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The Way to Gyō

Priestly Asceticism on the Shikoku *Henro*

The Shikoku *henro* is arguably the most literary pilgrimage of the contemporary world. An unprecedented publication boom during the Heisei Era (1989–present) is centered especially on personal accounts of walking the 1,200 kilometer journey. A major theme among the more than 140 *henro* diaries that have been published in this era, and especially those of pilgrim priests, is that of asceticism. In this analysis I consider the narratives of several Buddhist clergy to highlight various interpretations of pilgrimage austerities. I use this data to analyze theoretical assertions concerning Japanese asceticism. I argue that asceticism is best viewed as a family grouping of phenomena that exists across a wide spectrum. As such, the concept is poorly served by a bounded definition contingent on some universal essence or formulaic set of rules.

KEYWORDS: pilgrimage—asceticism—Shikoku *henro*—*shugyō*—Kōbō Daishi Kūkai—*hijiri*

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A CELLULAR phone advertising campaign in 2012 by the Japanese mobile phone company WILCOM (ウイルコム) (2012), depicting four odd-looking and strangely accoutered Buddhist priests standing on a sand dune in the middle of the desert requires no explanation for its general target audience.¹ Despite being a Chinese satire, the *Saiyūki* 西遊記, or “Journey to the West,” is such an integral part of both traditional and contemporary popular Japanese culture that its priestly protagonists, one entirely feminine and the other three bestial in character, are instantly recognizable by the population at large. Similarly, a hugely popular ad campaign for the Nissan Note in 2014–2015 features a more stylized version of the tale’s powerful but tempestuous monkey-priest hero played by Ninomiya Kazunari, a famous member of the band Arashi. The commercial includes the soundtrack “Monkey Magic,” an English-language song by the 1970s pop band Godaigo (NISSAN MOTOR CORPORATION 2015). The advertisement presents the car as something of a compact vehicle to enlightenment.

These two recent media campaigns serve to demonstrate that, beyond the realm of Chinese fantasy satire, three simple elements—Buddhist clergy, epic travel, and enlightenment—have combined to create a deeply established trope integral to traditional Japanese Buddhism. Biographies of sectarian patriarchs such as Kūkai, Saichō, Ennin, Dōgen, and Ippen depict the spiritual path to enlightenment as being superimposed upon physical journeys on romantic sealandes and dusty roads.² Furthermore, the tendency to view purposeful travel—and not merely itinerancy—as Buddhist asceticism has been furthered by domestic wanderers as well. The poet Bashō shows a deep consciousness of the great traveling seekers who came before him, such as Kūkai and Saigyō, in writings such as *Bashō oku no hosomichi* (BASHŌ and HAGIWARA 1979), an account centered on romantic domestic journeys. Likewise, the compelling tradition of multi-site Buddhist pilgrimages, such as the Saikoku pilgrimage or the Shikoku *henro*, became fertile ground for ascetic-minded Buddhist clergy.

The basic archetype of a Buddhist priest finding ultimate truth in epic travel is not a relic of traditional Japan; it figures prominently in the literary boom of the

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2. For examples of popular biographies sanctioned by religious organizations, see *Kōbōdaishi no tanjō to rekishi* (2015) for Kūkai and AWAYA (2003) for Dōgen.

Heisei era centered on journeys to the 88 holy places of Shikoku. My research considers texts from the more than 140 first-person accounts of the *henro*, which have been commercially published over the last twenty-six years, with an eye toward the implications they offer for the study of pilgrimage and religion in contemporary Japan (see SHULTZ 2009; 2011b; 2013; 2014). The writers of these narratives vary considerably, but professional authors and Buddhist priests are particularly prominent among their ranks. Of the clergy who have written the eight accounts I have found, five are members of some form of Shingon Buddhism (SUGIMOTO 2006; HAMADA 2002; IEDA 2009; ŌGURI 2009; ASHIHARA 1994), two are Sōtō Zen practitioners (AONO 2004; ONODA 2002), and one is a Tendai monk (SETOUCHI 2010). Though the risks pale in comparison to travels undertaken by their brethren in premodern periods, walking the 1,200 kilometer circuit still constitutes a considerable adventure for these priests, marked by anxious uncertainties, as well as monumental physical and psychological challenges.

The *henro* viewed as being some sort of training or asceticism indisputably becomes the most common understanding of the journey for both lay and clerical authors. The narratives are likely skewed toward more austere interpretations, as most published diaries record captivating, but comparatively rare, methods of pilgrimage performance. Nonetheless, envisioning the Shikoku *henro* as asceticism is not nearly as interpretively reductive as one might expect. The notion of asceticism, while linguistically encountered in everyday interactions in contemporary Japan with terms like *shugyō* 修行, is intriguingly amorphous. Asceticism is both something exotic—at liminal extremes—that may include secret rituals deep in the mountains, while at the same time containing an almost bromide element present in the training for nearly any common endeavor aimed at a degree of mastery.

In this analysis, I evaluate pertinent overarching theories regarding Japanese asceticism, and asceticism more universally. Scholars such as BLACKER (1999), LOBETTI (2013), and SHINNO (1991; 1993) have offered intriguing and descriptive theses regarding ascetic practice; their work is worthy of testing in other Japanese contexts in which the language of asceticism is heavily employed. In particular, Blacker views asceticism primarily through the purview of shamanistic healing, with a strong emphasis on the supernatural. Lobetti contends that asceticism is to be understood as performative practice, during which everything is centered on the practitioner's body. He offers that "asceticism is an 'embodied tradition' and its underlying themes should thus be understood in bodily terms as well" (LOBETTI 2013, 136). In contrast, I argue that asceticism is best viewed as a family grouping of phenomena that exists across a wide spectrum. Stricter definitions in this regard can be understood to impede rather than aid analyses. Indeed, as a clear demonstration of this complexity, we will

see priest-practitioners struggling to create their own personal definition of asceticism in a religious context that is, at times, almost uncomfortably free. My thesis is generally supported by assertions proffered by SHINNO (1991; 1993), who views ascetics broadly and calls attention as much to their function as to their form.

Evolving Images of a Walking Ascetic and of Walking Asceticism

Traditionally and popularly speaking, asceticism in the context of the Shikoku *henro* is archetypically represented in the ubiquitous iconography of Shugyō Daishi 修行大師, or “ascetic practice saint.” These images represent in part the training process whereby the Heian-era monk Kūkai (774–835) would ultimately become an enlightened saint and receive the title Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, which was granted posthumously by Emperor Daigo. The Shikoku pilgrimage includes Buddhist iconography of various forms, but Shugyō Daishi images dominate both in terms of sheer numbers and also in terms of their towering physical statures, often exceeding three or four meters in height. The statues can be seen at nearly all of the official 88 temples in Shikoku; at pilgrimage worship temples outside of the main 88 temples (*bangai* 番外); and alongside the pilgrim trail throughout the lengthy journey. The recurrent features of Shugyō Daishi images show him to be a minimalist traveler in the spirit of traditional Buddhist itinerancy, usually complete with Buddhist robes, a sedge hat, a begging bowl, a rosary, a stout staff, and a bedroll slung rather like a rucksack from his shoulders. The depictions personify a solitary, self-reliant, highly mobile, and—in many respects—a bold and manly persona. For those who are familiar with the accompanying legends, Shugyō Daishi is endowed with both benevolence for the kind and righteous, but also foreboding and even physical danger for the unrighteous.

Kūkai’s self-described austerities were tied more to specific locations of natural power rather than the lengthy circumambulation of the island commonly associated with his training avatar Shugyō Daishi. In the *Sangō shiiki* 三教指帰, he records doing a chanting practice at two locations: on Mt. Tairyū, a distinctive peak in what was Awa province, and on Cape Muroto, an escarpment that juts from the southern shores of Shikoku deep into the Pacific (ARAI 1997, 18). The *Kokūzō gumonjihō* 虚空蔵求聞持法 is an esoteric exercise dedicated to the bodhisattva Kokūzō that includes one million recitations of a single mantra (YAMASAKI 1988, 182). It is commonly thought to endow a successful practitioner with the ability to memorize any Buddhist text. Kūkai is said to have completed the final repetitions of his austerity in a cave that is situated on the cape, emerging to see the planet Venus, the celestial body associated with Kokūzō, rising in the morning sky. This ascetic practice and its dramatic conclusion represent the spiritual



FIGURES 1 and 2. Large statues of Shugyō Daishi are encountered on a fairly arduous mountain ascent en route to Shōsanji, Temple 12. Author-priests are obliged to address this almost omnipresent ascetic archetype in their diaries.

climax with regard to the saint's austerities on the island. The cave remains an important location on the pilgrimage, although individual pilgrims often display a general ignorance or ambiguity about the specific mantra practice, and sometimes even about the location.

With such a dramatic example of the power of an ascetic practice, it is somewhat surprising that only a single contemporary account in the collection of *henro* narratives I have studied describes an attempt at something resembling the Kokūzō mantra recitation practice. Having read a compelling description of the austerity in the illustrious book *Kūkai no fūkei* (1994) by SHIBA Ryōtarō, the famous kick boxer and television personality Sudō Genki is inspired to undertake something similar. He explains that the *Kokūzō gumonjihō* reminded him of Einstein's theory of relativity with thoughts of the convertibility of energy into matter and matter into energy (SUDŌ 2005, 42). Not considering himself a particularly religious person, he elects to choose his own mantra, and he ruminates over several possibilities including *hoimi*, a chant taken from the video game *Dragon Quest*, and *saikō* 最高, meaning "best" or "highest" (SUDŌ 2005, 48–50). He finally settles on simply *arigatō* ありがとう, or "thank you," and claims to have chanted the word 210,290 times during his pilgrimage, though it is not explicit how he kept track of his total (SUDŌ 2005, 180–81). Importantly, he incorporates his chanting with his general movements about the island. Nonetheless, the fighter's rough emulation of Kūkai's mantra practice is a rather surprising exception in contemporary contexts.

During the pilgrimage's lengthy historical development, literature has established notions of austerities centered specifically on walking practices, rather than remote wilderness chanting exercises. References in the *Konjaku monogatari* (compiled approximately in 1120) and *Ryōjin hishō* 梁塵秘抄 (compiled between 1127–1192) describe Buddhist clergy doing the *Shikoku shugyō* 四国修行 by following a coastal route (*henji* 辺地) around the island (READER 2006, 108). In the early Edo period, the Shingon scholar-priest Chōzen (1613–1680) authored the first great narrative account of walking around to 88 specific places on the island, the *Shikoku henro nikki*, which was published in mass quantities using woodblock printing technology (H. SATŌ 2006, 132–36). Mass appeal for devotional worship at the 88 places on the island was created with the publication of the *Henro kudokuki*, which lays out twenty-seven miracle tales related to Kōbō Daishi and the pilgrimage sites, by the ascetic practitioner Shinnen in 1690 (H. SATŌ 2004, 132–36). From the Genroku era (1688–1703), when new bridges and ferries were developed to span Shikoku rivers, and highways were constructed enabling horses and carts (READER 2006, 128), until the present day, the pilgrimage has evolved various improvements in transport facilities. Pilgrims no longer needed to walk the entire circuit—or indeed, any of it at all. Newly developed modern transportation infrastructure in the Taishō era

(1912–1926) provided walking alternatives to the masses, options that would ultimately distinguish foot travel as being the more ascetic choice. The comparative ease of motorized pilgrimage even led to a backlash or counter-reformation against writers like Shima Namio, who were promoting vehicular use (READER 2006, 148). The Shingon priest Tomita Gakuju launched a writing campaign through numerous articles and editorials to reassert the journey's connections to asceticism and Shingon Buddhism. In the Heisei era, a highly functional and hugely popular guidebook, the *Shikoku henro hitori aruki dōgyōninin* by Miyazaki Tateki prominently represents the pilgrimage as walking asceticism. In the so-called “Bible” for walking pilgrims (see GONOSUKE 2016; AONO 2004, 163), MIYAZAKI states, “For pilgrims, the space between two temples is the training ground” (2014, 4).³ This well established assertion is likewise reflected in the modern pilgrimage's symbolic structure that the journey is a process leading to enlightenment via four training halls, or *dōjō* 道場, which correspond to the four prefectures of the island (see READER 2006, 52–53). Kōchi prefecture, the second *dōjō*, is the *shugyō no dōjō*. In popular discourse, the ascetic qualities of this section are sometimes associated with the especially lengthy walking distances between temple locations (see SETOUCHI and KUBOTA 2002, 42–43).

Shugyō Daishi encompasses symbolic complexity for *henro* travelers. First, he is an ascetic ideal that pilgrims hope to embody, emulate, or even transform into. Numerous photos in recent texts juxtapose statues of Shugyō Daishi with modern pilgrims (see SUDŌ 2005, 90; 120; 136–37; see also KONDŌ 2004, cover). A particularly striking example is that of the famous female author, celebrity, and Tendai Buddhist priest Setouchi Jakuchō. In one of four texts centered on her promotion of the *henro*, pictures in the glossy magazine alternate between those of her on the pilgrim trail and images of Shugyō Daishi, suggesting a sort of non-duality or even interchangeability between the two (SETOUCHI 2009, 12–21). Second, the Daishi, who is said to be in perpetual circumambulation of the island circuit, is seen as a co-practitioner of walking *henro* asceticism. The well-worn phrase emblazoned on pilgrim goods and repeated ubiquitously in *henro* discourse is *dōgyō ninin* 同行二人, or “two persons, one practice.” Among pilgrim accouterments, Kōbō Daishi is symbolically represented by the pilgrim's walking staff, or *kongo zue* 金剛杖. The hiking staff represents Daishi's omnipresence with the pilgrim. An example of the significance of the staff is retold by a Shingon priest named SUGIMOTO Ryūbun, who describes a female pilgrim who refuses to grasp the top of her walking stick. She claims that she would be rudely grabbing Kōbō Daishi by the head, if she were to squeeze it as such (2006, 51). The general implication of the staff is linked to a sense of shared asceticism, which naturally has a focus on the walking.

3. Moreton has translated Miyazaki's text into English (MIYAZAKI 2014).

As central as Shugyō Daishi is to austerities on the island of Shikoku, the image does not enjoy a spiritual symbolic monopoly. As I will show, priests from sects other than Shingon often liberally reinterpret the basic representations of the Daishi, and other proxy ascetics can replace him as training exemplars. When choosing an illustrious ascetic to model oneself after, ultimately what constitutes asceticism is completely defined by the individual pilgrim and is even subject to change over the course of the journey. In light of this fact, I would like to introduce and profile individual representations of the *henro* as ascetic practice in the diaries of pilgrim-priests to provide data for which to consider and highlight various interpretations of pilgrimage austerities.

No Drinking, No Riding, and No Quitting: The Henro Diary of Hamada Giei

A basic, but seemingly common and compelling view of *henro* asceticism is expounded upon in the pilgrimage diary of Hamada Giei, a late initiate to the Takano branch of Shingon Buddhism. In 2002, at the time of the text's publication, HAMADA was working as a teacher of construction welding. Notably, he is also a fourth level practitioner of Karate and is from Kōchi prefecture on Shikoku (2002, 176). He took priestly vows at the age of fifty-five and, while previously working in ship construction, obtained a degree in Buddhist Studies from Bukkyō University in Kyoto (2002, 175).

Hamada's no-nonsense pilgrimage diary records a continuous (*tōshiuchi* 通し打ち) pilgrimage and follows a straightforward day-by-day structure that includes references to facts, such as when he wakes, how far he travels, and what he eats at specific meals. He is consciously trying to provide practical information to benefit future pilgrims. The priest keeps a rapid pace, suggesting that he is a fairly hearty pilgrim. Nevertheless, he is not without the common discomfort of blisters and foot pain, which he tries to ameliorate by walking alongside the ubiquitous pavement (HAMADA 2002, 36). Emotional climaxes for an otherwise formulaic text are especially centered on harrowing experiences in narrow, lengthy, exhaust-choked highway tunnels, which often lack sidewalks (see also READER 2006, 198). These dark, subterranean trials cause him to directly implore divine protection from Kōbō Daishi, chanting the mantra to the saint *namu daishi henjō kongō* 南無大師遍照金剛, or "all praise to the great master, the universally illuminating *vajra*" (HAMADA 2002, 42).

Asceticism is the overt central element for Hamada's pilgrimage, and he indicates this journey holds a place in a succession of training activities. He references the pilgrimage more generally as *henrogyō* 遍路行, or simply "*henro* asceticism," while referring to the activity of pilgrimaging simply as *gyō suru* 行する, which means "doing austerities." The *obi*-band used for marketing purposes on the cover of the book implies that asceticism is required for a follower

of Kōbō Daishi (HAMADA 2002, cover). Importantly, his journey takes place several years after his initiatory austerities on Mt. Kōya. It is quite common for Shingon priests to conclude their formal instruction at training temples with a journey around Shikoku, which could be undertaken solo and on foot or even in large motorized tours with other fresh initiates. As such, *henrogyō* can be understood as a continuation or culmination of formal training austerities. Shingon priests, though a tiny minority of the pilgrim population, are still highly visible along the pilgrimage route. Likewise, it is worthy of note that for some Buddhist initiates the pilgrimage can also serve as a precursor to formal training at a temple, even akin to something of a “boot camp” for a basic training regime. KOBAYASHI Kiyū records an interview with a fifty-two-year-old man named Ōmachi Genkei, who was required to undertake a particularly grueling *henro* (2003, 34–37). Having the ultimate goal of becoming a Rinzaï priest at an abandoned temple in Kōchi Prefecture, he is tasked with completing the circuit in the above average time of thirty-three days,⁴ while strictly sleeping only outdoors (*nojuku suru* 野宿する) with just a sleeping bag and while sustaining himself through the solicitation of alms (*takuhatsu* 托鉢). This initiation is to herald in a one-year training period for Ōmachi at an official training temple in Aichi prefecture (KOBAYASHI 2003, 36). In short, pilgrimage asceticism is often viewed as being a part of a continuum of priestly training activities.

Unlike the lifestyle in Buddhist training temples where almost every aspect of life is regimented, solitary priests traveling to the 88 places of Shikoku have free latitude to shape and define their own austerities. Hamada’s conception of pilgrimage asceticism is rather simply constructed from straightforward notions that some things are required, while others are prohibited. In terms of prohibitions, his narrative shows the inherent pull of worldly desires, while the priest attempts to maintain an entirely self-enforced ascetic discipline. Following ten basic pilgrim vows has become an established tradition with the journey, and such precepts can be prominently found in guidebooks and other literature (see Savvy 2005, 17; T. MIYAZAKI 1990, 24). Modeled on the basic Mahayana Buddhist precepts, they offer moral imperatives, including refraining from killing, lying, and sexual misconduct. Vows related to the prohibition of alcohol for clergy are often rendered in Japan as a prohibition against selling alcohol. The common form of *henro* vows does not include alcohol-related abstentions, but priests generally interpret asceticism to be devoid of libation. And thus, abstinence frames Hamada’s narrative. Despite numerous tests of his fortitude and notwithstanding a single frosty, malted transgression, abstinence clearly demarcates the time Hamada dedicates to austerities. The completion of his journey

4. This compares to an average time of roughly 40 days to walk the *henro*.



FIGURE 3. Abstention from alcohol is a key point of asceticism in the *henro* accounts of most Buddhist clergy. This *shōchū* (traditional spirits) is being sold on Mt. Tairyū, a famous location for Kūkai’s mountain training. Ironically, the liquor is named *Dōgyōninin*, evoking the notion of traveling and doing austerities together with Kōbō Daishi.



FIGURE 4. A *henro* guide clutches his *zuda-bukuro*, or “bag for austerities,” while catching a quick nap on a cable car up Mt. Tairyū. The bill of the *sendatsu*’s cap has been autographed by former Prime Minister Kan Naoto, an avid Shikoku pilgrim. *Henro* pilgrimage literature suggests the relative intensity of the journey is adjustable by virtue of transportation options such as this. Photograph by Wayne Arnold.

is distinguished by two of the “the most delicious [beers]” shared with fellow pilgrims (HAMADA 2002, 135).

Teetotalism is hardly universal with respect to the *henro* or even to priests walking the journey. Conversely, some pilgrim accounts describe authors drinking their way through the landscape (see T. SUGIURA 2004) and alcohol is occasionally offered as alms to pilgrims, sometimes creating a karmic dilemma for those who find both libation and the refusal of alms to be taboo. The great Internet *henro* evangelist KUSHIMA Hiroshi (see SHULTZ 2011a and 2011b), in a paper version of his pilgrimage diary, relates an anecdote of a pilgrim he meets drinking at lunch (2003, 53). The pilgrim had given up on his plan for a sober *henro* when he finds alcohol freely available in the inn at the first temple of the pilgrimage. There are a multitude of other examples; for instance, a diary by a pilgrim named IKEDA Tetsuro (2005) proudly markets his daily beer drinking in the title. Zen priest AONO Takayoshi (discussed below) openly questions why such abstinence is necessary, musing that Kōbō Daishi himself might sympathetically and compassionately offer a pious and weary pilgrim a cup of cheer (2004, 21). At perhaps an extreme margin for Buddhist clergy, Tendai priest SETOUCHI Jakuchō, well known for her love of Japanese *saké*, uses her *henro* magazine to promote her own name-branded “author’s *saké*” (*sensake* 撰酒) in glossy full-color advertisements (2009, inside back cover). Sadly, her *henro*-oriented *nihonshu* does not even appear to be of Shikoku origin.

Hamada’s most serious vow is to walk the journey without fail. As seen in sentiments above, ascetic practice is likewise mostly discussed in connection to the walking itself. HAMADA notes simply that walking is ascetic practice (*shugyō*), but especially reinforces that unpleasant conditions, such as walking in the rain, constitute *gyō* (2002, 101). In keeping with this understanding, he develops a strict rule against riding in vehicles while in Shikoku and aims specifically to complete the walking practice without fail. This is a common ideal among walking pilgrims, but few practice it with such purity. In fact, we will see theological arguments rejecting such absolutism.

Next to walking, a secondary focus of austerities for Hamada is occasionally forgoing accommodations. *Nojuku*, which literally means to “lodge in a field,” could encompass tent camping, but with respect to the *henro*, it usually implies a roughshod affair more likely to include makeshift, semi-sheltered accommodations in schoolyards, public restrooms, empty train stations, or under bridges. MIYAZAKI suggests that due to the availability of such improvised locations, a tent is not necessary for pilgrims who employ this style (1990, 33). As seen with the aspiring novice Ōmachi, *nojuku* is closely associated with asceticism and is iconically exemplified by Shugyō Daishi’s bedroll. Additionally, it is an outlying behavior, thereby interpreted as a high-order austerity. While data is relatively scarce, a study by Kōchi prefecture’s Department of Planning and Promotion

conducted in 2003 indicates about 11 percent of walking pilgrims bivouac at some point during their pilgrimage (KŌCHIKEN KIKAKUSHINKŌBU KIKAKUCHŌSEIKA 2003, 6). As indicated in numerous pilgrimage diaries, including the account of Hamada, most of these pilgrims engage *nojuku* as a hybrid style in combination with paid accommodation. Other estimates suggest that only about four percent of pilgrims are doing the circuit in a single journey (OSADA, SAKATA, and SEKI 2003, 245; 271). Therefore, continuous walkers who sometimes sleep outdoors could be a very small minority, indeed. The fact that *nojuku henro* is novel, praiseworthy, and spiritually fulfilling is reinforced by the fact that it is marketed heavily with respect to pilgrimage accounts in which it is featured.⁵

One of the Shingon priest's most profound statements regarding Buddhism is connected to *nojuku*. He clearly does not care for the practice, explaining that it is unsanitary and unhealthy, especially for an older person (HAMADA 2002, 103). Not generally given to theologizing or evangelizing in his account, Hamada turns deeply reflective while contemplating another night of loathsome *nojuku*. The Japanese word *kakugo* 覚悟 means "resignation" or "resolution" in everyday speech, but also has the lesser-known meaning of Buddhist enlightenment. He resolves himself to an uncomfortable night of *nojuku*, explaining that resolution is a matter of enlightenment, and when you are enlightened, there is no worry: one just walks (HAMADA 2002, 71). *Nojuku* as an austerity is interesting because of this discretionary, rather than absolute, character. In sum, for Hamada, *henrogyō* is composed of things you do not do (drink alcohol), things you must do (walk without fail), and things you sometimes do (*nojuku*). With regard to the latter two, it is when the activities are particularly uncomfortable or unpleasant that they become most strongly associated with asceticism.

Shakuhachi Shugyō: The Henro Diary of Onoda Takashi

As the *obi* book-band clearly advertizes from the cover, the pilgrimage of Sōtō Zen priest Onoda Takashi is set apart by his use of the *shakuhachi*, a traditional wind instrument, in substitution for chanting Buddhist sutras. Onoda is seventy years old at the time of his flute-playing segmented (*kugiriuchi* 区切り打ち) pilgrimage, which was completed over four trips to the island and is recorded in ONODA (2002). Onoda's use of the *shakuhachi* is consistent with practices of the Fuke Sect of Zen Buddhism, which was focused on itinerant wandering. ONODA presents sound as a more direct and accessible way for common people to achieve the wisdom contained in challenging Buddhist verses (*ge*)(2002,

5. Despite ubiquitous interpretations of it being difficult training, I personally have found camping and bivouacking along the pilgrim trail to be both convenient and comfortable. The logistics of the trip are greatly simplified when lodging does not need to be secured on a nightly basis.

28–30). The notion of pilgrimage expression through musical instruments is not exclusive to his account. For example, TSUKIOKA Yukiko (2002) performed the *henro* while making offerings of music with a three-string *shamisen*, recording her experiences in a published personal account (2002). Such ritual liberties are curious in so far as they do not appear to draw any contestation in the wider context of the pilgrimage. Instead, priests at pilgrimage locations and others along the way show their approval and encouragement for the pilgrim's musical offerings.

ONODA, who shows deep interest and sophistication on matters of Buddhist history and doctrine, references austerities on the island using the terms *shugyō*, *henrogyō*, and *kugyō* 苦行 interchangeably (2002, 5; 55; 59; 228–29). *Kugyō* means “bitter” or “painful asceticism” and implies elements of mortification. On the practical interpretations of these notions, Onoda abstains from alcohol during his journeys, but it seems to be less of a sacrifice than for Hamada, and it is, therefore, a less central feature of his austerities. Likewise, although he sets out to walk exclusively, he makes his “biggest change” only a quarter of the way through the trip when he elects to walk only the sections of the pilgrimage trail which are independent from other roads (ONODA 2002, 87). He justifies his decision explaining that he does not wish to dwell upon the walking and that the character of the route has been transformed from its more natural origins (ONODA 2002, 87). Guidebooks and magazines promoting the journey through photographs give the impression that one will be mostly walking earthen or stone footpaths through beautiful natural surroundings. Many a pilgrim has been unpleasantly surprised at the concrete and asphalt reality of much of the journey, only interspersed with the more idyllic, traditional pedestrian paths. But Onoda's narrative emphasizes a curious point: some or much of the discomfort associated with automobile traffic and feet pounding on concrete are functions of the journey's modification and are not some cleverly designed Buddhist austerity. Onoda differs from many insofar as he does not automatically associate discomfort, hardship, and perhaps the non-aesthetically pleasing elements with Buddhist edification. Opposite cases exist as well, where pilgrims—especially females by themselves—become acutely uneasy when the pilgrim trail departs from the concrete and traverses deep into forests and onto mountain ridges (see M. SATŌ 2005). Likewise, his example points toward other tendencies seen by contemporary pilgrims to adjust the experience to an acceptable or optimal level of difficulty. As such, walking functions as an element rather than an absolute, comparable to Hamada and the practice of *nojuku*.

A spontaneous friendship on the pilgrim trail between Onoda and a Taiwanese monk makes for interesting contrasts with regard to relative austerity. The *henro* term *kakezure* 掛け連れ is defined as the meeting of people en route on pilgrimage, especially folks with whom a personal connection is made and who

may become short-term traveling companions (SHIRAKI 1994, 41; see ONODA 2002, 191–99; 204; 211). A monk referred to as Ryu, who speaks Japanese rather colorfully, has come to Japan from Taiwan and is doing just a section of the pilgrimage. Their interactions rather poignantly call attention to the fact that this Taiwanese monk's everyday lifestyle appears to be much stricter than the comportment of most Japanese priests engaging in pilgrimage asceticism. Ryu is unmarried and not only abstains from alcohol, but also meat, fish, onions, and garlic (ONODA 2002, 115–22). Although these dietary constraints present considerable challenges even in the context of the pilgrimage, Onoda gives the sense that this journey for Ryu is a comparatively lighthearted endeavor.

Onoda's pilgrimage shows the strong influence of Zen thinking, and his pilgrimage asceticism eventually results in something similar to the solution found through a *kōan* 公案. Early in his account, ONODA introduces a difficult and mysterious scriptural verse and additionally provides an explanation of the Fuke Sect and its use of the *shakuhachi* (2002, 3–4). In the afterword to the text, he explains that he was able to understand the profound meaning of the verse, not when he accomplished his pilgrimage, but with the completion of his writing about the journey (ONODA 2002, 238). The curious notion of the act of writing as being edifying is not exclusive to this pilgrim and perhaps is another contributing factor to the deluge of *henro* publications in recent years.

With regard to the ultimate meaning of the journey, ONODA describes a basic connection between Shakyamuni Buddha, Kōbō Daishi, and the *henro* (2002, 238). He explains that Shakyamuni achieved enlightenment through ascetic practice and that his teachings and the Buddha-Dharma shone like a light. Furthermore, Kōbō Daishi contemplated the Dharma and practiced mantras from the Buddha (no specific Buddha mentioned), determined the 88 pilgrimage locations, and showed sentient beings the path of ascetic practice (ONODA 2002, 238). On this path one uses their body in devotion to nature, proclaims the mantra *namu daishi henjō kongō*, and investigates thoroughly “one's own Buddha-nature” (ONODA 2002, 239). As such, Onoda's description suggests that Kōbō Daishi is something of a conduit for truth and the ascetic paradigm established previously by Shakyamuni. Nonetheless, Onoda's Zen teacher, Kishi Tatsushi, reveals a less nuanced perspective in the book's *batsu* 跋, or afterword. He states that after reading Onoda's text he can understand that the *henro* is difficult ascetic practice (*nangyō* 難行). Likewise, he writes that Onoda informed him that sometimes when he is chanting the standard pilgrimage mantra *namu daishi hengo kongō*, he actually intends for it to mean *namu honshi shakamuni nyorai* 南無本師釈迦牟尼如来, “all praise to the original teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha” (ONODA 2002, 236). While perhaps an expression of non-duality on the one hand, it is likewise a pointed substitution that decidedly lessens the centrality of the Shingon Buddhist saint.

Ascetic Without Peers: The Henro Diary of Aono Takayoshi

The pilgrimage diary of AONO Takayoshi (2004) demonstrates how ascetic practice can be understood to distinguish, categorize, and even to scrutinize the various participants on the journey to the 88 temples. Aono, who was in his early thirties when the book was written, comes from a distinguished educational and Buddhist training background; he unabashedly expresses elitist interpretations of what does—and should—go on among those doing the temple circuit. At the time of his trip to Shikoku, he was a PhD student in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Tokyo University (AONO 2004, 248). Prior to his pilgrimage, Aono had completed two years of formal training at Buddhist temples, including the illustrious and famously strict Sōtō Zen temple Eiheiji in Fukui prefecture. Even the title, *Shikoku junrei kattōki* (2004), shows his desire to distinguish his journey from other *henro*. He uses the more general term for pilgrimage, *junrei* 巡礼, and chronicles the journey in terms of vine-like entanglement, or *kattō* 葛藤. The expression has a rich history in Zen discourse, including a fascicle on *kattō* in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. For Aono, entanglements come from the masses of pilgrims and locals he encounters on his walking pilgrimage, who—while at times lovable and endearing—have no connection to his understanding of true austerities and Buddhism. His elitism leaves him as a proud ascetic with no peers among those dressed in white and sharing the same footpaths. The priest honestly believes he has a vocational responsibility to save his fellow beings.⁶ Thus, he finds himself fretting about what to do about those around him who are at a lower level of understanding or are even delusional with respect to the truth.

Insight into Aono's pilgrimage is perhaps best found in his rejection of *henro* conventions. The Zen priest forgoes using the pilgrim's walking staff, the ultimate symbol of Kōbō Daishi, though he does admit that the implement has some practical value for use in the mountains (AONO 2004, 137). Most interestingly, he declines to use the pilgrimage stamp book, or *nōkyōchō* 納経帳, to collect the temple seals (*shuin* 朱印) at the pilgrimage locations, and he does not bring *osamefuda* 納め札, the pilgrim's calling card, which are used in numerous situations. These latter two items further pertain to his sense of *kattō*, as he perceives them as being connected to the distasteful pursuit of practical worldly benefits, or *riyaku* 利益. The tradition of pilgrim alms, or *settai* 接待, is central to the *henro* experience for almost every pilgrim-author. Early on in the history of the pilgrimage, almsgiving appeared to have existed, as it did elsewhere, with the ascetic initiating the activity and lay locals offering food in return (ASAKAWA 2008, 188–90). Over time, Daishi lore, which both encouraged the generous

6. See READER's discussion of the *henro* diary of Kagita Chūsaburo for similar elitist attitudes with respect to an ordained pilgrim (2006, 192–93).

with the offer of reciprocal merit and benefits and frightened the stingy with fear of divine retribution, led to locals liberally bestowing gifts on easily identifiable pilgrims. While naïve pilgrims may interpret this gift-giving as a sort of altruism unique to Shikoku locals, others such as Aono recognize that *settai* is tied to the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine of merit transfer. He acknowledges the tradition as a “give-and-take,” and his aversion to practical benefits with respect to the journey is really central to his sense of entanglement (see AONO 2004, 94–96). In one situation, he laments that he is akin to a vending machine for practical benefits (AONO 2004, 193). *Takuhatsu* is a significant aspect of his austerities on the island, and he seems to have achieved a personal goal to engage in begging on ten of forty days of his journey (AONO 2004, 95). However, he offers only sutra recitation in exchange for alms. This creates some awkward situations where donors are perplexed by their inability to receive a karmic receipt in the form of an *osamefuda* for their meritorious deeds. For instance, in Kōchi prefecture, a man gives him money and waits patiently for a scrap of paper that never comes (AONO 2004, 92–93). AONO resolutely defends his style to the reader, explaining why a sutra recitation is superior to the giving of an *osamefuda* (2004, 95).

Despite his use of the term *junrei* in the title, it is clear that Aono sees this journey more as a wandering asceticism than pilgrimage. He had been encouraged to pursue the challenge by his instructor at the second temple where he undertook Buddhist training, Hōkyōji. Aono’s Zen teacher, who had completed the circuit three times, presents the walk as an austerity, as opposed to pilgrimage, and explains that it may change the younger priest’s view on life (*jinseikan* 人生観) (AONO 2004, 15). The terminology Aono uses reflects this directly. The word *angya* 行脚 is employed most frequently to describe austerities in the text. The term is connected more directly with priestly asceticism and specifically with the practices of the *jūni-zuda* 十二頭陀, or twelve basic points of asceticism (for an explanation of *angya* see AONO 2004, 13–16). The *zuda* are manifest in *henro* accouterments, as most pilgrims carry basic supplies for worship in a bag slung around their shoulders known as a *zuda-bukuro* 頭陀袋. Specific points of practice for the twelve *zuda* show an inclination toward *takuhatsu* and *nojuku*, including 1. “dwelling in the forest”; 3. “living on alms”; 10. “living under a tree”; and 11. “living in the open air” (*Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* 1999, 168–69). In addition, Aono frequently uses the term *yūgyō* 遊行, which is a close synonym with *angya*. Finally, he employs the term *anri* 行履, which is used more exclusively in Zen-related contexts (AONO 2004, 13–16). The purposely more restricted terminology reinforces his basic stance that Shikoku is an excellent place to perform ascetic practices, but that *henro* pilgrims generally should not be regarded as undertaking austerities. Indeed, through the language of asceticism he seeks to differentiate himself from mere pilgrims, whom he references simply as “*ohenro-san*” throughout. This diary account is truly unrivaled with

respect to the sharp distinctions he draws between the various actors in the pilgrimage landscape.

Aono, a self-described “agent of Shakyamuni Buddha” is at times even more provocative in his overt assertion that the journey is not explicitly concerning Kōbō Daishi/Kūkai, but centers on fundamental Buddhist truth (2004, 104). He describes one *sendatsu*⁷ as an “extreme right-wing pilgrim” whose devotion to Kōbō Daishi is like that of a groupie to a pop idol (AONO 2004, 126). In another situation, his heart is touched by an interlude with an elderly local woman who proclaims predestination in life, saying that things are ultimately a function of “Daishi-san’s mind” (AONO 2004, 121–22). AONO believes that what this woman and other people in Shikoku describe as *Odaishi-san* is dharma (2004, 122). As such, he is able to praise the woman—somewhat perversely—not as an exemplar of devotional faith, but as a figure of insight into Buddhist wisdom. This assertion is indicative of his belief that Shikoku is an invaluable place where the “two-truths doctrine” of Buddhism can be understood, as it is where the relative and absolute realms overlap, giving one access to the world of the absolute (AONO 2004, 227–28). As such, the *henro* is a sort of porthole to truth available to a true ascetic practitioner.

The Henro Ascetic Lexical Spectrum

Using these three texts as a base and augmenting their narratives with other recent accounts by Buddhist priests, we can observe an obvious ubiquity in the use of ascetic practice themes to describe the experience of the *henro*. However, the language of asceticism is likewise intricate and disparate, with manifold doctrinal interpretations of single expressions, which can lead to the assessment of some activities as being superior or inferior. Undoubtedly numerous contributing factors create a spectrum of ascetic terminology centered on Shikoku. A tangible liberty with regard to an individual’s approach to the pilgrimage is a basic condition producing fundamental interpretive diversity. Pilgrims must define asceticism for themselves with regard to the journey in the face of numerous choices that ultimately make the circuit more or less austere. Personal freedom with regard to practice and belief is a theme that looms large in pilgrimage studies, being discussed in seminal theories by Victor and Edith TURNER (1978). Likewise, Karen Smyers has argued with respect to Inari pilgrimage in Japan that the highly observable liberties concerning practice and interpretation conceivably provide space for “solitude and individual needs” in a society that has a

7. *Sendatsu* are officially recognized pilgrimage guides, who have completed the journey at least four times. The term is used in many other ascetic contexts outside of Shikoku. With respect to the *henro*, *sendatsu* are regulated and ranked by the Shikoku Pilgrimage Association (Shikoku Hachijūhachikasho Reijōkai; READER 2006, 171–79).

normative appeal to group cooperation (SMYERS 1997, 428). This sense of freedom clearly distinguishes *henro* asceticism from formal austerities in training temples, as well as guided and meticulously structured mountain practices, such as those of various Shugendō organizations.

Considering the *henro*'s ascetic lexicon, it is probably best to go from words that are more general to those that are more specific. The Japanese term *shugyō* is certainly the most common expression for the journey viewed as spiritual training. *Shugyō* is a concept that can be encountered on a daily basis in Japan, and the word demonstrates how, at a basic level, the Japanese associate hardship and discomfort with meaningful transformation. Indeed, in everyday Japanese language, people often use *shugyō* to describe extra effort directed towards the mastery of some task. There is an entire range of expressions that apply various prefixes to *shugyō* to posit training with particular emphasis. For example, MANABE Shunsho, head priest of the fourth temple on the pilgrimage route,⁸ Dainichiji, and professor of literature at Shikoku University, uses *sangaku shugyō* 山岳修行, or “mountain austerity,” to describe Kūkai's practices that established the *henro*'s ascetic traditions (2012, 56). Another Shingon priest from Shikoku, MIYAZAKI Ninshō, likewise cites several other scholars when describing these same early ascetic activities by Kūkai, referencing them as *sanrin shugyō* 山森修行 (1985, 12). ŌGURI Dōei, Shingon priest and president of an organization called Kokoro no Shugyō Juku 心の修行塾, or “The School of Mind Training,” references the *henro* as “The Heart Sutra Training Journey” 般若心経の修行の旅 (2009, 4). Indeed, lay pilgrims often see engagement with the *Heart Sutra* as a central feature of what constitutes *henro* austerities. Author and famous walking *henro* evangelist, MIYAZAKI Tateki,⁹ uses the term *dōchū shugyō* 道中修行, literally “along the way training,” to emphasize his basic stance that training takes place mostly in the intervals between temples (1990, 3). MANABE additionally states the *henro* can be described as *kendō shugyō* 見道修行, literally “seeing the road training,” which implies moving beyond intellectual understanding in order to awaken to a wisdom not contaminated by worldly desires (2012, 38).

Shugyō-related terminology highlights a surprisingly critical issue with regard to how social in character *henro* training should be. One classic impression of asceticism is that—similar to the example of Kūkai and the Kokūzō practice—the pilgrimage is a solitary affair with minimum communication or interaction with others. However, many *henro* ideologues are adamant that

8. Each of the temples on the *henro* is referenced by a number (1 to 88), though pilgrims are free to visit them in any order that they choose.

9. Miyazaki was fervently devoted to the promotion of walking pilgrimage. In addition to writing his famous guidebook, he also dedicated himself to marking and maintaining the pilgrimage trail. He died tragically, falling off a cliff near Matsuyama City in 2010, during what was believed to be a trail maintenance mission (MIYAZAKI 2014, i–ii).

asceticism in Shikoku requires social interface. Primarily, neglecting others and pursuing enlightenment through the *henro* purely for one's own benefit is what MANABE calls *jiri shugyō* 自利修行, or "self-interested asceticism" (2012, 38; see also *Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* 1999, 189).¹⁰ The opposite of this would be doing the pilgrimage to relieve the suffering of others, or what he calls *bosatsugyō* 菩薩行, or "bodhisattva training" (MANABE 2012, 132–33). In his diary, Shingon priest SUGIMOTO Ryūbun worries that overly strict concentration on asceticism will inhibit encounters with others, which for him is essentially the heart of the experience (2006, 76; 105). Indeed, he emphatically points out that on the *henro* it is said anyone might be Kōbō Daishi incognito, and that, for instance, children and stray animals met along the way could be bodhisattva or kami in disguise (SUGIMOTO 2006, 24; 31). Antisocial behavior in the name of austerity is in fact an impediment to edification from this perspective. MIYAZAKI Tateki impresses that making special effort to interact with locals by greeting them and purposefully asking them directions to temples is a critical part of *henro* asceticism (1990, 24–26). Shingon priest ŌNISHI Ryōkū describes a dramatic realization in his recent *henro* diary (2014, 34). He discovers the meaning of "true training," *shin no shugyō* 真の修行, after what he believes is a shameful episode in which he displayed "smug" or "complacent training," *hitoriyogari no shugyō* 独りよがりの修行, by refusing to accept alms from a local in the form of a car ride and thereby denying a transfer of Buddhist merit to the would-be almsgiver. Indeed, the priest feels he suffers karmic retribution for his selfish approach to asceticism, which had prioritized walking (ŌNISHI 2014, 34). This is a curious foil to Hamada's ideas, seen above, which center on a vow to walk every step of the circuit in the name of training. In a sinners-versus-saints twist, Ōnishi adopts the figure of Emon Saburo as his ascetic model and hero. Emon is a legendary figure whose life is destroyed by his refusal to give alms to the Daishi, but whose salvation is secured subsequently through walking pilgrimage practice (READER 2006, 60–61).

Seen above with Hamada, the phrase *henrogyō* likewise has a broad, encompassing meaning that for some is nearly synonymous with general terms for pilgrimage, such as *junrei*, but which also indicates that the journey is a transformative process. Whether or not one can fully conflate pilgrimage and ascetic practice is an intriguing point of debate, though Miyazaki seems to indicate that they are one and the same. Some of LOBETTI's informants, who engaged in Shugendo practices on Mt. Ōmine, echo sentiments expressed above by Aono, indicating that asceticism is superior to mere pilgrimage (2013, 73). With this view, pilgrimage is seen as more casual and less strenuous in character. With

10. For Mahayanists, this is generally thought to be the spirit of Hinayanists or Pratyeka Buddhas.

regard to the *Hiei sennichi kaihōgyō* 比叡千日回峰行, probably the most famous ascetic practice in the country, RHODES draws from an argument made by Kōdera saying that Tendai priests “may also have taken part in pilgrimages of sacred mountains in search for mystic powers and enlightenment, and that such pilgrimages may have been the forerunners of the later *kaihōgyō* practice” (1987, 190). In a television interview, Fujinami Genshin, a recent successful practitioner of the *kaihōgyō*, relates the two practices, saying that the *kaihōgyō* walking practice is essentially like a circuit pilgrimage (*junrei*) (YORKE 1992). At the very least, Shugendō mountain asceticism can be seen to have considerable overlap with Buddhist circuit pilgrimages in the structure of confraternities (*kō* 講), of leadership positions (*sendatsu* 先達), and even the use of accouterments such as white garments and wooden staffs.

Notions of discomfort are almost universally implicit in all concepts of ascetic practice in Japan. Yet some terminology directly indicate a higher degree of physical or psychological strain, including *kugyō*, “suffering asceticism” or “mortification”; *aragyō* 荒行, “dreadful, wild, or harsh practice”; or *nangyō*, simply, “difficult training.” As seen above with Onoda, *kugyō* is often used almost synonymously with *shugyō* in Japanese contexts in general and with *henro* diaries specifically. Some buddhalogical interpretations paint *kugyō* in a negative light, similar to the sort of extreme austerities Shakyamuni Buddha rejected (see *Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* 1999, 205); likewise, some prominent *henro* voices make a clear distinction between these two concepts as well. For example, the *henro sendatsu* guide SHIRAHAMA Eiji (2015) describes a process whereby on the journey one’s negative state of *kugyō* is transformed into the positive state of *shugyō*. HOSHINO and ASAKAWA express a similar sentiment in describing *shugyō* as the transformation of negative aspects of the journey into something positive, though they do not distinguish between *shugyō* and more uncomfortable forms of training (2011, 190). Additionally, MIYAZAKI indicates that creating more difficulty by rushing around the circuit is not a true element of asceticism (*shugyō*; 1990, 3). Even the Sōtō Zen priest Aono, who generally feels most pilgrims are not austere enough, at times seems to be searching for an optimal level of difficulty. The Shingon Buddhist Priest Sugimoto Ryūbun lays out his vision for a “happy-go-lucky *henro* journey” (*okiraku henro tabi* オキラク遍路旅) in his own personal pilgrimage memoir, published in 2006. As a self-styled *henro*-evangelist, he explicitly states that painful ascetic training is not required to receive the power of Dharma (*hōriki* 法力) (SUGIMOTO 2006, 101). Indeed, he quotes one of his own teachers from his time on Mt. Kōya who denies a link between *aragyō* and enlightenment. Curiously, however, Sugimoto still maintains that pilgrimage difficulties, such as walking in the rain, constitute *shugyō*, so his encouragement for a happy-go-lucky style is free of neither dis-

comfort nor a sense of ascetic practice. Clearly, the pilgrimage viewed as especially difficult or painful asceticism is embraced or rejected to varying degrees.

As we have observed, there are ranges of terms that are more indicative of priestly asceticism or that frame the pilgrimage as a sort of preparatory training. As we have seen, Aono uses the terms *angya* and *yūgyō*, which have a long-standing use in the training of clergy, even well outside of pilgrimage contexts. Likewise, the elements related to the twelve points of asceticism (*jūni-zuda*) would seem to be more directly connected to itinerancy than purposeful travel, though there are famous examples on Shikoku of perpetual pilgrims, those in continual circumambulation of the island circuit.¹¹ Almost all of the extant priestly *henro* diaries from the Heisei era pertain to individuals who are transitioning into lives as Buddhist clergy. As such, many might be characterized as doing *jissengyō* 実践行, training in which the participants are putting something into practice. MANABE expresses a sentiment reflected implicitly in many accounts that *henro jissengyō* allows the practitioner to make abstract religious ideas concrete (2012, 63–65). For him, the pilgrimage represents the practical implementation of a mix of doctrines coming from both Shingon Esoteric Buddhism and Shugendō. Likewise, the account by Aono reinforces that he is putting into practice the more theoretical elements of his education and formal Zen Buddhist training. Uncharacteristically, he is rather humble reflecting on his transition, believing that he requires more practice to make his asceticism a true act of Samadhi (AONO 2004, 123; 129).

Henro discourse contains various terminologies for what LOBETTI (2013, 31) describes as “ascetic acts,” which are shorter and more specific austerities. Some authors avoid referring to the entire pilgrimage experience as asceticism, but reference particularly difficult situations encountered along the way as singular ascetic episodes, such as getting lost, hiking up taxing mountains, or walking in the rain (see SUGIMOTO 2006, 17; 75). Specific terms such as *fuse no shugyō* 布施の修行, *hōse no shugyō* 法施の修行, or *takuhatsu shugyō* 托鉢修行 all express ascetic acts aimed at the purposeful solicitation of alms during the pilgrimage, rather than simply the passive receipt of *settai*, which nearly all pilgrim experience. MIYAZAKI advocates alms-seeking for all walkers and provides detailed instructions for its undertaking (1990, 34–37). The Shingon priest ŌNISHI adopts the other side of the transaction and makes giving alms a central motive of his *henro* asceticism in order to “sow the seeds of merit” (2014, 23). Contrary to such encouragement, MIYAZAKI offers a stern warning against unsupervised attempts at waterfall ascetic practice, *taki no gyō* 滝の行, despite a considerable number

11. READER offers an excellent analysis of famous perpetual pilgrims on Shikoku (2006, 255–57), and he uses the topic to challenge constructions of pilgrimage as a “one-off activity” (2006, 266).

of locations for it around *henro* temples and in proximity to the pilgrim trail (1990, 37; 2014, 52). He maintains that a misstep with this practice can unleash violent retribution from evil spirits, causing the pilgrim to lose their minds. Finally, several contemporary *henro* diaries contain melodramatic climaxes that occur in connection to *gyōba* 行場, literally “place for asceticism” (see FUJITA 2003, 163–65). This term can indicate natural locations for austerities, such as caves, but especially has come to reference places that include semi-technical mountain routes that often require climbing up and traversing across rock slabs, gullies, and monoliths, and which are usually marked with directing signs and equipped with *in situ* chains. For example, Shushshakaji, temple seventy-three, has a very famous *gyōba* associated with a story of an adolescent Kūkai who took a leap of faith from a rock outcrop. Engaging *gyōba* can constitute decidedly spicy elements that are quite akin to rock climbing practices done by *yamabushi* throughout Japan.

The Implications of Henro-related Gyō for Theories of Asceticism

BLACKER sees the Japanese ascetic as one of two principal types of shamans (1999, 21–22). In her description, mediums (*miko* 巫女) channel spiritual beings to themselves, while ascetics traverse over to the spirit realm through either interior or exterior journeys (1999, 21–23; 172). Likewise, she posits that the ascetic is essentially a healer, who draws upon the aid of supernatural beings (1999, 22). BLACKER points to three basic categories for Japanese acesis, “fasting, cold water and the recitation of words of power,” as well as two “subsidiary ascetic disciplines”: seclusion in a cave and walking pilgrimage (1999, 98). With regard to the latter, BLACKER asserts that *yamabushi* and pilgrims are the descendants of *hijiri* 聖 (1999, 167), influential mendicant practitioners, who were often devoted to the practice of *nenbutsu* and who were purveyors of Buddhism among common Japanese. She mentions specifically the presence of “ascetic pilgrims” at the 88 places of Shikoku, indicating perhaps a specific class of participants among the pilgrim population (BLACKER 1999, 101), analogous to Aono’s assertion above. Overall, Blacker paints asceticism as a profoundly supernatural endeavor.

It is quite rare for contemporary *henro* diaries—either those of laypersons or priests—to thematically revolve around the paranormal, malevolent or benign spirits, or exorcisms. Nonetheless, there are two noteworthy exceptions. The female Shingon priest, Ieda Shōko, mentions in her *henro* diary’s introduction that her vitality (*seiki* 生氣) had been drained by the deceased spirits of HIV/AIDS patients she worked with in the United States (IEDA 2009, 11). Doing ascetic practice, she realizes, is a way to offset the illness brought on by this depletion of her life-energy (2009, 12). Likewise, a pilgrim named SUGIURA Shina (2005), who writes about her deep affliction with psychosis and depression, becomes a

disciple of a female Buddhist priest named Harihara Jisen.¹² Harihara seems to fit the classic definition of a shaman, as a figure in constant contact with spirits and the spiritual realm. She appears to function in equal measures as medium and ascetic; claims to be possessed by an *ujigami*, a patron deity; and is recognized even by another Buddhist priest along the trail as a healer (S. SUGIURA 2005, 141). The pilgrim shaman is said to cure SUGIURA's mental issues by placating, or exorcising, the spirits of her late father (2005, 68), two of her deceased pet dogs (2005, 75), and that of an aborted fetus (2005, 78) at various places along the pilgrimage.¹³ As we can see, none of the ascetically oriented priests considered here seem to fit BLACKER's view of the *gyōja* as a shaman bridging a gap to the spiritual realm or with the ability to "vanquish malignant spiritual beings" in the cause of healing (1999, 164). Likewise, these accounts seem to call into question the categorization of walking as a subsidiary rather than primary mode of ascetic practice in Japan.

Lobetti moves sequentially through several definitions of asceticism and, in doing so, raises propositions both supported and challenged by *henro* data. His discussions involving the scalability of ascetic difficulties, what he calls "the proficient balance between their [the practitioners] physical abilities and the requirements of the practice," or making things "wisely harder," is highly observable in Heisei-era Shikoku literature. Indeed, the relative scalability with respect to things like walking, sleeping outdoors, and soliciting alms, we have seen to be directly connected to how "gyō" is ultimately defined. Lobetti playfully notes that perhaps the simplest (albeit "poor") definition of asceticism might include "activities involving a certain degree of bodily pain or exertion..." (LOBETTI 2013, 117). While broad, this simple view has an almost universal resonance among *henro* pilgrim writers, as pain and exertion are the lowest common denominators in virtually every instance. MIYAZAKI quotes from pilgrimage association documents, which state: "Think that when you are in trouble or suffering that this is part of training and accept it as a test from Kōbō Daishi" (2014, 34). Of course, this exhortation raises the intriguing question of the extent to which asceticism is viewed as religious, spiritual, or even as a secular form of training, as one might see in martial arts or with high-school baseball in Japan (see CAVE 2004). At times, ascetic discourse seems to allow authors to avoid the stickier realms of more devotional religious terminology and stay anchored in notions of self-improvement or self-actualization. HOSHINO and ASAKAWA offer an example of a self-described "nonreligious" pilgrim who nonetheless discovers a cosmology through ascetic practice on the trail (2011, 183–84). Furthermore, asceticism pithily understood

12. The account does not reveal which Buddhist sect Harihara is affiliated with.

13. The identity of this fetus and whether it had any direct connection to the participants is not explained.

as a sort of meaningful engagement with pain or difficulties in part demonstrates why—as LOBETTI observes and as these examples demonstrate—it can be functionally trans-sectarian in nature (2013, 104). As seen with the examples of Sōtō Zen priests on the *henro*, the attraction becomes the ascetic opportunity, rather than devotional motives dedicated to a particular sectarian hero or saint.

LOBETTI is fundamentally dissatisfied with the simplistic association of ascetic practice with pain and exertion and ultimately hopes to posit “a theory of asceticism as a form of philosophy of the body” (2013, 5) and that all aspects of asceticism are to be understood in bodily terms (2013, 136). Indeed, he envisions his research as an endeavor to translate the “bodily texts” of the participants (2013, 7). As such, his ultimate definition of ascetic practice is “a structured and defined process of reversal of the flow of the body of the practitioner, and having as a consequence the production of power” (LOBETTI 2013, 136). Although he expresses concerns about mind/body dualism being too strictly conceived (LOBETTI 2013, 11–24), he hopes to “translate” these envisioned texts through an understanding of the body rather than through the mind (2013, 6). As such, he methodologically limits himself even while hoping to penetrate the phenomena more deeply.

Ultimately, Lobetti’s body-centered thesis of asceticism falls short in its efforts to redirect research in this area. First, the profundity of data obtained through participation need not discount the tremendous influences of history, literature, geography, infrastructure, and other non-ascetic actors. With regard to pilgrimage studies, READER has asserted that an overly concentrated focus on personal experience has noticeably skewed our theoretical orientations and often obscures highly influential aspects of the pilgrimage ecosystem (2013, 13–14). Indeed, in looking specifically as to why the Shikoku *henro* has risen relatively recently to become Japan’s great national pilgrimage (2013, 37–39), READER shows that personal experience is essentially enabled through a complicated social and economic nexus that extends far beyond driven seekers propelled by what other scholars have painted as a sort of “spiritual magnetism” (2013, 36). Second, physical paper texts demonstrate that asceticism is not reducible to merely a philosophy of the body, as the topic rivals many religious doctrines for its dialectical philosophical intricacy. Lobetti speaks about “ascetic literature” and is well aware of its influence, but the traditions he profiles are far less literary than the *henro*. In the case of Shikoku, we can understand that, more often than not, literature shapes the ascetic interpretations of the journey well before the practitioner’s body encounters the first footsteps on hard concrete. Indeed, the independent nature of many *henro* practitioners makes them far more dependent on literature as a practical and spiritual guide for what are rather epic journeys.

Through analyses of *hijiri*, SHINNO (1991; 1993) asserts the centrality of such figures to Japanese religious development and classifies them especially with

respect to their function rather than form. The language pertaining to *hijiri* austerities forms a broad spectrum, as seen with the *henro* above, but the term *yūgyō* is especially prominent (SHINNO 1991, 68–69). One of the most famous *hijiri*, the Buddhist priest Ippen 一遍 (1234–1289), spoke and wrote of his wandering asceticism mostly as *yūgyō*, and SHINNO describes his activities specifically as “*yūgyō junrei*,” or “ascetic pilgrimage” (1991, 68). In fact, Ippen, a native of Shikoku, led austerities at what would become temple forty-five of the route, Iwayaji, and some legends assert that he was reborn as the repentant pilgrim, Emon Saburo (READER 2006, 110). SHINNO considers how *hijiri* practitioners bridged a gap between mountain austerities and the lives of everyday Japanese they would come to serve (1991, 5). He historically analyzes the numerous nuances and variations with regard to the content of austerities. His treatment even highlights notable examples that exhibit deep subjectivity and a stress on personal, rather than shared, experiences (SHINNO 1991, 70). Nonetheless, in contrast to Blacker and Lobetti, SHINNO (1993, 202) sees *hiriji* and *gyōja* as being a broad class of practitioners serving mostly as a popular conduit of religious influence and often pushing the boundaries of orthodoxy. Indeed, his preference for keeping ascetic terminology relatively unbounded is displayed in his consideration of “*hijiri*-type” and “*gyōja*-type” practitioners. As examples of this ascetic-like pattern, he analyzes the religious development of the Ikoma mountains east of Osaka and the Shikoku *henro* itself, where influential individuals are “giving birth to religious meaning and persuasion” (SHINNO 1993, 202–203). As such, rather than being merely peripheral figures, ascetics are understood to be key leaders of religious development, displaying significant dynamism and creativity (1993, 199–203). This assertion has descriptive potential with regard to the narratives considered above. The pilgrim-priest’s overt presence on the *henro* trail and the publication of experiential accounts containing their own religious perspectives situate them as good candidates to serve as Shinno’s “*hijiri/gyōja*-type” practitioners.

SHINNO’s treatment of ascetics and asceticism implicitly recognizes a broad spectrum of phenomena with resemblances to one another. WITTGENSTEIN (1973, 31–32) describes a “family resemblance” among the referents of a word, which shows “overlapping and criss-crossing” characteristics. The philosopher feels there is generally no utility in creating strict limits for a term through a definition. Drawing from this perspective, I maintain that interpretations of asceticism through an abstractive universal or reductive formula, in the words of Law, risks “introducing *new* boundaries rather than revealing existing ones” (LAW 2003, 100; WITTGENSTEIN 1973, 32–33). Drawing from the philosopher’s analogies, I think Japanese *henro* data reveal that asceticism is not a single commonality but pertains to various phenomena with “similarities” and “relationships” (WITTGENSTEIN 1973, 31). At one extreme, a broad classification of

asceticism, as say activities that involve pain or exertion, is so non-reductive that most descriptive utility is lost. At the other extreme, where strict lines are drawn, the scholar finds herself almost in the theological position of delineating what constitutes genuine austerities. Further, in dealing with religious contexts and pilgrimage systems over a long period of time, we can recognize a dynamic fluidity, originality, and even an evolution with regard to such practices and practitioners. Finally, embracing key concepts of inquiry as a family of terms with resemblances to one another allows scholarship to more readily work across cultural lines to fruitfully discuss such broad—but intriguing—phenomena as “pilgrimage” or “asceticism.”

Considerable ink has been spilled supporting various assertions with regard to “true” asceticism and what form it should take with respect to the *henro*. As such, I have introduced nearly two-dozen specific Japanese terms for asceticism that authors have connected to the journey to the 88 temples on Shikoku. Beyond the nuanced doctrinal arguments put forth by professional guides and Buddhist priests, well-worn narratives in Japanese culture, such as the *Saiyūki*, help to establish a basic trope that Buddhist priests are actualized through the trials and tribulations of epic journeys. Borrowing liberally from Joseph CAMPBELL (2008), we could say that purposeful ascetic travel often exemplifies something like a durable *monomyth* for a monk-hero with a thousand faces. While for the *henro* the central exemplar of the austere priest-hero is Shugyō Daishi, many proxies are available. Ultimately, most pilgrim-authors tend to see themselves as the emerging hero, enlightened to a greater or lesser degree as a result of the pilgrimage.

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