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The “*Gaijin Henro*”: Outliers, Discrimination, and Time Variability with Pilgrimage in Shikoku*

John A. Shultz

Abstract

The diaries of foreign pilgrims on the Shikoku *henro* provide us with exceptional data to understand the experience of the pilgrimage. These narratives feature unique approaches, religious interpretations, and social interactions while walking the 1200 km journey. In particular, they curiously shed light on perceptions of discrimination while navigating the *henro* trail. I argue that the accounts of foreign pilgrims, like many of those by Japanese pilgrims, demonstrate that time-related factors are primary drivers of the pilgrimage experience. Time features of these lengthy religious journeys offer a potent area of analysis for the global field of pilgrimage studies.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, outliers, Shikoku *henro*, time variability

Introduction

The initial moments of the 1200km pilgrimage to the 88-temples on the island of Shikoku, or the Shikoku *henro*, vary with regard to the auspicious or inauspicious signs of the journey ahead. In the Heisei era, at least 145 accounts of first-person experiences on the *henro* have been published, and the first few hours of the quest are nearly always recorded with a sense of drama. In the 1990s, three intrepid foreign pilgrim authors set out from Temple 1, Ryōzenji, and their initial footsteps launch them into three distinct adventures. Don Weiss is a 44-year old red-headed, red-bearded American of Jewish ancestry (81; 85). As something of a Tokushima local, living and working in the town of Yoshino, and having made preparations for two years, he sails confidently through the first day of his winter pilgrimage (11-37). In contrast, Craig McLachlan, a very tall New Zealander, is poorly prepared and suffering through a “throbbing hangover,” as he struggles through blistering mid-July heat feeling like a “self-conscious... new kid at school” in his brand new, poorly fitting, sparkling white pilgrim clothes (*Tales* 4-5; 7). Amy Chavez, a petite, blond-haired, blue-eyed, American

woman, sets off from Temple 1 literally running after a regional news film crew filming her from a taxi because she simply does not know how to get to the next temple (5; 14). A high-profile celebrity pilgrim from the start, she describes herself as simultaneously being overconfident and underprepared for the rigors of the pilgrim trail (5; 43), the physical difficulties of which she has amplified by choosing to run instead of walk.

The diaries of self-described “*gaijin henro*” offer considerable insight both in terms of their stand-alone content and also in comparison to the accounts of Japanese pilgrims to the island. “*Gaijin*” means foreigner, while “*henro*” denotes both the pilgrimage and the pilgrim on this journey that dates back to the Edo era and is associated with the saint Kōbō Daishi. As I will show, foreign pilgrims are largely an exception to the norm in Shikoku. As such, these extraordinary accounts offer notable support for analytical orientations useful in consideration of all contemporary *henro* literature. I argue that the accounts of foreign pilgrims, like many of those by Japanese pilgrims, demonstrate that time-related factors are primary drivers of the pilgrimage experience. Indeed, foci of analysis in the multi-disciplinary field of pilgrimage studies includes social relationships, the function of holy sites, asceticism, and discourses on motion, all of which can all be deconstructed with respect to the role time plays.

Liminal Outliers: White Pilgrims and Potential Black Swans

In a previous study I considered the role of statistical outliers with regard to the *henro* and argued that so-called “black swans” have the potential to have outsized influence on the social system (Shultz, “Black Swans”). Even today, foreign pilgrims to Shikoku are an outlying proportion of the population with data from 2016-2017 suggesting they are approximately 3.7% of the total (Ohenro kōryū saron). However, when the three pilgrimages mentioned above took place in the 1990s, foreigners were even rarer. Indeed, even meeting non-pilgrim foreigners is so unusual in Shikoku that McLachlan notes in his text the two times it happens (*Tales* 57; 85). Locals in Kagawa admit to him that few people from the island have ever talked to a non-Japanese (McLachlan, *Tales* 199). The result is that these three pilgrims stick out and are treated quite differently than the general pilgrim population. They represent fringe elements in an already liminal population of *henro*. Their presence results mostly in increased—but generally positive—attention in the form of support and alms-giving, or *settai* 接待. Nonetheless, as we will consider, it raises some challenges as well.

Beyond race, visible with many of these pilgrims from a distance, the accounts highlight several other significant outliers. Don Weiss, as recorded in his bi-lingual diary, *Echoes of Incense: A Pilgrimage in Japan*, adds considerable challenge by doing his first pilgrimage in reverse order, or *gyakuuchi de* 逆打ちで. This is a comparatively rare style that is known to be more difficult, and therefore more meritorious, with the placement of trail markers oriented for pilgrims progressing from Temple 1 to 88, not from 88 to 1 (13). Furthermore, Weiss, who was 44 and from California, does two circuits of the pilgrimage separated by only three weeks. He makes his second circuit in the more standard clockwise direction with his wife, during what he describes as the “final days of marriage” after 20 years together (13). He hopes for either something to save the troubled relationship or for the journey to serve as a worthy good-bye ritual (13; 231). Indeed, something of a climax to the narrative occurs during the approach to Temple 65, Sankakuji, when they both admit that the *henro* marriage therapy has failed and that the marriage is over (231). There are 12 extant accounts of married couples pilgrimaging together (see Nishida; Suzuki) and one account of a recently divorced individual (Mori), but this account is outstanding as the only one highlighting the journey as a means to amicable divorce.

Craig McLachlan’s pilgrimage is justified by his wife as a means of clean living that she hopes will lead to the conception of a daughter, after already having two sons (*Tales* 2–3). Nonetheless, his attempts to avoid meat and alcohol are unsuccessful, and he continues to battle subsequent hangovers after his queasy first day (McLachlan, *Tales* 89; 188). McLachlan’s title, *Tales of a Summer Henro*, highlights how unusual it is to launch a walking *henro* in the scorching heat and humidity of mid-summer.¹⁾ Dozens of people marvel at his fortitude in these extreme conditions. He is a very hearty pilgrim who walks a blistering pace in temperatures sometimes pushing 40 degrees Celsius, completing the journey in a mere 29 days for what typically requires most walkers 40 days (*Tales* 229). Additionally, he mixes up sleeping outdoors, or *nojuku* 野宿, with stays at inns. *Nojuku* is often considered an admirable ascetic practice that follows the austere example of Kōbō Daishi in connection with the *henro* (Shultz, “The Way to Gyō” 285). For McLachlan the practice sees him sleeping on benches in temples amid hordes of mosquitos, crashing on elementary school grounds, or, on one occasion, even sleeping on a horizontally stretched cargo net covering a children’s jungle gym (*Tales* 142–43). Finally, his account is outstanding compared to the dozens of Japanese accounts I have examined with regard to overt descriptions of carnal temptations along the way. With real candor, his diary distinctly describes women as well-endowed (*Tales* 20–21),

attractive (*Tales* 37; 63), “alarmingly attractive” (*Tales* 95) and characterizes a woman with “long black hair, generous breasts, and a pink frock” as a “gorgeous temptress” (*Tales* 213–15). In the presence of giggly waitresses he muses, “surely flirting wasn’t against the [*henro*] rules” (*Tales* 109), while meeting two “stunningly beautiful” shrine maidens (*miko* 巫女), tests his ability “not to think impure thoughts (*Tales* 130).”

In previous work, I have established that *henro* diaries almost universally portray the journey as a sort of epic adventure (Shultz, *Characters On*). But Amy Chavez’s account, *Running the Shikoku: 900 Miles to Enlightenment*, markedly stands out even against this general tendency. Between her coverage on KSB television (sometimes broadcast nationally on Asahi TV) and her real-time articles from the trail and published in *The Japan Times*, she is a celebrity who people recognize all along the way (Chavez 150; 174; 198). Indeed, like a professional athlete or a Himalayan expedition climber, she eventually enjoys corporate sponsorship from Tengu Foods, a company specializing in imported goods (101). She chooses to run the route to make it unique by design (xxv). Considering she is running nearly marathon distances, in the range of 25-30 miles, day after day, it is indeed a remarkable physical test (xxvi; 97). The forward of the book is by the famous ultra-marathoner “Barefoot” Ted McDonald, who was profiled in Chris McDougall’s famous tome *Born to Run*. But while most ultra-marathoners run on natural footpaths, the *henro* is about 80-85% concrete or asphalt surfaces, which exact a significant toll on Chavez’s body. Indeed, by the time most walkers enter the last stretch of the journey in Kagawa prefecture, their bodies are generally adjusted to the rigors of the pilgrim trail. Chavez, in contrast, is suffering from a general physical breakdown, including what she calls “the trifecta” of “aches, swellings, and blisters” (196). The continuous challenges prove too much and she twice returns home (28; 89),²⁾ even with the thought to give up entirely the second time (28; 89-92). Interestingly, Chavez resorts to the occasional use of busses or car rides (77; 86; 103; 138; 165-166), the latter of which she explains in terms of the give and take nature of almsgiving in the form of rides (165–66). Her pilgrimage climaxes with the filming of a highly theatrical scene in which she kicks off and abandons her shoes in order to sprint up the final mountain summit on Mt. Nyotai, fighting back tears as she surmounts what she implies is a potentially lethal final 25 foot rock face (201–202). Finally, an unrivaled standout point with Chavez’s account is the 15 years from her pilgrimage to the publication of her memoir. It appears that considerable research concerning Buddhist doctrine was accomplished in the interim.

The diaries of Weiss and Chavez tend toward outliers among modern *henro* accounts for

their organization around the theme of pilgrimaging towards Buddhahood. “The goal of the Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage is Enlightenment,” Chavez unequivocally states in the first line of her account (xv). On the surface, personal enlightenment seems the most obvious goal for a Buddhist pilgrimage centered on Kōbō Daishi, who is widely touted as having achieved his exalted status through the journey. Indeed, considerable symbolism is dedicated to such thinking, including the classification of each of the four prefectures on the island according to the stages on the path to Nirvana (Miyazaki 16).³⁾ Nonetheless, the direct goal of seeking a state of Buddhahood is remarkably rare among the literature of Japanese *henro*, many of whom are looking for solutions to life’s difficulties or are searching for existential meaning. This includes diaries thematically centered on finding oneself; searching for healing, either physical or psychological (see Shultz, “Shock Treatment”); coping with an unexpected job loss; or memorializing a deceased relative.⁴⁾

Issues of Discrimination

Almost akin to pilgrim pop stars, these foreign *henro* are lavished with praise, attention, and support throughout Shikoku, and all three authors express deep gratitude for this encouragement. Additionally, it is important to note that there is no indication in these narratives that priests, Shikoku locals, or other pilgrims call into question the legitimacy of these pilgrims as “true *henro*.” Nonetheless, issues of discrimination are forefront and integral to the experiences described, perhaps because of its sharp contrast to the tremendous goodwill to which they have become accustomed.

In particular, the perception of the authors is that innkeepers very often refuse service or pretend that they are full when a foreign pilgrim arrives or calls for a reservation (Weiss 61; 91; 95-101; McLachlan, *Tales* 94; 149-161; 215).⁵⁾ The Japanese language skills of all three authors range from adequate (in the case of Weiss) to excellent (for McLachlan and Chavez). As such, there appears to be no difficulty in making reservations or in following the protocol typically required of guests in Japanese inns. Weiss views these refusals more stoically and encourages his readers to have compassion for the offenders, suggesting that—at least in part—it is motivated by the thought that innkeepers cannot adequately keep foreign guests happy (269). Indeed, the narratives describe hosts who are at first quite reluctant, only to become comfortable and even enthusiastic about their foreign guests by the time the pilgrims leave (Weiss 97-101; McLachlan, *Tales* 149-51). Additionally, it may well be

the case that non-Japanese guests expect or demand more of their Japanese hosts, despite what must surely be thin profit margins for the innkeepers. For example, as a pilgrim and enlightenment seeker, Chavez feels empowered to attempt to haggle lodging fees for both temple inns (*shukubō* 宿坊) and private inns (*minshuku* 民宿) from the normal ¥5000-7000 to her budgeted amount for lodging of ¥1000 per day (or even to stay free in temple buildings)(18). A kindly elderly innkeeper early on in the journey explains that her requests are unfair to the other guests and that she should make such negotiations in advance on the telephone and should bring her own sleeping bag (25). Indeed, she is embarrassed by “televised stinginess” when the TV cameras capture these negotiations near Temple 70 in Kagawa prefecture (177). The situation prompts her to reflect that she “is not a wondering mendicant” and that stinginess is one of the 108 Buddhist defilements (177).

For Chavez, discrimination is an organizing theme for her entire narrative, and discrimination is posited as unenlightened thinking. The impetus to begin her pilgrimage comes when her yearly contract for a university teaching job is unexpectedly not renewed after five years (xxi). The president of the university cites as justification for non-renewal her moonlighting as a writer for *The Los Angeles Times* (xx). She summarizes her perspective on the situation, “The reasons I was let go were multiple, but they all came down to one basic problem—I wasn’t Japanese” (49). Indeed, she devotes an entire chapter comparing the perceived discrimination from her university to the treatment of Japan’s “lowest caste,” the *burakumin* (45).⁶⁾ Approaching Temple 55, she expounds that the enlightened person recognizes equality and non-dualism in nature, while her university superiors were still unenlightened enough to create biases (153). She concludes that making these connections was indicative of her “reaching a higher level of consciousness” (154). Further, at times on the pilgrimage, she feels she is not treated properly as a person on the path to Buddhahood, as one who has unknowingly chosen to take “the most difficult path on the pilgrimage” (166) and suffers more hardships than others (39). She feels humiliated when temple priests reject her plea for free lodging, stating, “How is it so easy for them to turn away enlightenment seekers?” (39).

Curiously, one might wonder if McLachlan opens himself up to claims of discrimination, or at least negative stereotyping, with regard to his outlook on fellow pilgrims. He is a stalwart fundamentalist with regard to the belief that the journey must be walked in its entirety to constitute true asceticism (McLachlan, *Tales* 68–69). This absolute stands in contrast to his other self-imposed austerities that he repeatedly violates, such as drinking

alcohol and eating meat (*Tales* 38; 85-89; 100; 188). McLachlan boasts, “I was on top of the hierarchy” (*Tales* 101), and he believes the walker is the “essence of the pilgrimage,” deserving of greater respect and courteousness paid by temple staff when compared to the “tourist *henro*” (*Tales* 111-12). This hierarchy of pilgrims based on walking is referenced throughout his account (*Tales* 50-51; 120; 166; 168), and what is arguably the climax of his pilgrimage occurs when he discovers a perceived sin of former traveling comrades. He meets a cute, comparatively short in stature retired couple in their latter 60s walking up the steep flanks of a mountain en route to Temple 66, Unpenji, a section of trail among the hardest of the journey (*Tales* 196-98). The couple genuinely seems to enjoy their time together, and the three mutually bond by denigrating another curiously dressed young male *henro*, who had taken the cable car up the mountain. McLachlan references this fellow repeatedly as a “hopeless *henro*,” because of his seemingly impure style (*Tales* 200; 202; 236). However, arriving at Temple 67, McLachlan meets the older couple despite having been well in front of them on the path, and he realizes they have taken a ride on what is a scorching hot day, despite 34 previous days of walking (*Tales* 197; 202). He is overcome by a wave of negative emotions, believing that they were “reducing their pilgrimage to a lie” (*Tales* 202). Indeed, he feels so personally betrayed by his new friends that he thinks they might be belittling his own efforts.

Time Variance with Respect to Pilgrimage Analysis

While McLachlan is making something of a theological argument with regard to normative approaches to Japanese Buddhist pilgrimage, his assertions, and, indeed other data from the “*gaijin henro*,” suggest larger theoretical considerations. Two great debates in pilgrimage studies concern the true social nature of the experience and conceptions of spatial orientation, including the role of sacred places. Victor and Edith Turner envisioned anti-structure elements among pilgrims who enjoy homogeneity, equality, and camaraderie with one another, a state referenced as *communitas* (250). However, McLachlan’s diary and numerous other accounts highlight perceived hierarchies among *henro*. Since these hierarchies are generally based on modes of travel and/or the number of circuits completed, time variability can be considered the underlying factor that differentiates Shikoku pilgrims and—contrary to the thinking of the Turners—time can create heterogeneity among the pilgrim population.

A paramount example of this can be seen with what Ian Reader's calls "permanent pilgrims," those for whom the journey is ongoing after completing a circuit of temples, and for whom the *henro* becomes a primary religious practice or even a lifestyle (264–66). As with the Japanese, permanent pilgrims leave their mark on the experiences of the foreign *henro*. Weiss meets an array of such characters with widely varying time commitments to the *henro*. On a preliminary trip, he and his wife spend a half a day with an 11-time veteran that his wife calls an "express *henro*," due to the speed with which he zips around to the holy places in his car (Weiss 119–21). McLachlan similarly witnesses a so-called "whirlwind *henro*" spending about 60 seconds at a sacred site (*Tales* 171–73). At the other end of the spectrum, Weiss meets a 126-time homeless itinerant with the Buddhist name Unkai, who drags his belongings in a cart and is drunk at 9 am (179). After completing his first pilgrimage, Weiss meets in a train station a "tattered looking priest," from the famous Sôtô Zen training temple Eiheiiji, with a dog as a traveling companion (151–53). The priest has completed the pilgrimage 30 times, "sometimes by bus, leading a group, but now usually walking" (151–53). McLachlan has admiration for a 12-time walking veteran of the journey, who goes out of his way to give him and a companion cash alms, despite seeming to need the money himself (*Tales* 164–65). He also meets a 122-time pilgrim who gives him a prized gold nameslip, or *osamefuda* 納札, which pilgrims use throughout the journey (*Tales* 179).⁷⁾ Chavez, likewise, encounters relics of permanent pilgrims and meets several as well (113; 164). Very curiously, her efforts are presented as spiritually aligned to another type of long term pilgrim/ascetic practitioner: the so-called marathon monks of Mt. Hiei, the Sennichi Kaihōgyōja 千日回峰行者 (xxvi; 80; 205).

Simon Coleman and John Eade (2004) engage the debate of spatial orientation in regard to pilgrimage, seeking to reorient research toward the overall theme of mobility. In a self-stated attempt to widen theoretical fields, the authors argue that previous research, including both the Turners' and Eade's own work, were overly place-centered presentations, and that pilgrimage ought to be considered primarily within discourses centered on mobility (Coleman and Eade 4). However, philosophers from antiquity to modernity have asserted that movement cannot take place independent of time. For example, Aristotle states famously in his *Physics*, "all motion takes place during a time," and he maintains that both time and length are measures of distance (bk.V).⁸⁾ In these *henro* accounts, for example, the considerable distances between temples in Kochi prefecture are understood more in terms of hours and days, than they are in terms of the more abstract and perhaps experientially

relative measures of kilometers or miles.⁹⁾ Walking *henro* are constantly fixated on whether their pace will get them to the next inn and at an acceptable hour to check in.

The perceived centrality (or lack thereof) of sacred sites is contingent largely on the time spent getting from one location to the other. Walking pilgrims spend considerable time on the pilgrim trail and, thus, are more likely to regard the time intervals in between temples as essential drivers of the experience. Motorized pilgrims on their first circuit have a general tendency to find the key elements of the experience in time spent within the temples. However, as seen above, it may well be that some motorized permanent pilgrims eventually spend less and less time in sacred locations, as a quest for speed sometimes takes over. Further, few people are stylistic fundamentalists: it is quite common to employ multiple means of transport for a single journey, thus offering different temporal/spatial orientations in a single pilgrimage. Consider the work of Asakawa Yasuhiro (2008), which draws special attention to the pilgrimage’s spatial and metaphorical boundaries. Having considered numerous issues with respect to the *henro* based on fieldwork spanning ten years, he chooses pilgrim alms (*settai*) as the key to understanding the diverse meanings of the *henro* (Asakawa 4–5). The *henro* diaries clearly demonstrate that the receiving of alms is dependent on the amount of time spent among locals and, therefore, the overall speed of the journey. Most commonly, as seen in the *gaijin henro* accounts, pilgrims of a slower pace (e.g. walkers) have highly increased potential to receive *settai*. Likewise, the seasonal timing of the pilgrimage—in say the cold of winter or the peak heat of summer—seems to impact the offer of alms as well; those suffering difficult conditions are often treated especially generously.

Ascetic practice elements likewise create actual or psychological variations of time for the Shikoku pilgrim. The difficulty associated with walking in a single circuit, climbing strenuous mountains, sleeping outdoors, carrying heavy loads, begging for alms, and so on can be understood to distort the experience of time. For instance, structured alms-seeking, or *takuhatsu* 托鉢 in Japanese, requires a significant commitment of time to accomplish, as practitioners stand and beg in public locations. Compounding the issue, genuine challenges distort the perception of time. This idea is best explained through the famous quote attributed to Einstein to explain the theory of relativity to a layperson: “Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. That’s relativity” (“20 Things | Discover Magazine”). Pilgrimage difficulties are clearly on the stove side of the analogy, having the psychological effect of stretching time. *Henro* diaries often breeze through with minimal description dozens or even

hundreds of kilometers of the journey, only to fixate at length on the most challenging bits that come to define the experience. Sleeping outdoors, for McLachlan and Chavez, has the mental effect of lengthening the journey. After fighting mosquitos, hard benches, unexpected noises and strange actors, they awake early with the dawn, often poorly rested, having never emotionally left the pilgrimage during the evening. In contrast, a pilgrim who checks into a business hotel can essentially withdraw from the journey for the night. In turn, as Chavez posits, subsequent trips on the *henro* will have a tendency to become much easier (157). This can have the effect of speeding up subsequent circuits both physically and psychologically. Weiss's second pilgrimage generally appears smoother with regard to the basic mechanics of the trip. Finally, a pinnacle of ascetic experience appears to be the sensation of time as a state of *samadhi*, where a sense of effortless flow overtakes the walking pilgrim and the experience becomes akin to walking meditation. Weiss has such an experience and comes to believe that it radiates the truth that all things around him are equally Dainichi Buddha (127). Chavez speaks of entering the "Daishi flow" similarly uniting her with the elements of the natural environment (80). These deeply spiritual moments are profound temporal sensations for authors who experience them.

For lengthy pilgrimages that see a tremendous variety in approaches, time variability can be the analytical key to understanding the range of experiences and, therefore, approaching key debates in pilgrimage studies. The diaries of foreign pilgrims contain many outlying features with respect to time, including running, multiple and nearly back-to-back circuits, transitions in married life, and extreme seasonality. Nonetheless, these accounts reinforce data seen commonly in accounts of Japanese pilgrims, showing that time features are fundamental and perhaps unrivaled in terms of their descriptive potency. Such usefulness aids understanding of both the initial, tentative footsteps of a green *henro*, just beyond the gates of the first temple, and the confident arrival at the last temple by a seasoned veteran completing their 200th circuit.

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Notes

- 1) McLachlan published a version of his text in Japanese (*Shikoku Hachi*).
- 2) Her first trip home coincides with the death of her neighbor with whom she is very close (Chavez 26).
- 3) This symbolism is almost certainly a modern creation by priests of Shingon Buddhism (Reader 52-54).
- 4) Two notable exceptions with regard to enlightenment discourse are contemporary diaries by the Sōtō Zen Buddhist priest Aono Takahashi, who openly shows a certain disdain for the masses of pilgrims seeking prayer requests, and Ishiyama Mii, a pilgrim who discovers he has terminal leukemia.
- 5) I, too, experienced deep reluctance from a Shikoku innkeeper when attempting to make a reservation by telephone in 2015.
- 6) The *Burakumin* were traditionally associated with what were viewed as unclean or impure professions, such as dealing with the dead or processing meat or leather. They continue to fight for equality even in contemporary Japan.
- 7) For a pilgrim with over 100 completed circuits, the *osamefuda* is usually brocade. Gold is used for circuits 50-99.
- 8) Richard McDonough explains Heidegger’s view which builds from Aristotle’s saying, “For Heidegger, time is the medium in which the peculiar “motion” of Being takes place(70).”

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