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Approaching Emptiness: Buddhist Pilgrimage in Japan

Summary

Pilgrimage to religious sites and secular travel culture have been closely linked for many centuries in Japan. Pilgrims in the Japanese Buddhist context usually visit a series of temples that form a fixed set or 'circle' of Buddhist sites thought to be miraculous. The circulatory Buddhist pilgrimage to thirty-three sites in and around the old capital of Kyoto – the Saikoku pilgrimage – is one of the most enduring complex religious institutions known. The article examines possible reasons for the undiminished success of the pilgrimage, highlighting the role of foundation legends and miracle tales in the management of memory. The narratives reveal bureaucratic site administration and are connected to the act of mapping of paths both through the physical and the spiritually endowed landscape.

Keywords: Japan; Buddhism; pilgrimage; mapping; memory; narratives

Pilgerfahrt zu religiösen Stätten und säkulare Reisekultur sind seit Jahrhunderten in Japan eng verknüpft. Im Kontext des japanischen Buddhismus besuchen Pilger und Pilgerinnen eine Reihe von Tempeln, die einen festen Rundgang bilden. Der sechshundert Jahre alte Saikoku-Pilgerrundweg, der zu dreißig Tempeln in und um die alte Kaiserstadt Kyoto führt, stellt eine der erfolgreichsten komplexen religiösen Einrichtungen dar. Der Beitrag führt Gründe für den anhaltenden Erfolg dieser Pilgerfahrt auf. Zentral für den Erfolg und die Kontinuität der Pilgerfahrt in Japan sind die Erinnerungspflege in Form von Gründungslegenden und Wundergeschichten. Die Narrative zeigen sowohl die Verwaltung der Pilgerfahrt auf als auch die Verortung des Rundwegs in der physischen und der spirituell gedachten Landschaft.

Keywords: Japan; Buddhismus; Pilgerfahrt; Kartierung; Erinnerung; Narrative

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1 Introducing a popular practice

Pilgrimage to religious sites and secular travel culture have been closely linked for many centuries in Japan. Pilgrims and visitors to Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines regard the sites they visit to be miraculous, and their visit to be beneficial in the spiritual sense. Japanese call these sites *reijō* 靈場, roughly translatable as ‘numinous site’ denoting what in English would be rendered as ‘sacred site’. *Reijō*¹ are sites where visitors can directly benefit from the miraculous power of the deity present. The benefits that pilgrims and occasional visitors to a Buddhist temple in Japan strive for are generally referred to as *genze riyaku*, ‘this-worldly benefits’, and pilgrimage guide books usually list the particular benefits obtainable at a given temple. It would be misleading to compare this concept with the Christian idea of spiritual benefit, and it will be attempted in the following to show the specific Buddhist understanding of ‘this-worldly benefits’² in the context of pilgrimage, the deities encountered and the rituals performed. As an aside it must be mentioned that there is an inter-Buddhist debate on *genze riyaku*, and some Buddhist traditions in Japan openly despise the concept of obtaining benefits from practice and discourage their adherents from conducting pilgrimages. It is, however, such a widespread concept that the polemical stance toward it proves its importance.

This article examines the causes for the astonishing popularity of Buddhist pilgrimage practice in Japan, stressing aesthetic components and the role of foundation legends, miracle tales and narrative maps connected with pilgrimage sites. I will present examples from the oldest existing pilgrimage circuit that is performed in and around the former imperial capital of Kyōto, the ‘Saikoku Pilgrimage’, and show possible reasons for its popularity in the early modern period and today. The main reason is certainly the overall attractive design of this spiritual practice in that it has combined access to vigorous asceticism as well as worldly pleasure.³ At the same time, this dynamic between doctrinal Buddhist precepts and possibilities of individual styling has been balanced in such a way as to remain acceptable to both the clerical service providers as well as the pilgrims. In other words, the fickle balance between religious ‘fundamentalism’ (potentially leading to an over-emphasis on authoritative power) and destructive arbitrariness (potentially leading to the dissolution of authoritative structures) seems to have been successfully achieved. In this article, I will discuss possible motives for the achievement

1 The etymology of the term will be explained further below.

2 For a more general idea of *worldly benefits* in Japanese religious culture see Reader and Tanabe 1998 and Pye and Triplett 2007.

3 See Pye 2005 about the dynamic of traditional specifications and actual practice in modern Japanese pilgrimage. James Foard examines in a seminal arti-

cle precisely this relationship in regard to the social function of pilgrimage and tourism using the example of early modern developments of the ‘Saikoku Pilgrimage’. He concludes that both pilgrimage and tourism “aided the individual Japanese to identify with his national tradition” stressing the unifying character of early modern Japanese travel culture, Foard 1982, 248.

of this balance in both the early modern and the post-war periods. I assume that the motives surface in their respective contexts for various historical reasons but I recognize a certain interaction of guaranteeing and, *simultaneously*, inhibiting creative development. Bourdieu has called this interaction “economy of improvisation” (also: “regulated improvisation”) and regarded it as an underlying pattern in social action.⁴ According to Bourdieu both “breviary and prayer book function as much as an aid to memory as well as a straight jacket, by which the economy of improvisation is guaranteed and at the same time inhibited”⁵ In Japan, the Chinese lineages introduced from Korea and later China itself restricted improvisation by the narrow specifications of how to *do* Buddhism properly. On the other hand, the new teaching of having – relatively – unrestricted access to salvation and liberation from suffering through individual devotional practice and pious activities such as *sūtra* (scripture) copying, giving donations, going on pilgrimage etc. stimulated creative impulses. Aesthetic and cultural production of Japanese Buddhist writing, artefacts, new practices and lineages ensued to a high degree.

With this underlying pattern of a regulated improvisation in mind we turn now to a short general overview of Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage before highlighting individual components of the practice and its circulation.

2 Buddhist pilgrimage in Japan: a general overview

Pilgrims in the Japanese Buddhist context usually visit a series of temples that form a fixed set or circuit (Fig. 1). Pilgrimage in Japan is an extremely popular practice that is in principle organized by Buddhist institutions in a decentralized fashion.⁶ Its popularity has increased in recent decades so that we can virtually speak of a ‘pilgrimage boom’, a trend that we can also observe in other places in the world. Pilgrimage in Japan looks back on a very long tradition – the oldest pilgrimage circuit celebrated the millennial of its (legendary) founder in 2008. In Japanese Buddhism, as in Buddhism in general, pilgrimage practice constitutes a voluntary act. In other words: there is no compulsion or duty for Buddhists to conduct a pilgrimage so that the enormous success of this ritual practice cannot be attributed to the forceful implementation of religious precepts by an

⁴ Bourdieu, Pialoux, and Schwibs 1979 [1976], 170.

⁵ Translation of the following quote from the German translation: “Das Brevier und das Gebetbuch fungieren dabei ebenso als Gedächtnisstütze wie als Zwangsjacke, durch die eine Ökonomie der Improvisation zugleich gewährleistet und unterbunden wird.” This quote appears in Bourdieu’s commentary on Max Weber’s interpretation of religion, Bourdieu 2000, 37.

⁶ This chapter is with some changes the English version of a book section published in German (Tripplett 2014). I thank the editors, Klaus Herbers and Hans Christian Lehner, for the kind permission to publish it in English. – For a complete overview on the Buddhist pilgrimages in modern Japan see Michael Pye’s recent publication: Pye 2015.

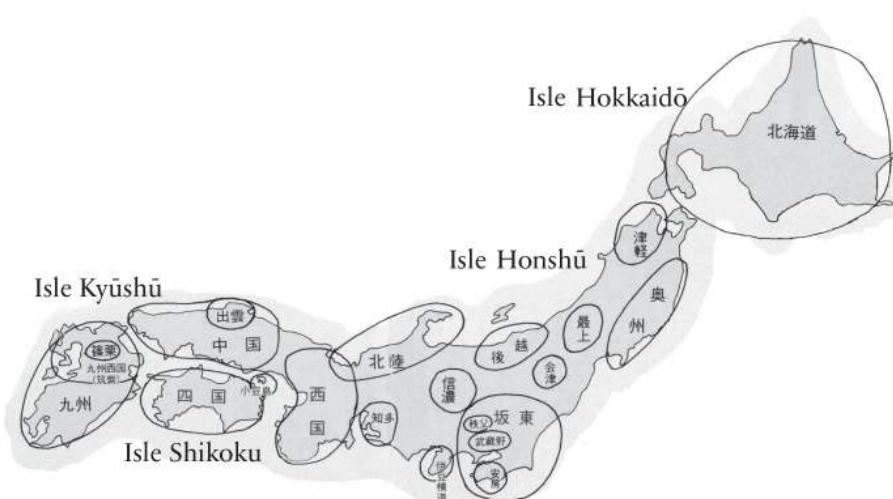


Fig. 1 Map of the Japanese archipelago with a selection of the most popular and well-known pilgrimage circuits, based on a postcard from a pilgrimage association.

authority. According to most Buddhist denominations, one can at the very least do no harm by going on a pilgrimage. Non-Buddhist pilgrims, i.e. non-Asian visitors that are easily recognized as foreign and therefore identified as belonging to another religion, are welcomed at Buddhist temples, and this welcome is extended to both men and women. Neither confession of faith nor membership in a Buddhist denomination are required or expected from the pilgrim. If an ethnically non-Japanese conducts the proscribed rituals at a pilgrimage temple the local populace will assume that the pilgrim has an emotional relationship with the deity venerated at the site and this incites a sense of pride in their local temple.

In the old days, as well as today, Japanese pilgrims become bonded by their devout practice to the long pilgrimage tradition not only in their own country but also, implicitly, to the ‘homelands’ of Japanese Buddhism: India and China. Pilgrims visit the residence or ‘land’ of the deity, depending on which deity is venerated at the visited temple and ‘encounters’ him or her at the site, an idea that will be explained in more detail below. The final aim of a Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage is not well defined. In principle, pilgrims obtain religious merit by their devotion to the deity. This merit is to be ritually transferred to suffering beings in an act that is, in Sanskrit, called *parināmanā*, which Japanese refer to as *ekō* 回向. The transfer of merit is an integral part of all Buddhist practice that will – according to the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition – lead to the attainment of insight into the basic emptiness of all phenomena. Therefore, Buddhist pilgrimage is a practice to ultimately gain this insight.

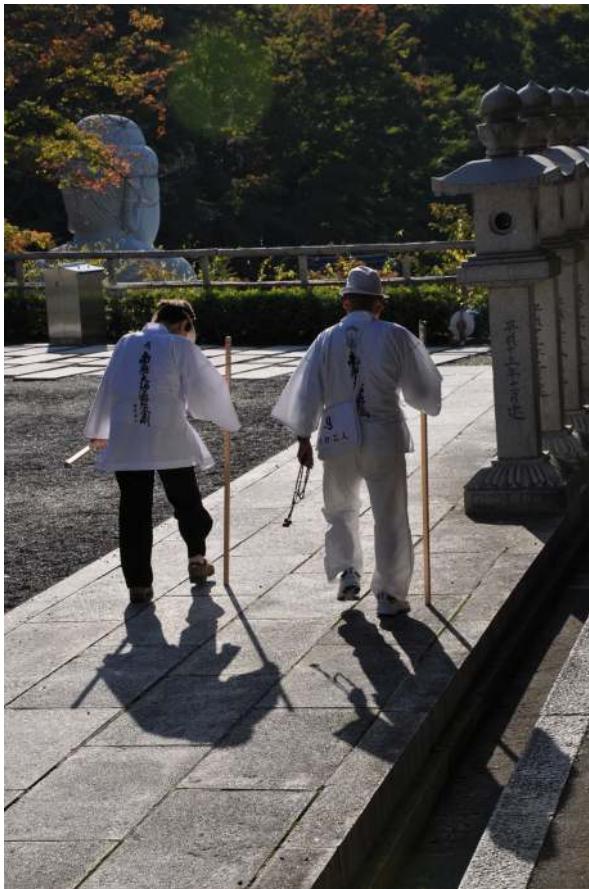


Fig. 2 Two pilgrims with traditional staff and clothing at Tsubosaka Temple near Nara, Japan, 2008.

The precepts regulating the ritual procedures of the Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage including recitations, songs, time of travel, clothing etc. are specific enough to ensure a fixed, identifiable frame of reference (Fig. 2). At the same time, there is ample scope for individualisation for both a single pilgrim as well as an organized group. As will be shown further below, this particular dynamic between authoritative ritual precepts and individual creativity can be said to be the main reason for the long and stable continuity of this religious tradition in Japan.



Fig. 3 Map of the Shikoku Pilgrim's Way, modern print on paper, H. 38 cm, W. 53.5 cm, private collection.

3 The Shikoku and the Saikoku pilgrimage paths

Two of the numerous Buddhist pilgrimage paths in Japan have a downright paradigmatic character: the Shikoku (Fig. 3) and the Saikoku (Fig. 4) pilgrimage paths. Both pilgrimage paths have been models for numerous imitations in other regions of Japan where priests formed other temple circuits, often linking thirty-three sites of worship of the Buddhist deity Kannon. In many temple grounds visitors also have the opportunity of conducting a full pilgrimage to a circuit of thirty-three or eighty-eight sacred sites in miniature by walking along the respective number of small stone statues representing the principal deities or touching small bags of sand from the original sites.

The paragon of Japanese pilgrimage is the 1400 km long circuit on Shikoku Island, the smallest of the four main islands of the Japanese archipelago, completed on foot and in traditional garb with special hat and stick. A foot pilgrim on the Shikoku path needs approximately six weeks on average to conclude the entire circuit. It leads to eighty-eight temples that are connected by a path all the way around the island. After completing the circuit one has done a complete tour of Shikoku through its four provinces. This path is referred to as *henro* 遍路, which means “connected paths”. The monk Kūkai (774–835) is



Fig. 4 Historical guidebook of the Saikoku pilgrimage, woodblock printed booklet, ink on paper, H. 7.9 cm, W. 18.2 cm, dated 1791, Nagoya City Museum.

revered as the (legendary) founder of this path. He is known foremost under his posthumous title Kōbō Daishi, meaning „Great Teacher ‘Spreader of Buddhist Truth’“ and pilgrims refer to him affectionately as Daishi-sama, “Lord Great Teacher”. Kūkai has played a major role as a cultural hero and ‘saint’ in Japan. The Shingon⁷ Buddhist tradition Kūkai introduced from China and developed and established in Japan is a living tradition to this day, also institutionally. This tradition has deeply shaped Japanese culture and religion, and although today it does not belong to the larger religious corporations, it still significantly informs the religious understanding of Buddhist pilgrimage practice.⁸ Remarkably, today’s eighty-eight Shikoku pilgrimage temples do not all belong to the Shingon tradition (or school) but to other schools such as Zen Buddhism due to historical developments. However, Shingon priests promulgate that pilgrims should start the circuit outside of Shikoku at the Shingon Kōyasan branch head temple in Wakayama Prefecture to strengthen the believers’ connection to Kōbō Daishi who is said to rest in meditation in the Kōyasan sanctuary to this day. Nevertheless, the circuit remains decentrally organised, not least because the Shingon school itself has several branches and different local foci. Today, the Shikoku Reijōkai, an umbrella organisation, represents the interests of the eighty-eight temples and the pilgrimage confederations in the local communities, prefectures and with travel agencies.

⁷ Shingon meaning “true word” referring to the frequently used sacred words (*mantras*).

The Shikoku path leads to eighty-eight numerically ordered temples in all four Shikoku provinces that stand for the four stages on the path to the final liberation from suffering: resolve, discipline, insight and nirvana. In this way, the landscape becomes a sacred topography that is physically perambulated and experienced. The foot pilgrimage through the mountainous, insular landscape with its steep cliffs, forests and dangerously busy narrow roads enables this direct experience in the most immediate manner. Nowadays, most pilgrims use a charter bus, their own vehicle or go by taxi to visit all eighty-eight or a selected number of temples on the circuit. In its time of formation in the late 16th and early 17th centuries when pilgrimage became popular in all of Japan, walking was the main means of transportation on the circuit; using horse or wagon was limited to a small group of the social elite.

The Shikoku pilgrimage path has been studied thoroughly, also in Western academia where this phenomenon has received much attention.⁹ The older of the two paradigmatic pilgrimage paths in Japan, however, the Saikoku path to thirty-three temples dedicated to Kannon, the deity of universal compassion, has not found its way into Western language research to the same extent. The reason for this relative neglect of the Saikoku pilgrimage is, in my view, the far less structured or fixed format – compared to the Shikoku path. On Shikoku, pilgrimage is viewed to be a more clearly defined religious practice whereas the much older Saikoku path is more complex, entangling religious and secular endeavours. This has to do with the location of the two pilgrimage circuits: before the construction of the gigantic bridge complex of Seto-Ōhashi in 1988 that connects Shikoku with Honshū, the island was more isolated from the vibrant cultural and urban centres of Japan. Shikoku had the reputation of being remote, mystical and poor – an ideal place for ascetic practice. It also was connected to death, and had a rather dark reputation, because most pilgrims took (and take) vows to dedicate the merit gained through the practice of pilgrimage to one's deceased ancestors or prepare for their own deaths. The Saikoku pilgrimage is quite the opposite: with some exceptions, the temples on the circuit are directly in or around the former capital city of Kyōto with its numerous tourist attractions and sites of national pride. In Japan, religious pilgrimage practice and secular travel culture is traditionally intimately connected, and this connection is particularly close in the case of the Saikoku path. Today, the sacred sites where Kannon resides are often part of temples of enormous historical and cultural, and therefore, national value and comprise important tourist attractions themselves. Some are even

⁸ For an overview on Japanese religions in history and today, with current membership numbers see Swanson and Chilson 2006. See also the comprehensive volume on the history of Japanese Buddhism: Kleine 2011.

⁹ Especially noteworthy are the works on the Shikoku pilgrimage by Ian Reader, e.g. Reader 2006. See also Bohner 1931 and Hoshino 1983; about transformation processes and contextualisation see especially Reader 1987, Hoshino 1997, Hoffmann 2004, and again Reader 2007.

recognized as a United Nations Cultural World Heritage (Kiyomizu-dera and Daigo-ji) increasing national pride in these sites.

Since it is neither mandatory in Japan to visit the temples on a pilgrimage circuit in the numerical order assigned to them nor to visit them in one go, the Saikoku circuit lends itself in a particularly large degree to be combined with leisure tours to one or two famous Buddhist sites at a time. The effort and expenditure of undertaking a trip to Shikoku from one of the larger cities on Honshū is much greater, and the idea that a visit to a pilgrimage temple is indeed devotional practice rather than a sightseeing tour will have priority. Moreover, the island of Shikoku is strongly perceived as a geographical unit and an isolated sacred locality whereas the area covered by the Saikoku path is not.

The question now is why this combination of pilgrimage and leisure travel in the region of Kyōto did not lead to the dissolution of the Saikoku path and the connected religious practice centuries ago. The geographical conditions could have facilitated such a development as pointed out above. The Saikoku circuit has astonishingly remained nearly perfectly intact since the 15th century, even as to the order of the thirty-three temples, although some exist only as small offices for the pilgrims and are no longer used for any other Buddhist services.

The Saikoku path has not only continued with just a few changes from the 15th century until today, but also enjoys undiminished and even rather increased popularity. Instead of falling into oblivion, scores of pilgrim-tourists eagerly visit the thirty-three sites and receive proof of their visit in the form of sealed and aesthetically hand-written ‘receipts’ for giving a contribution for the temple’s service. The ‘receipts’ are cherished and collected in booklets, scrolls or on pilgrim’s jackets sold at the temples for this purpose.¹⁰

4 The Saikoku pilgrimage as the matrix of all pilgrimage paths in Japan

The *circulatory* Buddhist pilgrimage¹¹ to thirty-three sites in and around Kyōto is probably one of the most stable complex religious institutions known. The number thirty-three is clearly identifiable as the special number of Kannon to which the pilgrimage is dedicated, found in an important Buddhist scripture, as will be explained further below.¹² Kannon is a *bodhisattva*, a nascent Buddha. The name *Kannon* is the Japanese

¹⁰ This practice is not special to this particular path but is shared by all Japanese pilgrimage centres.

¹¹ This term was coined by Michael Pye (e.g. Pye 2010). For further in-depth studies of modern and

contemporary Japanese pilgrimage and its sources see Pye 1987 and Pye 2000.

¹² The number eighty-eight of the Shikoku temples has by contrast several explanations, none of which is conclusive, see Reader 2006.

reading of two Chinese characters 觀音 for the translation of the Sanskrit name of Avalokiteśvara, literally *The One Who Perceives (all) Everywhere*. A bodhisattva is constantly in action to free the beings in need with his or her wisdom and compassion from situations that hinder those beings on their path to awakening. These hindrances include disease and accidents. Since there are immeasurable amounts of beings and uncountable unfortunate situations, a bodhisattva naturally has to be extremely powerful and, above all, flexible to be able to alleviate all this suffering. In Japanese Buddhism as well as in other countries shaped by Mahāyāna Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara is regarded by far as the most powerful and flexible bodhisattva. This figure is praised in many Buddhist sūtras (scriptures) with the *Lotus sūtra* (*Hoke-kyō* 法華經) being possibly the most important for understanding the religious and cultural history of Japan. The number thirty-three is derived from the 25th chapter of the *Lotus sūtra* that is dedicated to Avalokiteśvara: in this chapter, also counting as a separate sūtra on its own, Avalokiteśvara is introduced in great detail and highly praised. There is a long list of benefits that he bestows on those who turn to him, chant his name and make offerings. Those who are threatened with burning to death in a great fire are saved, equally those who are to be hurt or killed by a weapon, about to perish in shipwreck etc. Wishes for either a baby boy or girl are fulfilled without fail, and so forth, are vividly described in the sūtra in both prose and verse. These are important passages for the formation of the numerous miracle stories that place the wondrous activities of this bodhisattva on Japanese soil.

The text also lists Avalokiteśvara's various manifestations that suffering beings encounter. The bodhisattva takes on many different forms, both male and female, depending on the situation, to be of assistance and teach the *dharma* (Buddhist teachings) in the best possible and most skilful way. Altogether thirty-three manifestations are enumerated in the 25th chapter. The list of these manifestations starts with the most powerful one, that of a *buddha* (an awakened one).

The text says:

If there is any land where sentient beings are to be saved by the form of a buddha, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara teaches the Dharma by changing himself into the form of a buddha. To those who are to be saved by the form of a *pratyekabuddha* [private or solitary, non-teaching buddha], he teaches the Dharma by changing himself into the form of a *pratyekabuddha*.¹³

The text continues in this way by enumerating increasingly lower forms of embodying spiritual achievement and manifestations in the shape of non-human beings. The complete list¹⁴ looks like this:

¹³ Lotus Sūtra, 297–298.

¹⁴ Compiled from the BDK English Tripitaka translation.

1. buddha
2. *pratyekabuddha* (private buddha)
3. śrāvaka (listener to words of a buddha)
4. Brahma (creator god)
5. Śakra (a god, lord of the deities)
6. Īśvara (a god, universal ruler)
7. Maheśvara (a powerful god)
8. the great commander of the deities
9. Vaiśravaṇa (protector deity)
10. minor king
11. wealthy man
12. householder
13. state official
14. brahman (priest)
15. monk
16. nun
17. layman
18. laywoman
19. wife of a wealthy man
20. wife of a householder
21. wife of a state official
22. wife of a brahman
23. boy
24. girl
25. *deva* (deity)
26. *nāga* (supernatural being shaped like a giant snake)
27. *yakṣa* (demonic being)
28. *gandharva* (non-human musician)
29. *asura* (non-human being that battles with the deities)
30. *garuḍa* (supernatural being shaped like a giant bird)
31. *kinnara* (half bird-half human, makes celestial music)
32. *mahoraga* (snake-like being)
33. Vajrapāṇi (protector)

This list symbolizes the *entirety* of all classes of enlightened and non-enlightened existences – human, non-human, gods and divine beings alike. The number thirty-three therefore stands for an all-encompassing amount of manifestations and is an expression of the extraordinary power of this bodhisattva.

4.1 Encountering Bodhisattva Kannon in Japan: meeting miraculous images

We could now assume that each of the thirty-three pilgrimage temples on the Saikoku path is dedicated to one of these manifestations. This is, however, not at all the case. The number thirty-three merely points to the fact that visiting all of these temples means that the pilgrim is completely and wholeheartedly devoted to Kannon. The circuit enables practitioners to conduct their devotions to the fullest extent. As we will see below, temples are connected to the content of the 25th chapter if we look at how they quote indirectly from the *Lotus sūtra* in their foundation narratives and miracle accounts and have Kannon appear in the temple, e.g. as a miraculous boy, which is manifestation number 23. The iconographic forms that we encounter in the statuary and the images at the thirty-three temples do not derive, however, from the *Lotus sūtra* but from iconographic systems originally developed in Central Asia and China.

There are two principal systems each having six forms of Kannon. On the Saikoku path pilgrims visit the following icons; the number in brackets gives the total number of appearances on the circuit:

- Shō-Kannon (4)
- Eleven-headed Kannon (7)
- Thousand-armed Kannon (16)
- Wheel turning Kannon (6)
- Cūḍī (Mother Buddha) Kannon (1)¹⁵
- Lasso swinging Kannon (1)¹⁶
- Horse-headed Kannon (1)

The total numbers of all statues are 36 because at some temples more than one form is revered and these are represented by different statues. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that some forms appear only once whereas some forms are disproportionately frequent such as the Thousand-armed Kannon with 16 instances. Knowledge of six-Kannon systems that ultimately derive from different scriptures and rituals is not really important for doing the pilgrimage. The sets of six should rather be regarded as the iconographic reservoir that the Japanese use in their sanctuaries. Forms are also combined. Especially popular is the combination of the Thousand-armed and the Eleven-headed because the notion of an all-perceiving, tirelessly assisting bodhisattva is perceived to be particularly well expressed by giving the figure multiple arms, that traditionally have eyes on them, and multiple heads (Fig. 5).

The reputation of an exceptionally powerful Kannon (statue) at a given temple led to the fabrication of copies at other temples (Fig. 6) that were connected by the circuit

¹⁵ The six-Kannon system of the Buddhist Tendai school does not include this form.

¹⁶ The six-Kannon system of the Buddhist Shingon school does not include this form.



Fig. 5 Statue of Thousand-armed Kannon, wood with color and gold foil, H. 192 cm, 13th century, Ryūhō-ji, Kanagawa Prefecture.

but were still in some competition with the others. This is how the uneven distribution of the six forms at the thirty-three temples can be explained.¹⁷

The famous, miraculous Kannon is the main attraction of the historical temples, but interestingly the statue of the deity is not on public display in many temple halls or is shown only on particular occasions. Some are displayed only once a year, some are unveiled only every thirty-three years, others are completely secret and never on display. Temples celebrate – and have celebrated in the past – the public viewing of rarely shown Kannon statues in elaborate ceremonies. These popular events are not only of spiritual,

¹⁷ See Suzuki 2008 in the exhibition catalogue on the Saikoku pilgrimage published on the occasion of ordained emperor Kazan's 1000 year memorial day.

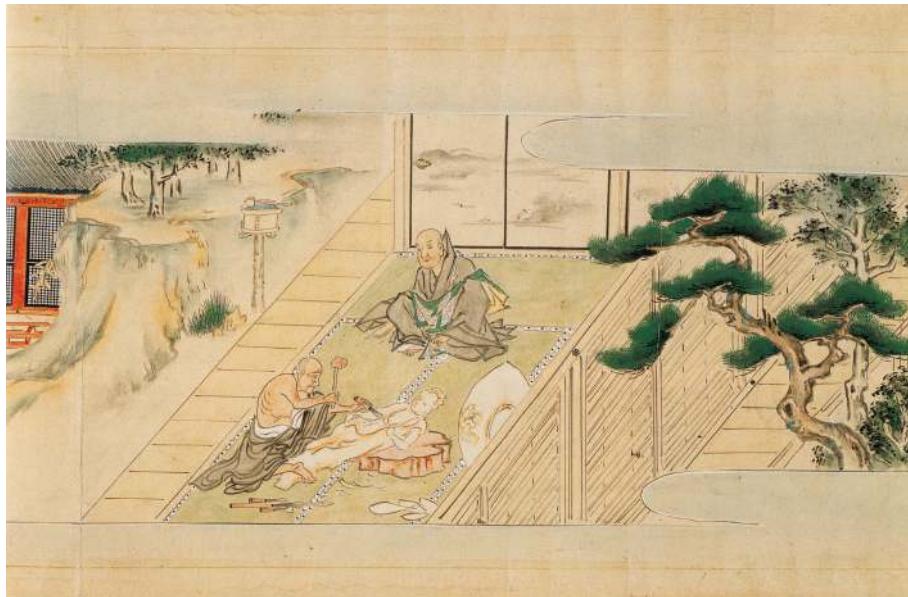


Fig. 6 A sculptor fashions the temple's Kannon statue, from: Illustrated legends of the Kannon of Anao-ji, by Kanō Einō (1631–1697), handscroll, ink and color on paper, H. 34.5 cm, W. 1253.2 cm, 1676, Anao-ji, Kyoto Prefecture.

but also of cultural and art historical interest, and contribute to the lasting attractiveness of the pilgrimage practice.

The practice of visiting thirty-three temples dedicated to the bodhisattva Kannon can be traced back to textual sources from the early 12th century.¹⁸ The circulatory pilgrimage to a fixed set of thirty-three Kannon sites is for the first time attested to in 15th century sources.¹⁹ Since the 17th century this pilgrimage circuit has been known as *Saikoku sanjūsan kasho Kannon junrei*²⁰ 西国三十三箇所觀音巡礼, meaning „Pilgrimage to thirty-three places of Kannon in the Western Provinces“. Saikoku, meaning Western Provinces or Lands, are those areas that are west of Edo, the flourishing commercial and political centre and seat of the military government that was in 1868 renamed

18 It is mentioned in a report by the abbot of the Tendai temple Onjō-ji. The abbot, Gyōson 行尊 (1057–1135), started his journey at Hase-dera and not with the current number 1, the Kannon temple in Nachi. However, the group of the thirty-three temples he mentions closely resembles the later, established set (Nara National Museum and NHK PlanNet Kinki 2008, 10).

19 The earliest mention of this is found in a collection of sermons and commentaries of the Rinzai Zen

monk Ten'in Ryūtaku 天隱龍沢 (1422–1500) from 1499 (Nara National Museum and NHK PlanNet Kinki 2008, 11).

20 *Junrei* is the most commonly used term for 'pilgrimage' in Japanese. Another important term is *ōmeguri*. For an overview on the diverse terminology used in the field of pilgrimage see the introduction to a special issue on Japanese pilgrimage: Reader and Swanson 1997.

Tōkyō, Eastern Capital. During this period, especially in the decades after the Genroku era (1688–1704), numerous imitations or ‘copies’ (*utsushi 写し*) of this popular practice were created by temple priests in other regions. The two, to this day, most important such copies were established in eastern Japan not far from Edo: the Bandō and Chichibu paths. The traditional Saikoku path was added to these two new circuits to form a super Kannon pilgrimage circuit that amounts to altogether one hundred sites by adding a 34th temple to the Chichibu path. This round number of one hundred has a satisfying ring to it and seems to have contributed to the inspiration for masses of pilgrims to complete this larger circuit.

The imitations are not limited to the two paradigmatic paths with their thirty-three or eighty-eight sites. Additional paths were and are being invented to accommodate temples dedicated to other Buddhist saints and deities, e.g. the Medicine Buddha. The paradigm of the circulatory pilgrimage is so dominant that non-Buddhist religions such as Shintō or those Buddhist traditions that decline the notion of pilgrimage as a means to obtain merit have also invented circuits.²¹

4.2 Performative modes of spirituality and fun: endeavours in ‘hagiotourism’

The imitation, miniaturization and invention of circulatory pilgrimage in Japan based on the highly successful older models is a clear sign for the immense popularity of this practice, especially in the centuries following the Genroku era when pilgrimage constituted the only opportunity for the general populace for travel and sight-seeing. The process of reproduction has a strong proliferating and, at the same time, stabilizing effect.²² One could image that such a proliferation would have a de-stabilizing effect because of the fundamentally competitive situation of the Buddhist temples vying for visitors and patrons. This is not the case in Japan: the associations of the temples as numbered sites on a circuit are nominal and not actual mergers. They are loose enough to provide room for individual operations also, but guarantee profit through the network of sites that are all intrinsic parts of a whole. The rationale for this is the *universal* power of Kannon (or Kōbō Daishi etc.), and pilgrimage stations are understood as *contact zones* to access this power and move the deity to bestow blessings. Since pilgrims and the occasional devout visitor view the site as the residence or ‘land’ of a universal deity, it is not seen as problematic that there are numerous such sites in Japan, China and India, and other countries and cities even outside of Asia. The focus on one single site of access to the sacred such as Jerusalem for Christians or Mekka for Muslims has not been part of Buddhist doctrine, ancient or contemporary. There were, nevertheless, Buddhist

²¹ For examples for practices in Shintō that can be recognized as pilgrimage see Pye and Triplett 2011, 41–

43; for examples in Buddhism see Pye and Triplett 2011, 33–34.

²² Reader 1988.

pilgrimages to only one destination in the history of Japan: Kumano on the southern tip of the Kii Peninsula in today's Mie Prefecture. This practice was, however, limited to the aristocratic elite and served to legitimize and stabilize imperial power and was conducted for a fairly short period of time in early medieval Japan.²³

While the Shikoku path provides a perfect ground for conducting ascetic practice ("enlightenment guaranteed"), the Saikoku path in and around the ancient capital with its access to both the sacred and amusement can be seen as a singularly successful combination of pilgrimage and tourism ("fun guaranteed"). For the latter phenomenon, I would like to introduce the ideal-typical term *hagiotourism*. However, finding distraction from the pressures of daily life while on spiritual pilgrimage is not the only reason for the success of the Saikoku path.

The important role of statuary has already been mentioned above, and there are other aesthetic components of the Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage, apart from the literary narratives introduced below in detail that have aided in the stabilizing of this religious practice. Foard introduces a helpful differentiation between pilgrimage itineraries that prescribe the pilgrim's clothes, equipment, songs, prayers, recitations and so on, and lists of additional and optional information such as guides to hostels, regional foods and other specialities. Items on the pilgrim's itinerary are to be performed, whereas the list provides merely information and lists items that can be freely selected from. Both *itinerary* and *list* are included in the popular pilgrimage guides. Foard describes both as 'modes' and notices that itineraries have remained surprisingly unchanged since the Tokugawa period whereas the lists were subject to much change.²⁴ The itinerary lists performative transactions at the pilgrimage temples that are still observable today. The transactions include lighting candles and incense, reciting liturgical texts and singing pilgrimage songs that Emperor Kazan composed according to legend, donating a small fee and a hand-copied, short Buddhist text (*sūtra*), and finally dropping off a paper slip announcing one's devotional visit by stating name, birth date, address and current date. Both the Buddhist *sūtra* copies and the pilgrimage slips are dropped into boxes dedicated to this purpose in the altar hall. *Sūtra* copying is traditionally an important devotional practice in East Asia. The seal and calligraphy of the name of the temple and the principal deity that the pilgrims (and occasional visitors) obtain from the temple office was originally the receipt of a payment to the monastic staff of the temple to have a *sūtra* copied professionally. Seal and calligraphy are collected in booklets, on scrolls and the traditional pilgrim's jacket which become cherished devotional objects.

²³ This medieval tradition is analysed in a book-length study by Moerman (Moerman 2005). The sacred site under investigation by Moerman is Nachi in

Kumano. This site was eventually integrated into the Saikoku pilgrimage circuit as number 1.

²⁴ Foard 1982, 241.

The traditional pilgrimage garb of white jacket, trousers, leggings, wide rush hat, bell and staff includes a practical bag for the paper slips, candles, incense, lighter, brush and ink, booklet with the Buddhist chants and so forth. The colour white symbolizes death: the pilgrimage is seen as a temporary state of dying and rebirth.

The most important symbols of Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage are staff and hat. The hat usually carries a calligraphy of a Buddhist saying that point to the special meaning of the arduous practice:

Through ignorance the three worlds are a prison
 Through enlightenment the ten directions are empty
 Originally there is neither east nor west
 Where then shall be south and north?²⁵

According to basic tenets of the form of Buddhism practiced in Japan, Mahāyāna Buddhism, all phenomena are empty, even the cardinal directions. Ultimately, walking in any direction on a pilgrimage path is therefore pointless or ‘empty’; still on the mundane level, in everyday life, the practitioner has to gain insight into this hard to grasp notion and to train hard.

The special design of the Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage as a circulatory practice emphasizes the concept of walking the path without emphasizing that a goal must be reached. Doing the practice, approaching emptiness, is the goal and the personal merit gained is not kept to oneself but ritually dedicated to others. The preliminary goal of the pilgrims is, however, to complete the circuit in its entirety. The completed pilgrim’s books etc. are not touristic souvenirs or ‘trophies’ Instead, they are collected conscientiously and painstakingly by the pilgrims to create a visual and material testimony of one’s piety and dedication. The completed book, garment or scroll illustrate the religious performance and are more than mere evidence of a satisfied urge to hoard objects in order to complete a collection. They demonstrate the pilgrim’s full devotion and pride in seeing an arduous and costly practice through to the end for the benefit of others.

4.3 Foundation narratives and miracle accounts of the Saikoku pilgrimage

The Buddhist foundation legends connecting the thirty-three temples of the Saikoku path form a fixed set or group. Such a group is otherwise not found in East Asia although the genre of Buddhist legends was widespread in China and Korea and comprised a typical textual genre. The development of Buddhist foundation legends in Japan actually goes directly back to the Chinese tradition with only slight changes. The compilation of groups of foundation legends, however, connecting a set number of temples

²⁵ Translation by Michael Pye: Pye 1997, 25.

is a Japanese invention. Foundation legends or myths is my translation of the Japanese term for such narratives, *engi* 縁起. *En* 縁 derives from the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term *pratyaya* and means the indirect causes that have karmic consequences. If something specific and unique happens from a direct cause, e.g. when someone finds a statue swimming in the river that later becomes a principal object of worship and ‘causes’ the foundation of a temple, the second character *gi* 起 is concerned and means roughly “to emerge”. An *engi* means that when the time became ripe by certain indirect and direct factors the temple was founded. Gorai Shigeru (1908–1993), a well-known scholar of Buddhist literature and ritual, deems *engi* not to be a Buddhist technical term but rather a term from colloquial speech. Buddhist deities such as Kannon as well as deities from the Shintō world – the *kami* 神 – appear because of a miraculous connection, *en*, to a place of person.²⁶ Gorai differentiates between 1) historical *engi*, 2) narrative or literary *engi* that developed into moralistic stories and fairy tales, and 3) *engi* of the esoteric Buddhism that touch on philosophical questions. The term is confusingly used as a category of miscellaneous Buddhist writings from chronicles to sermons and reports, and therefore hard to grasp as something in particular. Overall, it is not wrong to state that *engi* are a mixed group of textual genres concerned with the local histories and events of religious sanctuaries. They aim to foster the connection to the local emergence of the sacred and the power of the venerated deity. They are also instrumental in the memory management of these institutions.²⁷ As of the 12th century, *engi* narratives appear as longer stories that monastics or patrons commissioned as magnificently illustrated picture scrolls to praise the religious institution recounted in the story. Many of those scrolls have survived and are valuable sources for the study of Japanese Buddhism, history and culture.

Miracle stories are called *reigenki* 靈驗記 and reports of miracles connected to certain places are referred to as *reijōki* 靈場記. They can also appear as illustrated scrolls. Both are not much different from *engi* stories. The difference lies in the emphasis on the accounts and the portrayal of the power and blessings of Kannon (or other Buddhist figures) and the particular nature of the intervention or ‘response’ (*reiō* 靈応, *reikan* 靈感) of the divine power. The character 靈 *rei* (also read *ryō*) is important in the idea of how miracles work in the East Asian Buddhist context. The character is usually translated as “soul” or “spirit”, but means here more generally something indefinably numinous. The practitioner gets into contact with the universal power and merges with it by rituals of empowerment. Since ultimately the power of the ‘divine’ and the practitioner is not separate or different and since everything is interconnected, the very fabric of reality and the phenomena can be changed and influenced: the deity responds with healing

²⁶ Gorai 2008, 6.

Hokkeji (Tsubosaka-dera), and memory management see Triplett 2010.

²⁷ For an example of foundation legends of a temple on the Saikoku circuit, the Tsubosakasan Minami

an ailment, protection from danger and so forth, grasped as ‘miracles’ in the ritual of empowerment. The practitioner responds by showing gratitude and offering the merit to the less fortunate. The place where *rei*, the numinous in terms of the particular miraculous intervention of the powerful deity, can be experienced is therefore called *reijō*, ‘numinous site’ the typical term for a pilgrimage site in Japan.

The miracle stories often have the character of eye witness accounts and end, as is usual for Buddhist legends, with a moralistic instruction to avoid karmic retribution for unwholesome deeds in the future and praise for the beneficial figure or practice. Since the idea of karma, meaning *action* with ethical implications, was newly introduced to Japan in the 6th century, Buddhist legends explicating instances of the working of karma on Japanese soil were instrumental in spreading the teachings during the first centuries after its inception. The tendency to form and circulate *engi* and miracle stories has not subsided and continues to this day in the new media of communication such as temple websites and *manga* (comics).²⁸

The *engi* of the Saikoku pilgrimage is special because it presents the origin and the history of the establishment of the whole *institution* of the pilgrimage circuit. It also includes the *engi* stories of all thirty-three temples.²⁹ The legend of the institution of the circuit is actually the foundation legend of the Buddhist temple Hase-dera that was formed in the 13th or 14th century. It begins with a vision, resembling a message received in a dream:

The Chinese monk Tokudō Shōnin 德道上人 of Hase-dera dies suddenly and faces the ruler of the underworld, King Enma, who sends him back to the world of the living having given him a special mission. He shall establish thirty-three sites for Kannon to enable monastics as well as laymen and women to obtain virtuous benefits. The resurrected Tokudō tries to fulfil this mission but realizes that the time is not ripe for such an undertaking. He thereupon hides a dharma seal with the instruction of the king of the underworld in a stone box at Nakayama-dera so that someone in the future may fulfil the mission. The time passes by until in the middle of the Heian period (794–1185) the ordained emperor Kazan 花山 (968–1008), his Buddhist master Shōkū Shōnin 性空上人

²⁸ A *manga* praising and explaining the Saikoku pilgrimage was published by the pilgrimage association Saikoku sanjūsansho fudasho-kai in 1991.

²⁹ In many of the foundation narratives of the thirty-three temples the founder is described as asking the local mountain or tree deity for permission to erect a Buddhist sanctuary for Kannon. This permission is granted and the founder then either finds or makes the first statue of Kannon. This statue forms the ba-

sis for the first cultic activities at the new sacred site. The statue works miracles which are related in the legend. Interestingly, the stories do not make any difference between the deity and the statue that is regarded simply as a manifestation of the deity. For a short overview on the structure and function of the thirty-three Saikoku legends see Foard 1982, 243–244. For foundation legends or ‘myths’ of the Bandō circuit see MacWilliams 1997.

and other monks officially establish the pilgrimage path to thirty-three Kannon temples.³⁰

We can see clearly that this *engi* connects the lineages of two Buddhist temples – those of the influential Hase-dera and Nakayama-dera. The legendary figure Tokudō Shōnin, a Chinese immigrant monk, is supposed to have lived from 655 to 735 and to have founded Hase-dera although his actual existence cannot be verified. The legend states that a new and distinctive monastic lineage was established and that simultaneously Buddhist teachings were introduced from China. Tokudō can therefore be regarded as a cipher for authority (founder of new temple) and authenticity (through transmission of the Buddhist teachings) in the transfer of Buddhism in early Japan. The *engi* authorized the practice of pilgrimage and the establishment of the specific institution of circulatory pilgrimage that had no precedence in China or Korea. Moreover, the seminal role of Buddhist emperor Kazan makes it unquestionable that this religious institution, the Saikoku path, has real relevance for all Japanese.

The oldest extant manuscript of the Saikoku pilgrimage *engi* dates back to 1536. The text was written by the nun Zenshō 善勝 (dates unknown) who produced the scroll for fundraising purposes and finally donated it to Matsuno'o-dera, which is number 29 on the circuit. Interestingly, the original founder of the pilgrimage is in this version the founder of that temple and not Tokudō. The plot of the main story is recognizable: the temple's founder also received instructions from Enma, the king of the underworld, and Emperor Kazan who meets several other pilgrim monks at the grave of the founder of Matsuno'o-dera, ends up travelling with three monks of *Nakayama-dera* to Nachi, the first of the thirty-three-temple circuit. The three monks had information that their temple founder, Tokudō, had also been given a similar mission by King Enma.

This is obviously a somewhat laboured adaption or creative amplification of the prevailing line of transmission of the Nakayama-dera legend. Since around the time when Zenshō wrote down her version of the *engi*, but especially in the Genroku era, members of all parts of society began to participate in the pilgrimage movement. It is no coincidence that the earliest collections of foundation legends and miracle stories of the thirty-three temples fall into this period and became part of the massive popularization of the practice. These collections were published as manuscripts and prints, often illustrated. Aside from a huge rise in the production of practical pilgrimage guides that also contained short summaries of the temple *engi*, this period saw an increasing publication of collections of the pilgrimage songs. As we have seen above, replica circuits appeared at the same time, complete with their own *engi* and miracle story collections. The new needs of an urbanized and rather well-to-do populace in the area of Edo (Tokyo) and

³⁰ See also Foard 1982, 234, for a recounting of the story.

also Osaka was, we can conclude here, met and neatly converged with the offer of book publishers and devout individual copyists.

The oldest extant complete collection of Kannon miracle stories and Saikoku pilgrimage *engi* dates, not surprisingly, back to the 17th century, to the year 1687 to be exact. The collection has the title *Saikoku rakuyō sanjūsan kasho Kannon reijōki* 西国洛陽三十三所觀音靈場記, “Account of the thirty-three Miraculous Kannon Sites in the Western Provinces and Rakuyō [= Kyoto]”, and was written by Shōyo Ganteki 松誉巖的.³¹ The work is categorized as a book of Buddhist sermons, a *kangebon* 勸化本 in Japanese, and comprises one of two textual lineages of such collections. The second lineage refers to the 1726 compilation with the title *Saikoku sanjūsan kasho Kannon reijōki zue* 西国三十三所觀音靈場記圖繪 by the more artistic writer Kōyo Shun’ō 厚譽春鶯.³² The 17th and 18th centuries saw numerous editions of miracle stories, often with ‘realistic’ illustrations of the temple buildings and the main statues, maps of the temple precincts and traffic maps. Some of these works are clearly intended for a general readership that plans to connect the visit to a famous pilgrimage site with touristic sightseeing. Other editions had a more strict focus on the religious practice. At least two groups of professionals were responsible for the various kinds of literary output at that time based either (1) on the Buddhistic work by Shōyo Ganteki who was more interested in the spiritual journey or (2) on the collection of the poet Kōyo Shun’ō. Both³³ have had a deep impact on the selection and new interpretation of the traditional *reijōki* (accounts of numinous sites) in the framework of relatively narrow specifications – a good example for regulated improvisation following Bourdieu.

A common feature of the texts of both lineages is that the *reijōki* are closely connected to the *Lotus sūtra* with its specific praise and set of Kannon miracles, whereas this is not recognizable in the old temple *engi* and miracle tales to such a high degree. Moreover, the early modern compilations prominently give space to descriptions of temple visits by members of the imperial family. In my view, the pilgrimage practice is legitimated twofold in these new compilations: first by the strong reference to the *Lotus sūtra*, thought to contain a path to universal salvation albeit written in a strange and foreign language (Chinese translated from Sanskrit), and second, by reference to one’s own nation with its imperial family who are thought to be decedents of the Japanese *kami*. This twofold linkage to the ‘foundations’ of the Buddhist tradition on the one hand, and the nation’s divine ruler and the *kami* on the other was quite in line with other intellectual and religious developments in early modern Japan and is not unique to Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage. The popularization of the printed word and the distribution to

³¹ For an edition see Kannon reigenki kenkyūkai 1986.

³² For an edition of Kōyo Shun’ō’s illustrated work see Kanesashi 2007 [1973].

³³ I could not find any further information about the lives of these two men.

a readership in the comparatively highly literate society of early modern Japan was, of course, not limited to Buddhist travel books and tales, but was also a general trend.

The military government in Edo instigated severe provisions to control Buddhist institutions and temples and to limit their possibilities of exerting as much influence as they had before. That is why Buddhist temples reverted to concerted efforts to attract visitors and patrons to ensure income. In times past, members of a highly mobile section of society that can be termed ‘travellers’ had played an important role in the circulation of knowledge about devotional practices. These were predominantly women who donned Buddhist robes and lived as itinerant storytellers and fundraisers for pilgrimage sanctuaries.³⁴ This tradition petered out in the Edo period, at least in central Japan, because of the stringent measures of the government to limit uncontrolled mobility in order to create a static society with four social strata (aristocrats, samurai, farmers and merchants) without any official possibility of social movement. Since itinerancy became an undesirable life-style in the eyes of the Edo government, and even more so in modern Japan, the tradition of living as a fundraising nun or Buddhist storyteller ceased and information about faraway sanctuaries and their benefits became circulated more and more via printed books. Not much is known about the fundraising nuns because of the scarcity of records. However, numerous narrative maps that they used have survived, mostly from the 16th and 17th centuries. These maps provide unique insights into the phenomenon of Buddhist pilgrimage in that period. We will turn to these sources in the following section.

4.4 Narrative maps, imagined worlds

The public oral presentation of *engi* stories using paintings in the form of hanging scrolls or the aforementioned maps on particular festival days in medieval and early modern Japan had an enormous effect on the level of familiarity with these stories. The audience often is requested at the end of such a story to circulate it because of the immeasurable merit that is accrued by listening to and recounting it. Therefore, the significance of these *engi* stories for the distribution of religious and philosophical ideas as well as ritual practices cannot be overrated. It is particularly interesting to take a closer look at the groups and individuals involved and responsible for the various ways of passing on such ideas. The role of the Japanese retired emperor Kazan in the establishment of pilgrimage as it is given such prominence in the Saikoku pilgrimage foundation legend mentioned above can be said to be – historically speaking – purely hypothetical. Both Kazan and the monk Tokudō as narrative figures had the role of legitimizing the practice. It is, however, quite possible that in the sphere of influence of Kazan’s teacher Shōkū, a Tendai monk,

³⁴ Ruch 2002, 537–580.

the worship of Kannon and mountain asceticism became increasingly connected, and that this lead to the formation of a pilgrimage practice of undertaking arduous trips to a set of thirty-three temples. Analysing the sites visited in medieval Japan it can be said that the original route and the entire performance of the Saikoku pilgrimage must have been collectively founded by itinerant, semi-ordained monks and nuns. Inspired by the performances of mountain ascetics they associated the often fairly inaccessible numinous mountain sites with the Buddhist worship of Kannon.³⁵ We can see here that the Saikoku pilgrimage originated in a Buddhist grassroots movement of ‘wild’ ascetics who were on the margins of the official and publicly sanctioned temple hierarchy.

Traces of the tradition of mountain asceticism are recognizable in the local legends, for instance, frequently mentioning a waterfall that the ascetics use for austerity practices, special rock formations or other topographical markers. Their path involves the symbolic incubation in the womb, then birth, living, death and rebirth in a purified and more powerful body.³⁶ Moreover, the pilgrim ascetic encounters numerous deities at particular sites in the mountain wilderness. The aforementioned narrative maps show these important topographical markers from the mountain pilgrimage tradition, often in great detail, and are therefore excellent sources for the study of the way the sacred sites were seen in terms of the combination of non-Buddhist and Buddhist practices.

Narrative pilgrimage propagation maps and other more complex paintings of religious sanctuaries are, in the words of Max Moerman, “more than simply descriptive records”³⁷. They are prescriptive and profoundly ideological documents in which social reality and the religious imaginary are conjoined.” Moerman follows Bourdieu closely in saying that “they portray a symbolic system as if it were a natural order”³⁸. These kinds of paintings are in Japanese called *mandara* 曼荼羅 – from Sanskrit *maṇḍala* (“circle”) – pointing to the Buddhist tantric tradition of depicting cosmic spaces as stylized palaces in which deities reside. The *mandara* maps used by itinerant fundraising nuns usually measure 150 x 150 cm. The composition of the images do not in the least resemble *mandala* of the esoteric Buddhist practice in the narrower sense. Rather than being formalistic diagrams such as the Buddhist *mandala*, the *mandara* maps depict temple and shrine buildings set in the ‘natural’ landscape complete with numerous figures from the local legends, deities and – most importantly – representations of pilgrims, often in couples of man and woman. The prospective pilgrims are shown in different stages of the pilgrimage at places where they would have certain spiritual experiences. These pilgrimage (*sankei* 参詣) *mandara*, a genre of religious paintings that flourished in late medieval

35 Nara National Museum and NHK PlanNet Kinki 2008, 9.

36 The tradition is alive today and groups of such mountain ascetics continue to visit Buddhist temples to perform their rituals, sometimes in combi-

nation with explicitly Buddhist ceremonies, see e.g. Miyake 2005.

37 Moerman 2005, 25.

38 Moerman 2005; Bourdieu 2000, 49.

and early modern Japan, go far beyond mere navigation maps (Fig. 7). They invite the viewer to freely browse through the depicted symbolic landscape. The *mandara* maps are teeming with small scenes rendered in charming detail and are reminiscent of ‘wimmelbook’ pictures of the European tradition.³⁹ They share with the wimmelbooks a ludic element in that the viewer can visually discover well-known scenes from the foundation narratives, pictures of famous visitors to the site, appearances of various deities and numinous figures that must have been mentioned and embellished in the oral presentations of the itinerant storyteller. Both the *mandara* and the story along with it served not only the proselytizing efforts of the nuns and monks but also played an important role in the memory management of the temple networks that in turn were to strengthen the role of the single site in connection with the other temple institutions on the circuit.

The map of the Kumano pilgrimage that Moerman uses to guide his readership through his study of the Kumano pilgrimage and the religious landscape of pre-modern Japan includes site number 1 of the Saikoku circuit, Nachi.⁴⁰ The Kumano Nachi map is perhaps the best-known example of such a pilgrimage *mandara*. The site was (and is) regarded as a realm of rebirth modelled on Buddhist cosmological ideas. The old *kami* deities were identified with Buddhist deities and certain features of the natural landscape regarded as their residences, ‘paradieses’ or ‘pure lands’ of boundless merit. Famously, the land of Kannon was regarded as being located beyond the ocean accessible from a small temple on the shore in Kumano. However, all thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage sites represent Kannon’s “paradise” which is called Potalaka (Fudaraku 補陀落) and the pilgrims spiritually gain access to it through their devotional practice.

In other words, these Buddhist pilgrimage temples are not merely religious sites where pilgrims conduct rituals. The pilgrimage offers foremost a visit to imagined worlds of the principal deity’s land of boundless merit. The pilgrim can partake in the bodhisattva’s merit and can experience his or her personal and unique miracle. Moreover, the pilgrim comes into contact with Buddhist masters not only of Japan but also of India and China, the countries of origin of the teachings. The relation to monks from China such as Tokudō and the founder of Matsuo’o-dera who was also supposedly Chinese, has

³⁹ The larger paintings of the Renaissance artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525–1569) usually display a large amount of detailed groups of figures interacting with each other. They are set in landscapes or villages. These paintings count as the origin of the tradition of teeming picture books (wimmelbooks) that are popular today in children’s literature, e.g. the picture books by Ali Mitgutsch. For a study on Bruegel’s ‘pictures within the picture’ see Seidel and Marijnissen 1969.

⁴⁰ The Saikoku pilgrimage exhibition catalogue of 2008 shows two examples of the Kumano Nachi maps (nos. 163 and 164) and those of several other pilgrimage sites (nos. 165–174), all from the 16th or 17th centuries (Nara National Museum and NHK PlanNet Kinki 2008, 191–192, 193–202). For the genre of pilgrimage (*sankai*) *mandara* see Ōsaka shiritsu hakubutsukan 1987.



Fig. 7 Temple Chōmei-ji Pilgrimage Mandala, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, H. 148.2 cm, W. 165.2 cm, 16th–17th century, Chōmei-ji, Shiga Prefecture.

already been referred to above. Indian monks also played a significant role in this context. Hōdō Sennin 法道仙人, a monk and ascetic from India who allegedly lived in the 6th century when Buddhism took root in Japan, is said to have founded number 16 on the Saikoku pilgrimage circuit, Kiyomizu-dera, and many other temples in Japan. Legends about this figure were circulated especially in the Kamakura period in the 12th and 13th centuries when indigenous forms of Buddhism were formed in Japan. Another Indian monk is said to have initially had a vision of Kannon during his austerities under the monumental Nachi waterfall. This 4th century Indian monk, Ragyō Shōnin 裸形上人, had become shipwrecked in a storm off the southern coast of Japan. He created a small statue modelled on his vision of Kannon and lived at Nachi until his death. Hundreds of years later, a Japanese ascetic named Shōbutsu 生仏 sought to emulate Ragyō Shōnin and underwent austerities under Nachi waterfall as well, for a thousand days. Finally,

he encountered the Indian master in a dream where he was asked to worship Kannon at the site. Shōbutsu carved a large statue of Nyoirin Kannon in which he inserted Ragyō's small statue. This 'double statue' became the principal object of worship of the temple Seigantō-ji at Nachi thus embodying in a very literal sense both the Indian and Japanese Buddhist traditions.

Material objects mentioned in the temple legends can be directly seen or touched at the locus of the narrative and thereby manifest central events of the temple's (legendary) history in material form. Of particular significance is the personal encounter with Kannon made possible through the statues. The statues prominently feature in the temple legends and are objects of great admiration and awe up to this day. The *mandara* sometimes show the deities as statues in opened temple buildings with worshippers in devotional postures, e.g. in the upper left-hand corner of the *Kokawa-dera sankei mandara* 粉河寺參詣曼荼羅 which comprises number 3 on the Saikoku pilgrimage circuit.⁴¹ Another example is Tokudō's stone box that can be admired at Nakayama-dera.

5 Conclusion

A religious tradition is successful when supply and demand continue to meet even after the initial phase of the tradition's establishment. Clearly, the circulatory pilgrimage as a religious tradition must have addressed and continues to address a particular category of social and spiritual needs. Although with shifting emphases the narrative, aesthetic, topographical and demographic conditions as well as the Buddhist teachings, the 'economy of improvisation' remained in a booming state over a period of nearly 600 years in regard to the Saikoku pilgrimage. Apparently, the dynamic of authoritative ritual precepts and individual creativity continued to level out in the framework of regulated improvisation. The attractiveness of the Japanese Buddhist practice of pilgrimage has persisted therefore less because of a spontaneous experience of a group of pilgrims finding themselves cut off from mundane life – the experience of *communitas* that Victor and Edith Turner saw in Christian and in other pilgrimage traditions⁴² – but in the possibilities of embracing and also embellishing the Japanese pilgrimage style and partaking in the celebration of the nation in the framework of a cosmic imagination (Buddhist paradeses, land of the *kami*, divine empire, realm of death and rebirth). These possibilities continue to be appreciated deeply although the framework of the Buddhist teachings is seen as complex and difficult to comprehend. Instead of an intellectual pursuit – that

⁴¹ Nara National Museum and NHK PlanNet Kinki 2008, 194.

⁴² For a critique by Foard of the Turner's *communitas* theory see Foard 1982, 240, 246.

is left to the experts – the average Japanese has the option to have personal and embodied access to a universal deity, to obtain benefits and to partake in a respected and ‘traditional’ pursuit. At the same time the participant can adjust his or her schedule and style. The model provided by the numerous legends and testimonials of the miracles and encounters with the deity in dreams etc. fostered and facilitated the identification with other pilgrims of times past. The term *hagiotourism* is hoped to be instructive in regard to examining the motivations of the ‘pilgrims’ who move dynamically between their roles as tourists ticking off items on lists and religious practitioners gathering seals and calligraphies as visual proof of their exertion and devotion in this world.

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