

THE HISTORY OF CHARITABLE GIVING
ALONG THE SHIKOKU PILGRIMAGE ROUTE

by

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of Charitable Giving along the Shikoku Pilgrimage Route

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The following thesis examines the extensive history of charitable giving along the eighty-eight temple pilgrimage route around the island of Shikoku, Japan. The founder of this route, believed by common tradition, is Kūkai, (posthumous name, Kōbō Daishi 774-835), who established the Shingon sect in Japan, emphasizing that all people could achieve the ‘attainment of Buddhahood in this life’ (*sokushin jōbutsu*). To achieve this Buddhahood, one must participate in the Six Perfections, the first being, ‘to give’, that is through charitable giving.

Since the time of Kōbō Daishi, there has been a custom of giving to religious figures such as monks or pilgrims in Japan. The Shikoku pilgrimage, unlike other pilgrimage routes, offers a unique perspective for a study in charitable giving for at least two reasons. First, Kōbō Daishi has traditionally held a strong influence on the people who have participated as donors of charity, especially on the local people within Shikoku. Secondly, the isolation of Shikoku has allowed this pilgrimage route to preserve its original religious nature for much longer than other areas. As a result, the custom of giving remains unusually prevalent to this day.

Through the use of numerous primary sources written by both Japanese and foreign authors who offer their firsthand accounts of charitable giving, from the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) until the mid-twentieth century, I will argue that this custom of giving along the Shikoku route was a wide spread phenomenon that was

evident in a variety of forms. It will become evident that the concept of giving in Shikoku has had a strong tie with religion, specifically with the teachings and legends of Kōbō Daishi. To provide evidence for this, and to examine other reasons for people's participation in charitable giving, I will explore the origins of this custom in Japan, explain the motives for giving, and highlight the numerous ways in which people throughout Japan have provided charity to Shikoku pilgrims for such an extensive period of time.

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I feel like a pilgrim who has just successfully completed the pilgrimage route around the island of Shikoku. I am both happy and sad that this journey is over. My life during this trip has been like the four stages within the Shikoku route, that of, awakening, discipline, enlightenment and Nirvana. When I reached the point between discipline and enlightenment, I was ready to give up, but due to the assistance, support and kindness of so many people, I have been able to successfully complete this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Kōbō Daishi as Founder

Kūkai or Kōbō Daishi (774-835) is considered to be “the single most popular Buddhist saint in medieval [Japanese] society.”¹ He is accredited with such accomplishments as performing numerous miracles, inventing *kana* (the Japanese phonetic orthography), and creating the first school open to all social classes, as well as establishing the Shikoku pilgrimage route. Despite these feats his early life was quite simple. In 774, he was born near the temple, *Zentsūji* (no. 75 on the Shikoku pilgrimage route) to a noble clan, the house of Saeki, and spent his childhood years in Shikoku. At the age of eighteen, he joined the State College (*daigaku*) in Kyōto, but became disillusioned with the Confucian education that he was receiving and dropped out at the age of twenty-four to engage in Buddhist training. Before quitting the college, he had, through some circumstance, met an unknown monk who had introduced him to Esoteric Buddhist texts and sparked Kūkai’s interest in becoming a monk. Until Kūkai left for China in 804 little is known about his activities during this seven-year period. It is assumed that he acted as a wandering ascetic pursuing further religious training.

In 804, the Japanese court chose Kūkai to go to China as a student monk, and with this opportunity, he was able to study under the leadership of the Seventh Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism, Hui-kuo (746-805). Kūkai was personally trained by Hui-kuo in “the most essential yet secret aspects of Esoteric Buddhism” and “in the mantras, Sanskrit hymns, the *mūdras* and visualization of the sacred symbols.”² However, this was only to

¹ Ryuichi Abe. *The Weaving of Mantra*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 2.

² Ibid. 123,125.

last for two years because Hui-kuo's health deteriorated and in 805, he passed away. Before his death, he told Kūkai to return to his country and spread the teachings of what would become Shingon Buddhism. Thus, after only two years in China, Kūkai returned to Japan. From 806 until his own death in 835, Kūkai worked diligently to establish this new faith and spread its teachings.³ His achievements were well known throughout the country and in 921 Emperor Daigo (r. 897-930) bestowed on him the posthumous title of Kōbō Daishi (弘法大師) or 'Great Master of Spreading the Dharma', by which he is best known.

One of the major achievements attributed to Kōbō Daishi is the founding of the Shikoku pilgrimage route, although there is no concrete evidence for whether or not he actually traveled around the entire island. What is known is that between the ages of eighteen and thirty-one, he traveled to such places in Shikoku as Ishizuri, Cape Muroto and Mt. Tairyū to participate in ascetic training. He also conducted public works by leading the people in rebuilding the dam at Mannōike (Kagawa Prefecture). One legend has it that Kōbō Daishi walked the Shikoku route in 815 at the age of forty-two. This seems unlikely due to the fact that in the same year, he is said to have launched a new initiative to spread Esoteric Buddhism from Takanosanji, his monastic headquarters located in the northwest Kyōto. Ryuichi Abe argues that in the spring of that year Kūkai sent a letter to Buddhist leaders asking for their cooperation in copying and circulating thirty-five books of scripture chosen from amongst the writings he had brought back from

³ According to Yoshito Hakeda, "Kūkai had not died but has merely entered into eternal samadhi and was still quite alive on Mt. Koya as a saviour to all suffering people..." Yoshito Hakeda. *Kūkai: Major Works*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972) 60.

China.⁴ Perhaps Kūkai traveled around Shikoku during another season, other than spring. During the years of 809- 816, he had maintained a close relationship with Emperor Saga (r. 809 - 823; 786 - 842) by frequently exchanging letters of which the contents show that Saga had asked Kūkai “to produce calligraphic works, to engage in exchanges of poems, and to submit to the court samples of poetry and calligraphy, textbooks on poetics and calligraphic technique and other related works Kūkai had acquired while in China.”⁵ None of these letters, however, make any mention of him making a trip to Shikoku during that period. It is clear that by 815, Kūkai was extremely busy with promoting Shingon Buddhism, writing materials, fulfilling the Emperor’s requests and training his increasing number of disciples that make it impossible for him to have walked the route around that period. Thus, it is unlikely that he could be the first person and founder of the Shikoku route, even though that this traditional view has come down through the centuries.

There are some other theories offering conjectures to who really was the first person to walk the route. One possibility is contained in a book about the Shikoku pilgrimage published in 1690:

It is not known by whose hand or at what time the eighty-eight places of the Shikoku pilgrimage route were established. One theory says that, after the death of the Daishi, a person called Shinzei, (800-860), a monk living on Mt Kōya and a disciple of the Daishi, began the pilgrimage by following in the Daishi’s footsteps. It is because of this that people started to do the pilgrimage.⁶

⁴ Abe 46.

⁵ Abe 43.

⁶ Iyoshi Dankai.ed. *Shikoku Henroki shu*. . “Shikoku Henro Kudokuki.” (Matsuyama: Aoba Tosho, 1994) 213.

遍路所八十八ヶ所とさだめぬる事、いづれの時、たれの人いふ事さだかならず。一説に、大師の御弟子高雄山にましませる 本の紀僧正真濟といひし人、大師の御入定の後、大師をしたひ、御貴跡を遍路せしよりはじまり、世の人相逐て遍礼する事となれりとへり。

The author suggests that it was Shinzei, a disciple of Kōbō Daishi, who was the first person to walk the route in its entirety. It is claimed that he followed the Daishi's footsteps, yet there is no clear evidence of him walking around the present-day circuit. Perhaps he only visited those places where Kōbō Daishi had been in training, where he was born or where he had conducted public works. Yet even this theory is questionable because there is no reference in Shinzei's biography of him traveling to Shikoku. Another theory regarding the first person or founder of the route, based on a legend from the ninth century, is of a man called Emon Saburō, who is said to have walked the pilgrimage route in search of Kōbō Daishi.

Since the earliest days of the Tokugawa period, the inaccessibility of Shikoku and difficulty of traveling were two main factors that restricted pilgrimages to priests or aristocracy. Unlike the common people of the region, only these types of people would have the freedom of time, freedom from obligations and sufficient money to undertake such a journey. Was it one of these early priests or aristocrats who 'founded' the route, or can this honor be attributed to the common people who began to appear as pilgrims between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries?⁷

⁷ The earliest proof of pilgrims on the route comes from graffiti at Temple no. 69, Kannonji that is dated from 1347. (Toshiyuki Shiraaki. *Junrei- Sanpai Yōgo Jiten*. (Osaka: Shobo, 1994) 17)

There is an inscription on a small temple bell from 1471 on the Jizōdō (Jizō shrine) in the village of Motokawa in Tosa. It is heavily damaged and partially readable. However, the inscription records that it was a group of two men and two women, representatives of a Buddhist community, who were traveling at this time. There is also some scribbling on the temple, Jodoji (no. 49), dating from 1525, 1527, 1528, 1531, 1540 and at Kokubunji (no. 80) in 1528 (Shimazaki Tanaka Hiroshi. unpublished Phd. dissertation *Pilgrim Places- a study of the 88 sacred precincts of the Shikoku pilgrimage of Japan*. 1975. 48.)

It is clear that the origins and founder of the route cannot be positively determined.⁸

Growing Popularity in the Modern Period

The possibility of pilgrims to travel around Shikoku improved dramatically with social changes concerning travel in general and the distribution of guidebooks about the Shikoku pilgrimage route during the Genroku period (1688-1704). Although books had been written about the Shikoku pilgrimage as early as 1638 and 1653, it was not until the period between 1687 and 1690 that any informative document on the route was published in large quantities. Increasingly, more people came to have access to such books and could use the information contained within to help them prepare for the journey around Shikoku.

Three books written during the Genroku period on the Shikoku pilgrimage became so popular that they went through numerous reprints during the eighteenth century.⁹ The availability of such guidebooks, combined with the Bakufu's relaxed travel restrictions, allowed the Shikoku pilgrimage route to experience its first boom in popularity during the Genroku period (1688-1704). While exact numbers are not known for this first peak, there are specific numbers available for later periods. For example, during the next peak in numbers (1756-1780), records from the Tosa domain (Kōchi prefecture) dated 1764 indicate that 200 to 300 people from outside the domain were passing through daily between February and July (他国遍路二月より七月までに一日

⁸ For excellent studies in English into the life and teachings of Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi) see Joseph Kitagawa. *Kōbō Daishi and Shingon Buddhism* (unpublished PhD dissertation) University of Chicago, 1951; Yoshito S. Hakeda. *Kūkai: Major Works*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Ryuichi Abe. *The Weaving of Mantra*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

⁹ see Introduction p. 8 (Source Materials) for the explanations of these earliest guidebooks.

に二、三百人も取り申候).¹⁰ Extrapolation of this data could mean that 30,000 to 40,000 people made the pilgrimage in one year but estimating annual figures based on the data is hazardous because of the seasonal nature of the pilgrimage; for example, another source puts the annual number of pilgrims in the area of 10,000 to 20,000.¹¹ The third peak in the number of pilgrims in Shikoku occurred during the Bunsei-Bunka era (1804-1830), which Nathalie Kouame calls the ‘Golden Age of the Shikoku Pilgrimage’, but there are no specific references to the numbers of pilgrims.¹²

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the number of pilgrims continued to increase dramatically. For example, a former head monk of Temple 19, Tatsueji (立江寺) indicated that approximately 300 to 500 pilgrims visited his temple every day between March and May of 1894.¹³ This figure if multiplied by ninety days suggests that between 27,000 and 45,000 pilgrims passed through Tatsueji for that three-month period. A reference from the Taishō period (1912-1926), by the head priest of Temple 77, Dōryūji (道隆寺), notes that on a busy day about 1000 pilgrims visited the temple.¹⁴ Alfred Bohner who walked the route in 1907, and published his book about various aspects of the pilgrimage twenty years later, determined that there were 30,000 pilgrims

¹⁰ Takashi Maeda. *Junrei no Shakaigaku*. (Osaka: Naniwa Printing, 1972) 108.

¹¹ Constantine Nomikos Vaporis. *Breaking Barriers- Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 247.

¹² Nathalie Kouame used the phrase ‘Golden Age of the Pilgrimage’ in her “Shikoku’s Local Authorities and Henro during the Golden Age of the Pilgrimage.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Fall 1997. p.413-425. Studies of the numbers along the Shikoku and Saikoku routes have been examined by Takashi Maeda in *Junrei no Shakaigaku* (Osaka: Naniwa Printing, 1972)

¹³ Maeda. 108.

¹⁴ Ibid. 126.

on the route with one-third of the participants coming from outside Shikoku.¹⁵ Since then the most recent data estimates the numbers of pilgrims to be over 100,000 annually, traveling by bus, taxi, car, motorcycle, bicycle and even by helicopter!¹⁶

Examination of Charitable Giving

The Shikoku route (like other pilgrimage routes to Ise Shrine, Saikoku, Kantō, and Chichibu) provides excellent examples of what the local people did to support and assist the travelers on their demanding journey.¹⁷ Although the number of pilgrims traveling around Shikoku never reached the millions of pilgrims seen along the roads to Ise Shrine during the eighteenth century, Shikoku provides a unique perspective on charitable giving because this custom has not dissipated as it has along so many of the other routes. The ongoing strength of charitable giving in Shikoku may be a result of the fact that as other pilgrimage routes became more popular, with increased numbers of pilgrims needing food, housing and other services to survive, businesses arose more quickly to accommodate these travelers' needs. Such communities began to offer charitable giving less, and instead the same services were increasingly offered for profit. This trend towards commercialization also occurred in Shikoku but at a slower rate and to a much lesser degree. Shikoku's isolation, as well as the length and difficulty of its route and the strong religious beliefs of the people has played an important role in preserving the religious focus of the Shikoku route, including the custom of charitable giving.

¹⁵ Alfred Bohner. *Wallfahrt zu Zweien die 88 Heiligen Statten von Shikoku*. (Tokyo: Druck van Gebauer Schwetckhe AG Halle, 1931) 132.

¹⁶ *Gendai Shakai to Shikoku Henromichi*. Study by Waseda University. 1994 p.37.

¹⁷ Pilgrimages are a popular destination amongst the Japanese. *The National Dictionary of Pilgrimage of Spiritual Places* highlights 282 routes in Japan that involves over 7750 spiritual places! (Daihorinkaku Henshubu ed. *Zenkoku Reijō Junpai Jiten*. Tōkyō: Daihorinkaku, 1997)

This thesis examines the Shikoku pilgrimage over the last four hundred years, from the earliest days of the Tokugawa period until the mid-twentieth century, and investigates firsthand accounts from both Japanese and foreign documents of people who either witnessed or experienced the various forms of charity provided to pilgrims in Shikoku. This study will examine the pre-modern process of almsgiving in Shikoku, describing and accounting for the development of a pilgrimage infrastructure or support system that, initially voluntary and informal in basis, gradually took on a more formal structure.

The first chapter is a brief history of charitable giving, first within Japan and then within Shikoku. Focusing on the Shikoku pilgrimage, an attempt will be made to answer such questions as: who gave the charity, who received it, and why was such a custom carried out? One consequence that can be noted regarding this selfless action of giving is that with time, as the degree of charity increased, the number of people who took advantage of such a service also increased. An undesirable percentage of pilgrims apparently had marginal interest in the religious nature of the pilgrimage route, and instead used the charity of others as a means to sustain their own personal existence. Thus part of chapter one will also examine the response of the local people and local authorities to such pilgrims who were apparently seen as being disruptive and causing trouble.

Chapter two begins a three-part study of the various forms of charity available for free, or at a minimal cost, that have been observed since the Tokugawa period. These amenities have been organized into the following categories: temples, private homes, and other places, with each main group including sub-categories such as ‘road-side temples’

(*ekiroji*), ‘Inns to accumulate merit’ (*zenkonyado*), ‘Pilgrim Inns’ (*henroya* or *henroyado*), and huts. Further development of the motives as to why such accommodation was offered will also be examined.

Chapter three is the second part of the forms of charitable giving along the Shikoku route. This chapter will offer descriptions of such aids as lanterns, path markers, guidebooks and tour guides that were provided so that the pilgrims could safely achieve their goal of completing the pilgrimage without getting lost, without making a mistake in pilgrim etiquette and with the necessary information enabling them to prepare for and survive the journey. Finally Chapter four concludes the examination begun in Chapter two, by focusing on the forms of goods and services provided willingly for the benefit and support of the pilgrims including food and tea being offered, personal assistance, free transportation and other services.

The evidence offered through Chapters two through four supports the hypothesis that the custom of charitable giving was extremely widespread and took many forms. Moreover, this action of giving was not only voluntary, but was also at times a very well organized and formalized action. Although earlier pilgrims suffered due to restrictions and regulations implemented by local governments to control or limit ‘undesirable’ pilgrims, or due to social changes such as war, famines or other natural disasters, pilgrims would still for the most part be assured of receiving charity while traveling along the Shikoku pilgrimage route. The reasons for such charitable behaviour are many: showing sympathy to pilgrims for their difficult journey, family tradition, remembering one’s ancestors, or participating vicariously in the pilgrimage. As the numbers of pilgrims increased over time, those who had successfully completed the route were keenly aware

how much assistance was necessary to make the journey around Shikoku and they also began to actively participate in the role of charitable givers.

Probably one of the strongest motives for giving was rooted in the strong faith of the people in Kōbō Daishi and their belief in the concept of ‘do good and get rewarded or do evil and receive a punishment’ (*kanzen chōaku* 勧善懲悪). The numerous legends and tales that emerged over time became imbedded in the minds of the people and seemed to direct their actions. People also showed kindness to receive merit, an intangible reward that allowed them to achieve Buddhahood in this life (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏), and tangibly, a name-slip (*osamefuda* 納め札) to protect them and ensure that they would have a good, safe and rewarding life while on this earth and a good rebirth for the next life.

Source Materials

Since the beginning of the Tokugawa period, the Shikoku pilgrimage route has been a popular topic for many books, articles and other scholarly works in the Japanese language, but it is only since the twentieth century that some works on this route began to appear in Western languages. Within this thesis, there will be references to both Japanese and Western language sources, especially to diaries, travel records or guidebooks written by Japanese and foreign authors who have participated as pilgrims and have experienced first hand the custom of charitable giving.

In each chapter, different forms of charitable giving are highlighted. This will be presented by surveying the history of giving in Shikoku during the past four hundred years. It will become evident that this custom has endured for an extensive period of

time with its origins based firmly on faith in Kōbō Daishi. It is unfortunate that there is a lack of pilgrim diaries from the Tokugawa era largely because when a pilgrim died, the travel diary was buried with the deceased. Thus most of the books remaining today are those that were produced for wide publication to promote the pilgrimage for the general public. The observations of non-pilgrims will also be examined to highlight such aspects as who embarked on pilgrimages, what pilgrims wore, the road conditions, and the response of common people to the pilgrims.

The first books on the pilgrimage emerged during the seventeenth century. The earliest one available is from 1638, entitled, *Kūshō Hoshinō Shikoku Reijō Ojungyōki* (空性法親王四国靈場御行記) compiled by Kemmyo of Sugoza and based on the three-month pilgrim experience of the Daitakuji imperial prince, Kūshō Hoshinō (1572-1650). In 1653, the priest Chōzen (1612-1680) wrote the *Shikoku Henro Nikki* (四国遍路日記). Between 1687-1690 came the three most popular of the earliest books on the pilgrimage, which were produced for the general public. The first and third were written by Yuben Shinnen (d. 1691) and the second, on request of Shinnen, was written by a Mt. Kōya priest named Jakuhon (1631-?). These books are: *Shikoku Henro Michishirube* (四國邊路道指南 1687), *Shikoku Henro Reijōki* (四國偏禮靈場記 1689), and *Shikoku Henro Kudokuki* (四國偏礼功德記 1690). One foreign observer from the Genroku period (1688-1704), whose comments will be helpful for this study, was Englebert Kaempfer. He visited Japan for two years between 1690-1692 as a physician to the Dutch East India Company at Nagasaki. During his sojourn, he actively collected detailed information about all aspects of Japan and recorded his observations while traveling from Nagasaki to Edō.

During the eighteenth century, the people prospered between times of famine. The Kyōhō (1716-1736) and Tenmei (1781-1789) famines destroyed many lands and decreased the amount of food available. The only book available for this study is the *Shikoku Henro Nakagata Oboe Nikki* (四国辺路中方覚日記 1747) written by Saeki Fujihei, about whom little is known. However, the observations of the Dutchman Charles Peter Thunberg who visited Japan in 1775 will add interesting details to the concept of travel during that time. He, like Kaempfer, worked for the Dutch East India Company as a physician, lived on the island of Dejima and had the opportunity to accompany the Dutch ambassador on his journey to the imperial court in Edō.

For this study, there are several sources used from the early nineteenth century. One is the *Shikoku Henro Meisho Zue* (四国遍路名所図会 author unknown) from 1800 and another is the *Shikoku Jumpai Nikki* (四国巡拝日記) 1819 by Arai Raisuke (unknown). Other references are from a non-pilgrim, Jippensha Ikku, who traveled around Shikoku in 1821. In his book, the *Kanenowaraji* (金草鞋 1821), he offers descriptions of when and what he received as charity despite not being a pilgrim, as well as the activities of charity groups. The observations of Franz Siebold from 1823-29, who was also a medical officer and lived on Dejima, are helpful in realizing the popularity of pilgrimages during this time.

Numerous guidebooks from the twentieth century provide useful information. The ones used in this study are the *Shikoku Hachijuhakkasho Reijō Annaiki* (四国八十八カ所霊場案内記 1908), *Shikoku Reijō Hachijihakkasho Henro Hitori Annai* (四国霊場八十八カ所遍路独り案内 1910), *Shikoku Reijō Annaiki* (四国霊場案内記 1911) and *Shikoku Henro Dōgyō Ninin* (四国遍路同行二人 1920). These four books offer

substantial descriptions of the history of each temple, distances, nearest post offices and other factual information. They differ from the individualized day-to-day travel diary of Takamura Itsue (1894- 1964) who walked the route in 1918. After completing her journey, she published the events of the trip in a series of articles in a newspaper in Kyūshū. These articles were compiled after her death into the book, *Musume Junreiki* (娘巡礼記 1979) . Other books that she wrote relating her pilgrim experiences are *Ohenro* (御遍路 1938) and *Henro to Jinsei* (遍路与人生 1939). In 1907, Alfred Bohner, who was a teacher in Matsuyama, walked the route and wrote about his experience and the history of the pilgrimage route in his book ‘The Pilgrimage Route of Eighty-Eight Holy Stations of Shikoku’ (*Wallfahrt zu Zweien die 88 Heiligen Statten von Shikoku*). In his books, he often quotes from another guidebook, the *Shikoku Jūmpaiki* (四国巡拝記) from 1903. The author of this book was Kan Kikutaro (who also went by the name, Shikokuzaru), a professor at an agricultural school in Matsuyama.

A different type of primary source material is the *Kinsei Tosa Henro Shiryō* (近世土佐遍路資料) published in 1966. This is a compilation of documents from the entire Tokugawa period that mostly highlight the laws and measures taken against ‘non-desirable’ pilgrims. Another document from the twentieth century is ‘The Spiritual Tales of the Temple, Tatsueji’ (*Tatsueji Reigenki* 立江寺靈験記) from 1926. This document records the aims and goals of a charity group that operated out of Tatsueji every year during the busy spring ‘charity-giving’ season.