

2020

## Pilgrimage Through Time: the Theoretical Implications of Continuing Journeys on the Shikoku Henro

John Shultz

*Kansai Gaidai University, Japan, japanjohn.com@gmail.com*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp>



Part of the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Shultz, John (2020) "Pilgrimage Through Time: the Theoretical Implications of Continuing Journeys on the Shikoku Henro," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 7.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/6kqe-0m64>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol8/iss1/7>

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

---

# Pilgrimaging Through Time: The Theoretical Implications of Continuing Journeys on the Shikoku *Henro*

---

**John Shultz**

Kansai Gaidai University, Japan  
[japanjohn.com@gmail.com](mailto:japanjohn.com@gmail.com)

Fantastic growth in the field of pilgrimage studies raises real questions about whether our theories and methods are up to the task of describing increasingly diverse phenomena. Herein, I maintain that the future of the field lies not with articulating some vague generalisations in an attempt to somehow maintain universals, but to consciously ponder the variability found with respect to pilgrimage. I argue that pilgrimage analysis needs to be more ground-up with a methodological focus on how key variables shape the fundamental meaning of pilgrimage. I demonstrate such methods by looking at the relativity of time in the context of contemporary journeys to the 88 sacred places on the Japanese island of Shikoku, or Shikoku *henro*. The *henro* is one of the great pilgrimages of the world, and the 1400 km journey exemplifies the complexities of such a large social system. More specifically, I consider a diverse sub-set of pilgrims linked only by their noteworthy tendency to remain pilgrims for a significant portion of their lives and to traverse the circuit of Buddhist temples again and again. Analysis of continuing pilgrimage demonstrates that time is a key variable that is inextricably linked to the construction of an entire spectrum of meanings of what is described as ‘pilgrimage’.

**Key Words:** time variability, Shikoku *henro*, continuing pilgrimage, ascetic practice, flow

## On Theoretical Orientations: Abstracting Pilgrimage

Within the discipline of pilgrimage studies, an implicit tension has developed. Genuine enthusiasm for the field has spawned its promotion as a universal phenomenon. However, as the discipline enjoys more and more popularity and its universality is assumed, the study of pilgrimage covers an ever-growing array of experiences across an increasingly diverse spectrum of religious and social contexts. As such, evocative theoretical propositions are derived from highly specific and localised data, but such theories often fail when applied to other pilgrimage contexts, or even to the same journeys in different eras. Even as the field probes ever more enthralling phenomena, and scholarship increases exponentially, methods and theories have become stagnated, and meaningful descriptions of ‘pilgrimage’ have lost potency. The essential question becomes: given the challenges of making even basic generalisations about these phenomena, how can pilgrimage studies continue to flourish?

Every time a pilgrimage scholar asserts that a particular analytical concept fails with regard to his / her data, the individual is generally highlighting the fact that the points in dispute are in fact scientific variables rather than higher-order overarching abstractions. I wish to make the assertion that the future of the field lies in

greater articulation of - not uniformity - but variability. Current theoretical impasses in the field of pilgrimage studies demand a back-to-basics return to the scientific method and a clear delineation of analytical variables and how they influence certain foci of study. I argue that pilgrimage analysis needs to be more ground-up with a methodological focus on how key variables - such as time - spring from and create tremendous diversities of interpretation. Further, pilgrimage studies should prioritise mid-level, rather than overarching, analytical constructs. This approach recognises that common patterns and types can be found, but that they almost never have the consistency to become a universal, higher-order theory.

The primary focus of this field should be to articulate the implied basic meanings of pilgrimage in various social systems. The worthiness of this basic goal has become obscured with the development of the field. Research should not begin with a scholar-asserted definition of pilgrimage, as the meaning of the experience is *the* priority independent variable and should be understood to readily change with variation through a host of other factors.<sup>[1]</sup> Consider, for

---

1. As seen below, the reverse is also true: the meaning of pilgrimage can be a dependent variable, which subsequently shapes a host of other independent variables, such as how one travels, etc.

example, areas of debate that have consumed analytical discussions of pilgrimage, including the degree of free choice among participants, the role of sacred places, and the social character of the experience. While much ink has been spilled in deliberation, consensus has not emerged with regard to these issues as they are variable, and the variability therein shapes differing visions of 'pilgrimage' for practitioners and other actors in the social systems. Pilgrimage is thus recognised as a concept existing on a typological spectrum that shows tremendous resistance to description by overarching theories. While this fact is being increasingly recognised by those active in pilgrimage studies (see Coleman, 2002; 2014), the implications for how to move forward have remained largely unarticulated.

Herein, I will consider the seemingly mundane variable of time and its significant and mutable relationships to pilgrimage meanings with regard to contemporary journeys to the 88-places on the Japanese island of Shikoku. The Shikoku *henro* is well established as one of the great spiritual journeys of the world. In a culture that has fantastic appeal to sacred travel, the *henro* has risen to become the definitive pilgrimage of the island nation through the course of its 350-year history. Likewise, the *henro* embodies characteristics seen across the spectrum of Japanese pilgrimage, such as a mostly circular geographical layout and a tendency for the route to be repeated again and again. This journey links 88 Buddhist temple locations in a 1400 km circuit circumnavigating the island of Shikoku. The journey has as its spiritual mentor the figure of Kōbō Daishi, the enlightened and saintly representation of the Heian Era Shingon Buddhist priest, Kūkai (774-835 CE). The *henro* has such a stature among the great pilgrimages of the world that it is fair to say that if methods and theories are incompatible with the Shikoku pilgrimage, then they are of minimal applicability for pilgrimage studies, generally speaking.<sup>[2]</sup> Furthermore, the manifold approaches to performance of the *henro* show the usefulness of time as an analytical variable, with personal experiences ranging from a portion of a day to at least 56 years of continuous travel. One can commonly meet individuals whose lives revolve around the pilgrimage, and - at the extreme - we can even locate those who have circumnavigated the Shikoku pilgrimage purportedly more than 700 times (S1-san 2018). In contrast to the classic notion of such journeys being a dramatic and singular, once-in-a-lifetime event, the data referenced herein describes 'pilgrimage' as a continuing activity that can be a primary or exclusive religious practice, as well as a dominant lifestyle and identity.

## Time Variability, Perpetual Pilgrims, Compulsion, and Authority

Pilgrimage theorists have often sought to orient or reorient the discipline towards a specific theme. Quite understandably, these arguments—or even so-called paradigms—centre on aspects central to the experience of pilgrimage itself, such as sacred locations or movement. Coleman and Eade (2004) make a case for reorientation of pilgrimage research to the theme of mobility, arguing that the epoch-making work of Turner and even Eade's own previous work (1991) were overly place-cantered, an error that has skewed the field. My own assertion is that any specific theme in the context of sacred journeys can take on outsized or reduced significance due any number of variables.

Time is a worthy illustrator that shows no implicit thematic priority in pilgrimage studies. Temporal factors indicate that neither discourse related to sacred locations or mobility hold an essential key to understanding these phenomena in all circumstances. Initially one must appreciate that distance is a function of time. In his treatise titled *Physics*, Aristotle states, 'all motion takes place during a time,' and he elaborates that distance is measured both by length and time (350AD).<sup>[3]</sup>

Written diary accounts and interviews with modern walking Shikoku pilgrims suggest that they view distance more with regard to time than they do kilometres. Walkers in rural places like Kochi prefecture are constantly fixated on whether their pace will allow them to make it to their next accommodation and to check in at an acceptable time. Further, as the bulk of their time spent on pilgrimage takes place on the trail, walkers often say that the meaning of the experience is found not in the sacred locations, but in between the temples (see Shultz 2013). On the other hand, motorised pilgrims traverse distances between holy sites relatively quickly and have an increased tendency to equate time spent at sacred locations as the essence of the experience. To complicate matters even more, a considerable contingent of pilgrims to the island employ a mix of travel to accomplish the journey, including trains, buses, taxis, and walking, making temporal / spatial

2. Data can be easily used to disprove a thesis, but that should not be understood to imply a new thesis.
3. Richard McDonough elucidates Heidegger's view that can be seen as building from Aristotle's saying, 'For Heidegger, time is the medium in which the peculiar 'motion' of Being takes place' (2006:70).

orientations even more intricate. Added to this is the fact that the 1400 km circuit can be navigated in a single non-stop pilgrimage or can be sub-divided into any number of shorter jaunts. Taken collectively, time illustrates how an under-rated variable can have significant impact on pilgrimage experiences and the subsequent constructed meanings.

Beyond the fantastic variability with respect to time spent on a single *henro* circuit, there is a noteworthy tendency to repeat the journey after a single completion. With continuing pilgrimage, we can see individuals who spend remarkable portions of their lives on the *henro* or even those whose lives are reducible to travel among the 88-places on the island. Kōbō Daishi himself, who in both faith and folklore is said to be in continual circumambulation of the island, sets this spiritual precedent. Statistical data shows that most pilgrims to Shikoku either return for subsequent journeys and / or engage in other Buddhist pilgrimages after a circuit in Shikoku (Osada, Sakata, and Seki 2003). Reader has previously called attention to the theoretical significance of what he describes as ‘permanent pilgrimage’ (2006: 264–66), and he is - together with the author - currently executing a large-scale project with the same focus towards continuing pilgrimage. The emerging data show that patterns of repetition have unmatched significance both for individual pilgrims and the social system as a whole. This research highlights in detail the numerous implicit factors, which have promoted and enabled repetition in relation to the Shikoku pilgrimage. While ongoing patterns of performance are integral to the culture of the *henro*, such tendencies have been noted in other global pilgrimage contexts, including Lourdes (Agnew 2015) and the Camino de Santiago (Frey 1998: 211). When pilgrimage is envisioned as a journey without end, time emerges as a premiere descriptive variable.

The devotion of significant portions of one’s life to sacred travel highlights a hitherto unrecognised and potentially darker side of the phenomena: a compulsion for pilgrimage. Among primary motivations, the search for cures is still ubiquitous with regard to global spiritual travel. Previous work has demonstrated that pilgrimaging for remedies remains a major theme in contemporary *henro* literature (Shultz 2013). But what does one turn to when they are sick with pilgrimage? The common phrase ‘*Shikoku-byōin*,’ literally translates as ‘the Shikoku hospital,’ denoting the journey as a sort of cure for whatever ails you, including lifestyle and mental-health issues, in addition to physical cures. For example, antidotes to endemic

lifestyle stress are commonly sought. But there is much to indicate that the healing graces of the journey are strong medicine with risk of abuse or addiction. The term ‘*Shikoku-byō*’ means ‘Shikoku sickness’ and suggests an ongoing compulsion to continue doing the pilgrimage beyond the first circuit. At its worst, you may see individuals exemplifying the more pathological side of pilgrimage. More extreme pilgrims may be seen to have abandoned or neglected their families, to rack up fantastic vehicular emissions, or to have let the desire to pilgrimage lead to health problems due to long hours spent on the road. Arguably the most famous legend in *henro* culture concerns a figure named Emon Saburo (Figure 1), who essentially pilgrimages himself to death (see Shinnen, 1687). One contemporary professional whose job included providing liaison with Shikoku pilgrims notes that with problem drinkers it seems they can essentially trade one addiction for another (I-san 2019).<sup>[4]</sup> Though often a self-effacing light-hearted term, in some extreme cases *Shikoku-byō* may hint at a spiritually justified escapism. Indeed, in written surveys, several pilgrims with more than 100 circuits completed have sought to distance themselves from the implied negative label of *Shikoku-byō*. In one telling interview an informant simply said ‘[I am] sick,’ when asked about his motivations for ongoing pilgrimage (Anonymous 1 2018). To our surprise, he went on to explain that his affliction was not a physical or mental malady, but a ‘sickness’ associated with the pilgrimage itself. Pilgrimage addiction or compulsion highlights the perception of excessive time being allocated to sacred journeys.

The *henro* is a multifaceted and complex social system, but one can concisely state that authority - both formal and informal - within this system is in large measure a function of time spent on the journey. A highly-regulated system of *sendatsu*, a term that translates as pilgrimage guide, is maintained by the Shikoku Pilgrimage Association. In reality, most *sendatsu* are not regularly leading groups around the island, but the designation makes them formally eligible to do so. An array of qualifications must be met to become a *sendatsu*, but chief among them is to complete four or more circuits. Furthermore, the guide system has multiple levels with each subsequent tier requiring further pilgrimages to be completed. Thus, individual guides who have something of a formal mandate to address the meaning of the journey are themselves beholden to it as an ongoing activity.

4. I-san is a pseudonym.

**Figure 1: On the left is Emon Saburo who is a legendary archetype of a Shikoku pilgrimage repeater. He is depicted here dying on the pilgrimage trail in the company of Kōbō Daishi.**



By John A. Shultz

There is also an implicit hierarchy and status imparted by some key visual markers on the modern Shikoku pilgrimage. Pilgrims generally use calling cards called *osamefuda*, which are color-coded to distinguish the number of circuits accomplished: white (1-4 times), green (5-6 times), red (7-24 times), silver (25-49 times), and gold (50-99 times). With the 100th circuit, pilgrims switch from a paper to a brocade *osamefuda*. The brocade *osamefuda* endows the user with a significant, easily seen status, and many regard these name-slips as holy relics in and of themselves. Thus, a desire to graduate into the ranks of 100-time pilgrims can itself be a motivating factor for increased performance. Usage of the pilgrimage stamp book, or *nōkyōcho*, in which a distinctive calligraphy and red seals for each temple are placed, is a popular visual tradition that likewise imparts status. Stamps for subsequent circuits are inserted alongside the previous stamps until the book very gradually assumes a redder and redder appearance. With roughly 150 or more sets of stamps, the pages turn completely red and subsequent stamps do not change the appearance. I was

genuinely surprised to personally receive praise and encouragement from temple staff at the first temple, Ryōzenji, when they saw my *nōkyōcho* and realized that this was a second repetition of the journey. For those holding flush-red stamp books, there is certainly regular reinforcement that their efforts are significant (see Figure 2).

Those who hold these colourful accoutrements can have an implicit authoritative status, independent of any formal rank assigned by the pilgrimage association. For example, a famous 648-times motorized pilgrim, Fukuda Shōnosuke, by most descriptions was a quiet individual without any significant leadership ambitions. Nonetheless, his travel record was enough to endow him with a highly respected status, which has inspired numerous other continuing pilgrims, with whom I have spoken. It is worth noting, however, that while more time spent on the *henro* is generally associated with greater authority, pilgrims of differing orientations may notably qualify those whom they recognise as true leaders. For

**Figure 2: The pilgrimage stamp book, or *nōkyōchō*, for a pilgrim who has completed more than 100 circuits. The pages are slowly turning red with each subsequent temple visit.**



By John A. Shultz

example, an average pace for driving the *henro* is around seven days and walking the *henro* is around 40 days. Thus, in terms of overall time, seven circuits walked would be close to 40 times driven: both would be roughly 280 days. But the authority imparted by time and circuits often does not cross stylistic lines: long-term walkers rarely revere motorised pilgrims with high numbers, and in some cases the reverse is also true.<sup>[5]</sup> Thus, authority achieved through time spent pilgrimaging is relative and contingent on those who are willing to recognise it.

### Cyclicity, Pilgrim Identity, Challenges, and Flow

An essential—if basic—point with respect to these issues is the strong correlation between time spent pilgrimaging and the strength of identity one feels as a pilgrim. Temple #1, Ryōzenji, can be a wonderful spot to witness pilgrim diversity. Even casual observers

5. Indeed, one very respected leader with regard to the contemporary *henro* openly shows a certain disdain for walkers, which she feels are often motivated by recreation rather than faith.

there can see a significant difference among the pilgrims who are just starting for the first time and those who have significant experience. The former look understandably uncomfortable in their white pilgrimage garb and often stumble through ritual practices. The latter often display a deep confidence and pride in both their appearance and ritual prowess. The same is true throughout the island of Shikoku; veteran pilgrims can be spotted often by their demeanour even from a distance, as they have grown into the identity.

In the spring of 2018, I travelled to Mt. Kōya with 13 members of a pilgrimage guide-association (*sendatsukai*) based out of the Saijo-city region of eastern Ehime prefecture, as they were completing the first of two bi-annual Shikoku pilgrimages. Mt. Kōya is the mountain headquarters of Shingon Buddhism in Japan and was established by Kōbō Daishi Kūkai, making it a location of deep significance for *henro* pilgrims. The guide-association, which feels something like an extended family, breaks up the journey into six weekend trips over six months (from January to June and June to December). They visit the 88 temples on the first five trips using large vans and then conclude a complete circuit with a sixth trip to Tōji-temple in Kyoto and Mt. Kōya in Wakayama prefecture. Nearly all participants had completed at least four circuits of the *henro*, and one 90-year old member was finishing his 69th pilgrimage. Their leader, to whom members show equal measures of deep affection and deferential obedience, was finishing his 229th circuit (Sendatsukai 1 2018). The holy sites of the mountain offered something of a homecoming to the *sendatsukai*. They stopped at all their favourite spots, greeted the priests and store owners they have come to know, and even took time to offer ritual and practical advice to a more poorly organised pilgrim confraternity composed mostly of first-timers. The climax of a journey to Mt. Kōya is always a trip to the holiest of holies, the mausoleum of Kōbō Daishi, which sits at the rear of an enchanting moss-covered cemetery filled with old-growth trees. What struck me most about this climax was the fact that no congratulations were exchanged; there was nothing to indicate this was an endpoint or even a significant milestone for the group. It was understood that next month they would begin again at the first temple and continue on.

The more one pilgrimages the more one tends to think of oneself as a pilgrim, and there is often a distinct psychological projection of pilgrim identity into both everyday life and into the future. Indeed, it seems that

even regular cyclical patterns are not necessary to maintain a continuing pilgrim identity. The former prime minister of Japan, Kan Naoto, took 10 years to do a single *henro* (Kan 2015: 210). Despite a comparatively few number of days on the pilgrimage trail, he is one of the most famous Shikoku pilgrims of the Heisei era (1/1989-4/2019). The simple expectation that Kan will return and continue walking the route was all that it took for him to remain a Shikoku pilgrim.<sup>[6]</sup> He explains pointedly, ‘whatever I saw, and wherever I went, I somehow came to relate [everything] with the *henro*’ (Kan 2015: 103). This leads to the dramatic association of a singular sort of asceticism at work in both his pilgrim life and political life (Kan 2015: 52–53). Even a rival in an opposing political party recognised Kan’s transformation. The influential former Prime Minister Koizumi of the Liberal Democratic Party stated, ‘This is a big deal. I guess he felt something [with the *henro*]’ (Kan 2015: 52–53). As I have seen with other informants as well, far from being merely temporal and liminal, pilgrim identity can be remarkably persistent and can become highly integrated into conceptions of one’s work and home life. The example of Kan, likewise, shows the significant anticipation of journeys to come.

The above cases highlight the simple notion that pilgrim identity is not bound merely to those times when one is traveling to holy sites; these data also cover individuals whose lifestyles are basically reducible to the pilgrimage. While numerous individuals throughout history have made a life on the pilgrimage, the most famous modern example is that of Nakatsukasa Mohei, who left his home in Yamaguchi prefecture in his early twenties around 1865 and spent the next 56 years in nearly continuous circumambulation of the island, accomplishing 280 circuits of the route (Shiraki 1994: 92–94). It is said he only left the island twice during this period to engage in pilgrimage activities on the main island of Honshu. Nakatsukasa can be understood as a supreme saint of the *henro*, who—along with Kōbō Daishi—demonstrates the trope that ‘more is better’ when it comes to pilgrimage and self-actualisation.

This current research has uncovered the existence of what I estimate to be about 20-25 full-time pilgrims who live a minimalistic, mendicant existence on the road, generally carrying large backpacks or dragging or pushing their worldly possessions on carts. Some of these informants maintain that they have been living on the pilgrimage for 8-15 years, and one ascetic declared to us that he will continue such activities ceaselessly

until he dies (H-san 2018).<sup>[7]</sup> Among this sample of perpetual pilgrims, there is considerable variation with respect to the strictness of the lifestyle, with some self-imposing rules and standards on their behaviour, such as abstinence from drink. Others seem to enjoy a unique freedom without rules, a situation in strong contrast to the everyday conformity often expected in collectivist Japan. Indeed, pilgrims of the latter description sometimes appear to be more like a homeless person in a unique context that provides some benefits, including opportunities for alms and occasional accommodation. That said, a life of continually walking, begging, and establishing camps in every type of weather is demanding (see Figure 3) even if no other austerities are applied (see Hamaya 2009).

Time elements related to these walking itinerants contrasts markedly with more common pilgrims and are especially influenced by the performance of ascetic practices. While these mendicants can develop certain patterns for both daily life and for the entire journey around the island, they have a tendency to be less goal-oriented. Several have told us that they avoid walking in the rain and will tend to remain in a single location to let a storm pass, as was more common in older times. They can be seen to shun or evolve past usage of things that are central to motorised perpetual pilgrims, like *osamefuda* and *nōkyōcho*, avoiding the latter is especially due the 300-yen cost per stamp. If not acquiring temple seals, one’s schedule is liberated from the operating hours of temple offices, something that is a major consideration for other pilgrims. *Nojuku* in Japanese indicates camping or sleeping roughshod outdoors, and it has ascetic associations with both the historical Buddha and Kōbō Daishi (Shultz 2016:285–86). A strong argument can be made that *nojuku* pilgrims essentially do not emotionally leave the pilgrimage at night. As such, it makes a continuous pilgrimage even more uninterrupted, as the experience is not punctuated by business hotels, television, Wi-Fi, or other elements that could take one out of the experience. This special immersion is discernible in the diaries of contemporary pilgrims who sleep outdoors (Shultz 2018). Finally, these itinerants need to incorporate considerable time for *takuhatsu*, the practice of alms-seeking in the context of the

6. The motorised pilgrim using a spreadsheet mentioned below had an autographed hat signed by Kan. Pictures and other memorabilia related to Kan can be seen at *henro* locations throughout the island.

7. H-san is a pseudonym.

**Figure 3: An itinerant pilgrim who sleeps outdoors. He has been navigating the temple circuit on foot for about 10 years. His face is obscured to protect his privacy.**



By John A. Shultz

pilgrimage. Indeed, one pilgrim, whom I will call H-san, lived entirely on alms. He indicated that he simply would not move forward on the trail until he had enough funds to sustain himself (H-san 2018). As such, ascetic practice elements, including sleeping outdoors and the solicitation of alms, dramatically alters both the daily timetable of the pilgrimage, but also the time required for a circuit. Several pilgrims of this style indicated that it takes them roughly two months for a circuit, as opposed to the more common walking pace of 40 days.

We have also had occasion to meet seasonal itinerants, who engage in such a lifestyle for portions of the year. These semi-homeless may double the overall numbers of pilgrims of this description at certain times. One such example, whom I will call S-san, is a fully ordained priest in the Shugendō mountain ascetic tradition, who does mendicant pilgrimages every spring and fall (2018). His seasonal itinerant begging existence represents a marked contrast with a more conventional life for him outside of the island. With S-san, ascetic practice, such as alms-seeking, is the heart of the experience. As such, we can understand that time can represent both an independent and dependent

variable with regard to pilgrimage meaning. In some cases, factors such as how one moves create specific time conditions that subsequently impact the perceived meaning. The opposite is true as well: strong beliefs about the proper essence of pilgrimage can dictate factors which determine the time necessary to execute the journey. In the case of S-san, as with H-san above, forward progress on the pilgrimage is a function of *takuhatsu* and sleeping outdoors, and these activities are essential to the true meaning of the *henro* for both men.

While methods of performing the pilgrimage have an intimate connection to time variability and meaning, the psychological experience of time can hold great significance for pilgrims as well. Consider, for instance, the relationship of time to challenges. Contemporary *henro* diaries demonstrate that meaning is very often found in the most arduous difficulties the journey has to offer. As such, a few hours of steep mountain climbing in the rain or even a harrowing 5-minute walk through a dark and dangerous roadway tunnel can eclipse the impact of days and days of more uneventful travel. In such cases, more significant intervals can actually feel longer than other sections.



The most mentally and physically demanding experiences often represent a climax for pilgrims in which the ultimate meaning of the experience is found.

Motorised pilgrims with dozens of circuits completed will often try to challenge themselves by meticulous route planning designed to improve on their previous times. I met one such *sendatsu* who had a detailed spreadsheet that was denoted in 15-minute increments in some places for his personal daily itinerary of stops and temples (Anonymous 2 2015). He showed me with considerable enthusiasm where he was able to economise his pacing in comparison to previous journeys, giving the impression that efficient pilgrimaging was a complex puzzle seeking an efficient solution. I travelled with him for a portion of a day, and he showed elation when his schedule was being met and some frustration when progress was falling behind.

Finally, numerous sources indicate that a deep source of meaning for the *henro* can be found in super-heightened mental experiences, which are accompanied by reduced consciousness of the subjective self and significant distortions in the perception of time. Traditional Buddhism would describe these occurrences as a state of *samadhi* (*zanmai* in Japanese), which is a state of deep concentration or a state of meditation. A poet-itinerant, going by the pen-name Kogetsu, who spent more than six years walking and living on the *henro*, wrote a book of poetry about his experiences that is arranged around the central theme of *zanmai* (2003).<sup>[8]</sup> One American pilgrim named Don Weiss, describes an experience akin to *zanmai*, during a stretch of hiking when he has the powerful sensation that all things around him are equally Dainichi Buddha (1994:127). A professional writer also from the U.S., Amy Chavez, describes entering the 'Daishi flow' in the context of her running pilgrimage, and she says this sensation unites her with elements of the natural environment (2013:80). The later clearly evokes modern psychology's notion of flow, which pertains to a hyper-focus on an activity done for its own sake, the process of which includes such absorption that time is distorted and the ego is minimised (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Since the experience of flow is associated with deep fulfilment and represents a type of optimal human experience, it could potentially provide an explanation for why pilgrimage becomes such a compelling and ongoing aspect of peoples' lives. Indeed, Weiss himself - like so many others - has gone on to essentially structure his entire life around the pilgrimage, including moving to

and finding work on the island, becoming a prominent leader in an international SNS groups dedicated to the *henro*, and pursuing pilgrimage as the focus of his recent retirement.

## Conclusion

As the above demonstrates, our work on continuing pilgrimage introduces informants so diverse in orientations that the only significant shared quality among them is the tremendous overall amount of time spent pilgrimaging. Indeed, while continuing pilgrims of all types may spend years of their lives on the *henro*, consider the basic variability of time with regard to a single circuit. It has been said that motorised pilgrims forgoing the use of a pilgrimage stamp book (due to it becoming opaquely red), may accomplish the entire 1400 km circuit in as little as three days. At the other end of the spectrum, we have homeless mendicant walking pilgrims who may take two months or longer to cover the same distance. This research sample covers literally the fastest and the slowest pilgrims on the contemporary *henro*. Added to this is the above observation that time variability with respect to pilgrimage is not limited to clock time, calendar time, or even time-as-distance; it can be an intimate function of the psychological experience of time.

Pilgrimage meaning - the ultimate object of pilgrimage studies - shows remarkable diversity in relation to a slew of temporal factors. As we look forward to the future of pilgrimage studies, we must carefully consider the most fruitful methodological and theoretical avenues to pursue. While overarching theories derived from specific, localised data have lost much of their usefulness, carefully constructed mid-level generalisations may indeed offer analytical potency, perhaps even across a range of global pilgrimage phenomena. Time represents one variable, which has considerable impact on pilgrimage meaning (and vice versa). Nonetheless, one could imagine any number of approaches to pilgrimage studies based on the consideration of other key variables, such as the relative freedom present [absent] in the experience or relative factors in the social character of holy travel.

As seen above, we do in fact see significant similarities among certain classes of pilgrims or certain approaches to the journey. Among this myriad sub-set of individuals who dedicate much of their lives to

---

8. Kogetsu's fame caught up to him when it was discovered that he was wanted for attempted murder in Osaka; he was subsequently arrested in Shikoku.

spiritual travel, we tend to find one important shared - but not universal - sentiment: that 'life is pilgrimage' and / or 'pilgrimage is life' (see Howard 1980:11). These sentiments support what I have noted above that pilgrim identity exists well beyond the physical act of sacred travel. Continuing pilgrimage points to the critical fact that these phenomena can be considered unbounded in a temporal sense, even being mentally projected into the traveller's future. This simple observation alone has deep significance for the field.

## References

- Agnew, Michael. 2015. 'Spiritually, I'm Always in Lourdes: Perceptions of Home and Away among Serial Pilgrims.' *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 44(4):516–35.
- Anonymous 1. 2018. 'Interview with Pilgrim from Kagawa at Enmeiji Temple.'
- Anonymous 2. 2015. 'Conversations with a Motorized Sendatsu Pilgrim.'
- Aristotle. 350AD. *Physics*.
- Chavez, Amy. 2013. *Running the Shikoku Pilgrimage: 900 Miles to Enlightenment*. Volcano: Volcano Press.
- Coleman, Simon. 2002. 'Do You Believe in Pilgrimage? Communitas, Contestation, and Beyond.' *Anthropological Theory* 2(3):355–68.
- Coleman, Simon. 2014. 'Pilgrimage as a Trope for Anthropology of Christianity.' *Current Anthropology* 55 (S10):281–91.
- Coleman, Simon and John Eade, eds. 2004. *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*. Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Eade, John and Michael J. Sallnow. 1991. *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. Routledge.
- Frey, Nancy Louise. 1998. *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*. Berkeley: Univ of California Pr.
- Hamaya, Mariko. 2009. 'Kojiki Henro No Seikatsushi.' *Tokushima Chiiki Bunka Kenkyū* 103–19.
- Howard, Donald R. 1980. *Writers and Pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- H-san. 2018. 'Conversation with an Itinerant Pilgrim at Iwayaji Temple.'
- I-san. 2019. 'SNS Messages with Former Shikoku Village Official.'
- Kan, Naoto. 2015. *Sōri to Ohenro*. Tokyo: Kadokawa.
- Kogetsu. 2003. *Kazefutokoro Ni Kachi Zanmai*. Hiroshima: Shinmedia.
- McDonough, Richard M. 2006. *Martin Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*. New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers.
- Osada, Seiichi, Masaaki Sakata, and Mutsuo Seki. 2003. *Gendai No Shikoku Henro: Michi No Shakaigakuteki No Shiten Kara*. Tokyo: Gakubunsha.
- Reader, Ian. 2006. *Making Pilgrimages: Meaning And Practice in Shikoku*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- S1-san. 2018. 'Conversation with a Shikoku pilgrim purporting to have done 705 circuits.'
- S2-san. 2018. 'Conversation with an Itinerant Pilgrim at the Gate of Anrakuji Temple.'
- Sendatsukai 1. 2018. 'Conversations with Ehime Prefecture Guide-Association Members in Kyoto and Wakayama.'
- Shinnen. 1687. 'Shikoku Henro Kudokuki.' Pp. 69–116 in *Shikoku Henro Kishū*, edited by Iyoshi Dankai.
- Shiraki, Toshiyuki. 1994. *Junrei Sanpai Yōgo Jiten*. Osaka: Tokishobō.
- Shultz, John A. 2013. 'Shock Treatment on an Inpatient Island: Finding Anxious Cures in Shikoku.' *The Journal of Intercultural Studies* 38:27–41.
- Shultz, John A. 2016. 'The Way to Gyō: Priestly Asceticism on the Shikoku Henro.' *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 43(2):275–305.
- Shultz, John A. 2018. 'The Gaijin Henro: Outliers, Discrimination, and Time Variability with Pilgrimage in Shikoku.' *Journal of Inquiry and Research* 107:1–12.
- Weiss, Don. 1994. *Echoes of Incense: A Pilgrimage in Japan*. Capitola: D. Weiss.