking pilgrims in Shikoku would not like to be as regulated as on the route to Santiago, but they do appear to be seeking some form of recognition of their distinctness from motorised pilgrims. Demands for access to the *shukubō* year round, and to be given priority at the *nōkyōjo* appear to indicate that walkers consider themselves to be a special category of pilgrim – perhaps more ‘genuine’ than those on bus tours, and thus deserving of preferential treatment.

Yet bus tours have made the pilgrimage accessible to many who otherwise could not perform it. One could argue that pilgrimage should not be available only to those who are physically fit. The bus pilgrims too, are kept to a punishing schedule; when Reader spent some time with a group, he reported ‘[they] proved to be four of the most hectic and wearying days of my life.’ (Reader, 1993a:127). The steep paths and flights of steps up to the temples also present a real challenge for the elderly and

infirm. Most Japanese pilgrims seem to acknowledge that walking the pilgrimage is the ideal, (see p. 47) but it is simply not practical for them. Since visiting all the temples, reciting the correct sutras and collecting the *hōin* are probably considered the primary activities, performance methods are less important.

Modern manifestations

It is those with the most ‘religious’ motivations who appear to be the most disillusioned by the pilgrimage’s ‘modern-day reality,’ as the twenty-one-year-old quoted above defined it. He recalled meeting a British priest (denomination unspecified) who said:

the pilgrimage he was doing . . . (his fourth time around) would be his last because he couldn’t stand to see the corruption of the pilgrimage, the temples and Shingon itself any longer. While the temples were once places of purity and true devotion, most are now far more concerned with money, and other materialistic things like upgrading themselves, becoming more popular, etc.

Whether the temples were ever as pure as this man believes is immaterial; the situation clearly is not consistent with his perception of what a pilgrimage should be. The pilgrimage is obviously very different now from the days when everyone walked it. However, Reader (1993a) considers those complaining about corruption ‘are to some degree indulging in a standard human exercise of looking back nostalgically to a past that is always better in the imagination than the present.’ (Reader, 1993a:127). In an era of consumerism and instant gratification, where self-denial and asceticism are distinctly out of fashion, we should not be surprised at seeing examples of this in pilgrimage, which is after all, a component of popular culture; it is simply reflecting the dominant values of contemporary society.

Conclusion

Previous chapters have compared and contrasted the profiles, motives, impressions and performance methods of Japanese and western pilgrims, and have found some significant differences between them. In fact, one American's initial response to my request to participate in the research was:

I'd be surprised if us westerners have anything in common with your Japanese respondents, other than that we all went around in the clockwise direction. When you look at Waseda's survey, the vast majority of people do the pilgrimage by bus, *kugiri-uchi*, when they are retired, and for reasons other than travel or religion. *All just the opposite of what us westerners seem to do.* [Emphasis added].

To review the major differences: while most Japanese pilgrims were in their fifties and sixties, the western pilgrims were generally much younger – the average age being the late thirties. The majority of Japanese – as noted by the American above – travelled by motor vehicle, as part-time pilgrims (*kugiri-uchi*), but the westerners all walked the route – mostly in one trip (*tōshi-uchi*). There were some shared motives, such as self-discovery, ascetic training and history, but most of the Japanese pilgrims' motives related either to ancestors and the recently deceased, or to practical concerns of everyday life, such as health and safety; whereas the non-Japanese pilgrims' motives mostly centred on hiking in the natural environment or an interest in Japanese culture. While both Japanese and westerners expressed appreciation for nature and the people of Shikoku, the Japanese pilgrims mostly described their experiences in relation to their feelings: being refreshed, calmed, purified or grateful. Many of the westerners, however, wrote more dramatically about the intensity of their experiences, and how the pilgrimage had changed their lives.¹⁸

¹⁸ To what extent the westerners surveyed can be considered typical is an issue that must be taken into account. I have met a number of international residents in Tokushima who have participated in bus excursions to at least the first twelve temples – although whether they considered themselves pilgrims at the time is doubtful – as well as an Australian woman who visited all the temples in her car. The fact that the pilgrims I contacted had put their names on a list of 'Known *henro*' willing to communicate with others about the pilgrimage would seem to indicate a particular interest in it (that they responded to my questions – some even sending me their own written accounts – attests to this, as does the fact that the American quoted above possesses a copy of the Waseda survey). Further research with a much larger sample of non-Japanese pilgrims will be needed to confirm whether the data and hypothesis presented here are accurate.

It is obviously unreasonable to compare fifteen western walking pilgrims with hundreds of Japanese motorised pilgrims; realistically they should be compared solely with Japanese walking pilgrims. However, after examining the motives and impressions of all the Japanese respondents, walkers do not appear to differ noticeably from those travelling in cars or on bus tours. As seen in the quotations in Chapter Three, for most themes there were almost identical statements from pilgrims in all travel modes. It was only in their common disdain for motorised pilgrims that a number of Japanese and western walkers expressed similar views. It is necessary to look elsewhere to explain the differences: to the concept of pilgrimage itself.

Pilgrimage, as represented in European or North American literature and historical accounts, evokes an image of a long, arduous and possibly dangerous journey through foreign lands, encountering different cultures and customs, to a distant sacred goal. In his foreword to Phil Cousineau's 1998 book, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, Huston Smith declares:

To set out on a pilgrimage is to throw down a challenge to everyday life. Nothing matters now but this adventure. . . . The naked glitter of the sacred mountain stirs the imagination; the adventure of self-conquest has begun.' (Cousineau, 1998:xi).

The words 'challenge', 'adventure' and 'self-conquest' exemplify 'the pilgrim as hero' that Aziz describes. Pilgrimage appears to be attractive as a spiritual activity that also involves physical challenge. Frey reports that many of the predominantly male pilgrims to Santiago 'boast about the number of kilometres they are able to travel each day. Instead of the 20- or 30-kilometre average, some walk 40 to 60 kilometres per day.' (Frey, 1998:30). An example of this in Japan is Craig McLachlan – a New Zealander who had previously walked from Kyūshū to Hokkaidō – who completed the Shikoku pilgrimage circuit in thirty days. (McLachlan, 1997:223). Perhaps the emphasis on individual achievement in a competitive, goal-oriented society influences this type of behaviour. Turner and Turner (1978) 'argue that there is a significant difference between pilgrimages taken after the industrial revolution and all previous types' (p.38):

[P]ilgrimage has become an implicit critique of the life-style characteristic of the encompassing social structure. Its emphasis on the transcendental, rather than mundane . . . its generation of *communitas*; its search for the roots of ancient, almost vanishing virtues as the underpinning of social life . . . all have

contributed to the dramatic resurgence of pilgrimage. (Turner and Turner, 1978:38).

By contrast, it is said that, ‘In Japanese culture, the image of pilgrimage took a peculiarly poetic and haunting turn.’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995:186). The haiku poet Matsuo Bashō is probably the most famous poet-pilgrim. He ‘spent the last ten years of his life going on a number of pilgrimages, dressed like a priest’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995:187); his *The Narrow Road to the Far North* shows his melancholy nature:

But though I might die on the road – on this journey to far and remote places, off the beaten track – I was resigned from the beginning to the evanescence of human existence; and if I fall by the wayside and die in a ditch like a beggar, it will merely be my fate. (Matsuo, 1974: np¹⁹)

For wanderers like Bashō, and possibly also for the ‘professional’ pilgrims on the roads around Shikoku, movement seems to have taken on a meaning of its own, as Coleman and Elsner explain: ‘For Bashō, the particular goal was less important than the wandering itself and the deep motivation for attaining an interior state, an ecstasy.’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995:187). Both the mythic adventure, and the drive to achieve, are absent; instead, the idea of pilgrimage seems to be of wandering in nature and visiting places associated with holy men of the past. The fact that, except for the earliest pilgrims to China, almost all pilgrimage has been within the country, also removes the encounters with different cultures noted in most western pilgrimage; indeed, as described by Foard in the last chapter, pilgrimage has tended to reinforce Japanese identity through the sense of sharing a common history.

While some Japanese undoubtedly do undertake the pilgrimage in a spirit of ascetic discipline, this may not imply exactly the same thing as for a western pilgrim. Kitagawa (1987) has written that Japanese Buddhism has ‘a propensity for understanding the meaning of life aesthetically rather than ethically or metaphysically’ (Kitagawa, 1987:268). One of Hoshino’s walking pilgrims described arriving at the final temple and ‘being able, for the first time to indulge in a moment of bliss,’ (*‘hoetsu’ to iu shifuku no shunkan ni hitaru koto ga dekita*). (Hoshino,

¹⁹ This book had disappeared from the library when I went to check the page number.

1999:60). This reflects Bashō's 'ecstasy,' noted above, and could illustrate Kitagawa's assertion.

At the root of these contrasting ideas of pilgrimage is the different nature of religion in each culture. Turner and Turner (1978) describe how, in western nations:

Religion . . . has been moved into the leisure sphere . . . On the other hand, work . . . has been totally segregated from religion . . . Thus, under the influence of the division between work-time and leisure-time, religion has become less serious but more solemn . . . it has become specialized to establish ethical standards and behavior in a social milieu characterized by . . . large scale secularization. (Turner and Turner, 1978:35-6).

The current revival of interest in the sacred may be a reaction to consumerism and an excessively secular society. Books such as Phil Cousineau's (see p. 52) aim to help those jaded with conventional tourism to transform their travel experiences. Some believe it necessary to perform a pilgrimage as closely as possible to the way it would have been done in the past, emulating the ascetic monks. The material aspects of the Shikoku pilgrimage are offensive to those seeking an exclusively sacred experience; yet pilgrimage has always combined sacred and profane. As Turner and Turner note: 'The great medieval pilgrimages, in Islam as in Christianity, were usually associated with great fairs and fiestas, as indeed they are in Shinto Japan.'²⁰ (Turner and Turner, 1978:36). Sumption (1975) reports a knight offering to buy an indulgence from a servant who had travelled to Assisi, for the amount he had spent getting there. (Sumption, 1975:295). This could be compared to buying a scroll with all the Shikoku eighty-eight *hōin* on it.

The Japanese, however, as reported in Chapter Two, do not clearly separate secular and sacred behaviour, and ritual is more central to religion than belief. Pilgrimage appears to be more of an inner journey; perhaps it may be considered as a ritual of purification – a calming and cleansing of the spirit and a reorienting the mind, to put the pilgrim into a right relationship with the gods and nature (one person described this as a humbling feeling, not a heroic one) – enabling him or her then to return to the structured life of everyday urban society, feeling refreshed and renewed and able once again to interact with others in the busy city. Since they do not strictly

²⁰ Not just Shinto, but Buddhist Japan too, I would suggest. Tō-ji, Kōbō Daishi's former temple in Kyōto, holds a flea market on the 21st of each month, to mark the day the saint 'entered into nirvana.'

separate the sacred from the profane, perhaps the modern manifestations do not offend them so much – particularly as the majority are benefitting from the convenience – although, as seen in the last chapter, there were certainly some Japanese who criticised the temples for ‘becoming like merchants.’

When the western pilgrims describe the intensity of their experiences using terms like ‘amazing’, ‘sublime’, ‘exhilarating’, ‘empowering’ and ‘life-altering’ they are conforming to Huston Smith’s ‘challenge’, ‘adventure’ and ‘self-conquest:’ this is pilgrimage as a mythic voyage of self-discovery. Whereas, when Japanese pilgrims describe feeling ‘cleansed,’ or ‘refreshed’ or ‘flooded with a strange peace and a feeling of fulfilment’ they are reporting experiences consistent with their concept of pilgrimage as an inner journey of renewal and purification. Thus pilgrims from both cultures are performing the pilgrimage according to their own notions of what pilgrimage represents for them, and their impressions echo those concepts.

As for the role that the pilgrimage plays in contemporary Japanese life: if the Shikoku pilgrimage were to be considered as a ritual, the fact that the majority of participants come in spring means that it could fit conveniently between January’s *hatsumōde* (New Year visits to shrines and temples) and the summer *o-bon* festival (when the ancestral spirits are believed to return to their homes) as a cyclical ritual of refreshment, renewal, and reintegration into Japanese society.

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