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How far are they determined by deep-lying assumptions?

Peter Ackermann

Introduction

Places of pilgrimage in Japan are frequently situated in the mountains, 'mountains' meaning anything from wooded and slightly elevated terrain just outside a town or a village, to places far from any settlement, hidden in a lonely valley or exposed to the winds high up on a peak. Pilgrimage thus consists of moving a certain distance, usually upwards, through space, this movement giving the pilgrim something he or she deems vital for his or her well-being. What emotional value, however, is attached to this movement? What expectations might be related to it?

Interviews and discussions may give us a few plausible answers. People might say, for instance, 'I like to come to this place because of its natural beauty' or, 'I like to come here because my parents and grandparents used to come too'. Yet the question remains whether there is not some deeper and more compelling logic guiding the pilgrim, maybe far beyond his or her awareness.

In other words: is it possible to catch a glimpse of what might lie behind the data that we can gather through observation and interviews? The intention is not to cast doubt upon what has been observed, but to try and give observable actions a place within an encompassing framework of logic, a place which may help us to see an action not as a possibly random or merely spontaneous one, but as one that forms part of a concrete, albeit unconsciously held, pattern of reasoning.

Mystic experiences in mountains

There could be several reasons for a person to leave home and suffer the sometimes severe hardships of a journey to an often remote temple or shrine. However, one principal motivation for such a journey could well be the wish to travel to a mountain. No doubt, on the surface the legends surrounding the great centres of pilgrimage play a prominent part in the formation of the conscious and unconscious images people hold of the places they visit, and of the high value attributed to going there.[1] Beyond these legends, however, and beyond a particular deity (or Buddha, or Bodhisattva) that is to be revered, it is, as mentioned, noteworthy that the goal of pilgrimage as a rule is situated on the slopes, or even on or near the summit of an elevation. This factor alone, I assume, could well be the major reason for making the pilgrimage.

Let us take a closer look at the way pilgrimages were traditionally described in songs and stage plays, in which persons setting out to a sanctuary were a common topic. Sometimes the name of the sanctuary is explicitly mentioned (e.g. Mii-dera in Shiga Prefecture, Dōjōji in Wakayama Prefecture, the Ise shrines etc.). Often, however, we are just told of a journey to a hill, a mountain (which, if surrounded by water, could also be an island), or a peak whose sanctuary is mentioned only by the way, if at all. What is important is that at the goal of such a journey it is possible to have a mystic experience.

To give some concrete examples, of the seven central songs sung to the accompaniment of the zither *koto* in the city of Edo around 1800 several can be categorized as *sankei-michiyukimono* (pieces [singing] of the visit to a shrine or temple).[2] These pieces deal with movement through space and reach a climax of artistic elaboration when the text indicates a mystic experience. In two songs this journey is explicitly a pilgrimage (one to the island of Enoshima, the other one to the Sumiyoshi shrine in the present-day city of Sakai). The remaining songs describe a journey to a sacred space in mountainous territory, one in the Province of Kii (Wakayama Prefecture), the other – using imagery associated with Mount Yoshino in Nara Prefecture – in the wooded lands of Kitano, outside Kyoto (cf. Hirano 1978).

The larger context into which the mystic experience at the goal of the journey is embedded is basically the same in all of the songs: at the beginning of the piece the singer describes how they are conscious of reality, which is determined by the law of karmic causality and the cycle of growth and decay. Caught within the cyclic structure of reality the singer then refers to miserable days spent performing some empty routine or, worse, suffering from emotional disturbance such as grief, sorrow, anger or unrequited love. After this, however, the suffering singer sets out on an imaginary journey.

In many stage plays, particularly in *nō* theatre, it is not the person suffering who sets out, but a priest, who in the course of his wanderings meets human beings in distress. In other words, here – in a sense – the mystic place comes to those who are suffering.

In both cases – in the songs of Edo and in *nō* plays – the state of suffering and that of being at least emotionally if not physically tied and thus incapable of moving through space are inseparably linked. It is logical, therefore, that after depicting a state of suffering, a song or a stage play will describe efforts to break away. This is precisely where *asobi* (play) comes in and becomes such an essential part of human experience.

Asobi helps a person regain physical energy and health by relieving him or her from the negative effects of suffering. However, we may note that *asobi* does not include true mystic experience and in the end is shown to be futile, even if it marks an important first step in a person's spiritual quest. *Asobi* is characterized by circular movement, in line with the idea of the karmic cycle, that also takes a person onward from spring to summer (often implying from youth to adulthood) and in the process widens the scope of experience. However, in the wake of just such experience a person becomes all the more conscious of autumn and winter

(i.e. of decay and evanescence) and is thus led back to a state of suffering. The cyclic nature of both an ordinary life as well as *asobi*, something all ordinary people seek, is often portrayed by images of wheels or carriages, or by enumerations (e.g. of place names), that equally create the feeling of 'going round'.

One example of how a song may illustrate *asobi* is the well-known 'Forgetting-shell (*wasuregai*) song', which is cyclic in both structure and content and forms the centre part of *Sumiyoshi*, one of the late eighteenth-century pieces mentioned above and portraying a pilgrimage to the Sumiyoshi shrines:

> The forgetting-shell - it's just illusion:
> meeting, parting, and after that
> looking forward to blossom viewing once again,
> one counts the days, remembering …
> The forgetting-grass - it's just a cheat -
> sprouting, withering, and after that
> looking forward to moon viewing once again.
> night for night, remembering...
> spring and autumn.
> *(wasuregai to no na wa soragoto yo / ōte wakarete sono nochi wa / mata no hanami o tanoshimi ni / hikazu kazoete omoidasu.*
> *wasuregusa to no na wa itsuwari yo / shigerite karete sorekara wa / nochi no tsukimi o tanoshimi ni / yowa o tsumitsutsu omoidasu / haru ya aki.)*

The 'Forgetting-shell song' both is, and sings of, *asobi*. However, true mystic experience lies beyond *asobi*. As noted above, this place beyond is usually a mountain or an elevation where nature has a powerful impact on the human psyche.

Seeking (re)vitalization

As a rule, some sort of sanctuary will be found at the elevated spot that is conceived to be something beyond *asobi*. Accordingly, the Edo period songs in their final part after the *asobi* take the singer onward to a goal, and this is usually one of the great shrines or temples everyone knew at least from hearsay (cf. Ackermann 2000). At such spots the laws of ordinary life, characterized by suffering on the one hand and play – *asobi* – on the other, are described as being no longer in force. The mystic atmosphere at the end of the songs has an overwhelming impact and is created by a climax on all levels: music, text and (often) dance. On the textual level, we find descriptions of how the moon appears, the tide comes rushing in, the wind from the mountains starts to blow through the pines,[3] cherry blossoms or maple leaves scatter, or a waterfall thunders down the rocks. Sometimes, a deity or supernatural being will reveal itself personally in such a context.

The piece always ends with the implication that a pilgrimage to the particular temple or shrine mentioned, or to the region, or at least into the kind of nature

described, will help the individual out of his or her being trapped within the karmic cycle, and will restore full vitality, energy and good health.

We may thus assume that moving through space away from normal life into a territory with a mystic quality can be seen as an essential step once a person has become conscious of the facts of existence. However, consciousness – and hence suffering – fixes attention on the cycle of cause and effect, growth and decay, and therefore saps away energy needed to live a healthy life. This explains the importance of a mystic experience beyond rational thinking.

Here we must recall the fact that in pre-Meiji Japan it was certainly common sense that physical well-being had to be planned and kept up through practice, and that good health – and hence longevity, one of East Asia's most basic traditional concepts (cf. Bauer 1971) – could be gained by generating or regenerating energy and maintaining its flow. The regeneration of energy was essentially coupled to two things: first, the prevention of useless outpouring of energy (such as will happen if one wastes it through suffering); second, the intake of clear, good energy – particularly in the mountains.

The emphasis on the idea of vitalization and revitalization appears to me a characteristic that may set Buddhist places of pilgrimage apart from non-Buddhist ones elsewhere around the globe.[4]

Mystic experience in mountains described by the *Kokin Wakashū*

It is remarkable how constant the metaphors used in describing Man's efforts to break out of the karmic cycle and regain energies have remained to this very day, even if their deeper implications are no longer understood. These metaphors, probably all originating on continental Asia, have their direct roots in the classical framework of Japanese expression that took shape during the ninth and tenth centuries. To gain a more profound understanding of them as they appear in fixed sequences I looked through the *Kokin Wakashū* ('Collection of *waka* of Former and Recent Times', compiled around 904–914 CE), the first imperial anthology of Japanese language poetry (*waka*) and definitely Japan's most influential collection of poems for all subsequent centuries.

As we read through the poems in the *Kokin Wakashū* in strict sequence we witness a fascinating movement of up and down, coming and going, growing and decaying, out and back. This movement, which bears witness to an understanding of time and space in terms of the philosophy of yin and yang, is of special interest here in so far as it portrays movement between the plain and the mountains, between *no* and *yama*. At the same time we may note that it is always *yama* that relate to a mystic experience. In the plain (*no*) decay sets in, but at a certain point a shift of perspective occurs from 'this world' (the plain, the house, the private surroundings) to 'that world' (*yama*, the mountains, the wilderness). It is as if *yama* had the power to rejuvenate, revitalize and re-energize.

Spring

The first poems in the *Kokin Wakashū* (all examples here are taken from Kubota 1960) portray the beginning of the year and human beings at home enjoying the white plum blossom. Energy comes in form of the warbler that visits from the mountains (poem no. 16):

> not far from the fields / is where I live / so the warbler's call
> reaches my ear / morning after morning
> *(nobe chikaku iei shi oreba uguisu no naku naru koe wa asa na asa na kiku)*

Activity at this stage is concentrated in the plain and is of a down-to-earth nature, characteristic of the straightforwardness of youth (poem no. 26):

> the fresh green willow threads / are twined and twisted /
> by the winds of spring
> in great confusion / the blossoms now burst open!
> *(aoyagi no ito yorikakuru haru shi mo zo midarete hana no hokorobi ni keru)*

When the plum blossom has been picked, or has fallen, Man realizes for the first time the cyclic nature of the universe, that is, he realizes that things come to an end (poem no. 46):

> if the plum blossom's scent / I could transfer to my sleeve /
> and have it stay there
> it might - once spring has passed - / keep memories alive
> *(ume ga ka o sode ni utsushite todometeba haru wa sugu tomo katami naramashi)*

When this cycle of growth and decay, and, for the first time, the notion of evanescence (here: the awareness that the plum blossoms will scatter) has been dealt with, attention turns to *yama* and moves away from *no* (poem no. 51):

> cherry blossoms in the mountains / as I come from far to see you /
> mists of spring
> begin to rise on slopes and peaks / concealing you from view
> *(yamazakura wa ga mi ni kureba harugasumi mine ni mo o ni mo tachikakushitsutsu)*

The next climax in the sequence of poems takes place in the mountains, not in the plains (poem no. 66):

> in the radiance of cherry blossom / I will deeply dye /
> the robe I wear
> so once the blossoms all have scattered / I may remember them
> *(sakurairo ni koromo wa fukaku sometekimu hana no chirinamu nochi no katami ni)*

Then the cycle draws to a close as also the cherry blossoms scatter.

Summer

In the humid and rainy summer *yama* cannot be visited, and the poems tell of how humans sit in their dwelling and hear the message of *yama* from the cuckoo (poem no. 145):

> if you cuckoo / in the summer hills /
> can feel for others
> do not make me - being deep in thought - / have to hear you calling!
> *(natsuyama ni naku hototogisu kokoro araba mono omou ware ni koe na kikase so)*

Consciousness, that saps our energies and makes us aware of the karmic cycle, becomes more und more of a problem (poem no. 162):

> cuckoo / calling in the mountains /
> who are you waiting for
> I all of a sudden / feel my longing grow
> *(hototogisu hito matsuyama ni naku nareba ware uchitsuke ni koi masarikeri)*

Autumn

In early autumn, as the crickets in the plains start to wail, feelings of frustration reach a peak (poem no. 196):

> you crickets! / do not wail and wail /
> in these long autumn nights
> for drawn-out laments / I have reason - more than you
> *(kirigirisu itaku na naki so aki no yo no nagaki omoi wa ware zo masareru)*

However, after these sounds of frustration in the plain, attention is again drawn to *yama*, which literally call out to those who are sensitive enough to listen (poem no. 215):

> deep in the mountains / stamping through the coloured leaves /
> a stag
> when its call reaches our ear / we intensely feel what autumn means
> *(okuyama ni momiji fumiwake naku shika no koe kiku toki zo aki wa kanashiki)*

In contrast to summer, this time of the year again has a playful element. This is similar to, but more intense than, what we witnessed in spring (poem no. 230):

> the maiden flower / bends in the wind /
> that sweeps the autumn plains
> in whose direction I ask myself / does all its feeling tend?
> *(ominaeshi aki no nokaze ni uchinabiki kokoro hitotsu o tare ni yosuramu)*

Play (*asobi*) clearly belongs to the realm of the plains, and this realm stands in the sharpest possible contrast to that of the mountains. We can see this in the following poem, which spells out a state of majestic detachment by referring to the idea

of eternity and invariability contained in a mountain's name, '*Tokiwa-no-yama* (i.e. Mountain of Timelessness)' (poem no. 251):

> never changing, never breaking out in colour / Mountain of Timelessness /
> does not the sound of the wind /
> tell us there / that autumn has come?
> *(momiji senu tokiwa no yama wa fuku kaze no oto ni ya aki o kikiwataruramu)*

The *yama* that are referred to from here on have the quality of a supernatural and mystic realm (poem no. 296):

> where the deity resides, / up to Mount Mimuro /
> I go in autumn
> feeling that the falling leaves / were tailoring a robe for me
> *(kamunabi no mimuro no yama o aki yukeba nishiki tachikaru kokochi koso sure)*

A mystic climax is reached soon after (poems no. 304 and 305):

> when the wind blows / the autumn foliage scatters /
> while waters, crystal-clear
> let even leaves that have not fallen / appear - reflected - in their depths
> *(kaze fukeba otsuru momijiba mizu kiyomi chiranu kage sae soko ni mietsutsu)*

> standing still / and looking ere I cross - /
> autumn foliage
> falls like rain / yet the waters do not rise
> *(tachidomari mite o wataramu momijiba wa ame to furu tomo mizu wa masaraji)*

Winter

When winter sets in, the experiences of the year – basically the experiences of movement between *no* and *yama* and of pleasure and suffering on the one hand and detachment on the other – have created a state of mind that is beginning to break out of the karmic cycle (poem no. 316):

> in the wide skies / the moon shines brightly /
> pure and clear
> the waters that reflect its rays /are the first to freeze
> *(ōzora no tsuki no hikari shi kiyokereba kage mishi mizu zo mazu kōrikeru)*

Finally we come to the image of retained strength and energy (poem no. 340):

> snow has fallen / and the year draws to a close /
> this is the time
> where to the pines that know no autumn colours / at last our eye is drawn
> *(yuki furite toshi no kuremuru toki ni koso tsui ni momijinu matsu mo miekere)*

Retaining energy in the mountains

In its 1,111 poems the *Kokin Wakashū* addresses a basic problem of human life, namely Man's incapability to become detached. This fact is repeatedly driven

home by sequences of poems that illustrate the senselessness of emotional reaction and stress the evanescent nature of the objective world. In this context, the poems show how consciousness leads to suffering, because Man emotionally cannot come to terms with evanescence.

At regular intervals the *Kokin Wakashū* thus draws attention to the fact that there is a link between suffering and consciousness. It is here that the poems begin to refer to a world represented by mountains. In the mountains we are shown a mystic dimension beyond the grasp of a discerning mind, where escape from suffering is said to be possible, and, as a consequence, a person's body is revitalized.

In line with a pattern of structuring the sequence of its poems in a back and forth movement between *no* and *yama*, towards the end the *Kokin Wakashū* comes to images like the following (poems no. 944 and 951):

> a dwelling in the mountains / is a lonely place indeed /
> yet rather
> than suffer in a wretched world / I am pleased to live here
> *(yamazato wa mono no wabishiki koto koso are yo no uki yori wa sumiyokarikeri)*

> as in this world we pass our time / feelings of wretchedness increase /
> to the steep paths
> of rocky Yoshino therefore / I now shall make my way
> *(yo ni fureba usa koso masare miyoshino no iwa no kakemichi fuminarashitemu)*

The impact of Buddhist concepts of Man and the universe

I have tried to shed some light on assumptions that presumably play a part in shaping the idea of travel – especially travel to a sacred place – in Japan. I am not saying that in present-day Japan people set out to shrines and temples with the same kind of expectations as they did in past centuries. The point I wish to make is that we can assume that a specific logic founded on Buddhist concepts of Man and the universe has, over a very long period of time, systematically patterned people's expectations as to why and when journeys (for spiritual gain) should be undertaken. Whatever the motivations may be today for visiting shrines and temples (particularly those that are, as it were, 'out in space', separated from where everyday life takes place), I expect them not to be identical with, but to have evolved out of, the concepts outlined above.

We should remember that the manifold efforts to create images of Japanese culture since the Meiji period, combined with the impact of naive foreign interpretations, particularly of what are classified as 'religious' establishments, have led to patterns of explanation both in and outside Japan that should not be taken at face value. I would argue that vague feelings, expectations and associations, having taken shape through the transmission of values among the members of family lines, or been sparked off directly by the sensual experience of a visit to a sanctuary, are invariably rooted in an understanding of human nature that was shaped by the great traditions of East-Asian thought, in particular Taoism and Buddhism.

To sum up: in order to gain a deeper insight into assumptions that are likely to determine attitudes towards movement through space, and hence also towards pilgrimage, I have drawn upon songs, stage plays and poetry. The songs I focused on were especially *sankei-michiyukimono* (songs depicting a visit to a sacred place), composed around 1800. The stage plays were pieces for the *nō* theatre (mainly fourteenth/fifteenth century). Both the songs and the *nō* plays have a three-part structure: 1) a description of suffering; 2) *asobi*, i.e. seeking comfort and solace in a this-worldly way, only to find that the cyclic chain of cause and effect merely leads back into suffering; 3) rapid and straight-forward movement towards a mystic experience suggesting harmony outside the constraints of space and time; in the *nō* play often a final dance (cf. Yasuda 1989).

In the songs, the mystic experience takes place at the final goal of the initial movement out into space, as a rule a sanctuary. In the stage play, however, a wandering priest – a representative of space and the mountains, as it were – meets suffering people (in the plains) and helps them. Both songs and stage plays show the benefit of an activity that is at the same time mental and physical, namely training to overcome attachment to this-worldly phenomena. This alone is said to lead to the regeneration of vital energy, good health and longevity.

Finally, the poetry of the *Kokin Wakashū*, dating from the ninth and tenth centuries, deals with the human nature that at the same time enjoys the laws of the universe and suffers under them. In the course of the year (which is clearly an image of the course of life) it becomes more and more obvious that personal attachment to this-worldly matters arouses emotions that sap away vital energy and thus trap a person within the cycle of growth and decay (cf. Ackermann and Kretschmer 2002).

In the sphere beyond every-day life, however, symbolized by mountains – especially mountains in deep, white snow – the mind is cleared of all colour (i.e. emotion and destructive consciousness), so that the human body can regain – and retain – energy.

In view of the importance attached to the transmission of the *Kokin Wakashū* throughout the ages, and the fact that its poems are drawn upon as a model of classical imagery in all subsequent centuries, we may conclude that this anthology of poetry is a particularly valuable source for discovering basic assumptions about the order and rhythm in life. These assumptions, I maintain, deeply influence concepts of movement out into space, into nature and to the realm of a sanctuary.

Notes

1 Here the Buddhist concept of *engi* should be introduced. *Engi* has several meanings, all related in some way to the concept of 'cause' (within a relationship of cause and effect). The specific meaning of the *engi* referred to here is the 'reason for the origin of a temple or shrine', or the 'legend concerning miracles or virtuous deeds of a being with supernatural powers'. Vivid descriptions of such *engi* appear in the picture scrolls (*emaki*) that became extremely popular from the fourteenth century onward and may also be found throughout the Edo period wherever mention is made of shrines and temples.

2 Typical categories for musical pieces are *shūgimono* (festive pieces), *tsuizenmono* (pieces to recall a deceased person), *sankei-michiyukimono* (pieces singing of the visit to a shrine or temple), *engidanmono* (pieces telling of some *engi*) and *shikimono* (pieces dealing with the four seasons). For details see Hirano (1972, 1978).

3 A poem from the Imperial Collection *Shūishū* (early eleventh century) is often used to recall these associations:

with the sound of the zither / the wind in the mountain pines /
is felt
on which peak, which string / do the tunes originate?
(*koto no ne ni mine no matsukaze kayōrashi izure no o yori shirabe-somekemu*).

4 Practically all pre-Meiji temples and shrines of Japan I would consider as Buddhist institutions in a wide sense. Even though the notion of *kami* as specifically meaning 'the gods of Japan' was familiar in the Edo period, strict ideological separation was brought about by *shin-butsu bunri*, the division of religious spheres into Shintōism and Buddhism in 1868.

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11 *Agari-umāi*, or the Eastern Tour

A Ryūkyūan royal ritual and its transformations

Patrick Beillevaire

Introduction

Agari-umāi (*Higashi o-mawari* in standard Japanese), literally the Eastern Tour, is the common term for a major state ritual of the ancient kingdom of Ryūkyū, which involved its two leading figures, the king and the chief priestess. Initiated during the fifteenth century, as the ruling class was setting up a centralized system of civil and religious administration, it lost part of its importance as early as the mid-seventeenth century under the influence of Confucianism. Nevertheless, it survived official downgrading as well as the more dramatic demise of the kingdom itself by gradually becoming the focus of ancestor worship for kin groups from all over the Ryūkyū Islands. Thus, with some adjustments in scope, it remains a most popular ritual in today's Okinawa Prefecture.

The study of the Agari-umāi as a state ritual raises a number of difficult questions ranging from the practical details of its execution to the development of the Ryūkyū state organization and ideology. In this chapter, I limit myself to a general presentation of the Agari-umāi ritual.

Modern authors refer to Agari-umāi as *junpai*, *junrei* or *sankei*, terms that, as previously discussed, mean 'touring/visiting places of worship (*haisho*); or sacred places/abodes of spirits (*reijō*)'. Pilgrimage, a standard translation of these terms, appears to be an accurate designation of both the ancient and modern forms of the Agari-umāi.[1]

The phenomena of pilgrimage cannot be dissociated from the belief in the existence of special places located beyond the territorial boundaries of daily life – the term pilgrimage, after all, comes from *peregre*, meaning 'abroad' or 'from abroad'. There, humans would come into contact with some principle, whatever its nature, governing their existence or with what may be termed some sacred otherness. Pilgrimages are often comprised of more than one holy place, so that the devotional exercise follows a route or circuit along which the assistance of supernatural entities is solicited – gods, saints, ancestors or abstract forces – be it for one's own individual benefit, or on behalf of one's community. The narratives attached to those routes and places express a generally complex and flexible world-view supported by myths, legends and history. Visits to such places contribute, among other things, to sustain social cohesion and people's feelings of

PILGRIMAGES AND SPIRITUAL QUESTS IN JAPAN

Edited by Maria Rodríguez del Alisal, Peter Ackermann and Dolores P. Martinez