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SACRED SITES IN JAPAN AS PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS

Almost all publications concerning a history of Japanese pilgrimage tradition and dealing with its origin and specific features tend to consider Buddhism as a main cause of development of pilgrimages on Japanese soil. The most widely spread explanation is that the tradition of pilgrimages has been brought to Japan by Buddhist monks from China and a diary of Ennin, where the word *junrei*, usually simply translated as a standard Japanese term for pilgrimage without any additional explanations and reservations, is quoted in most cases as a main source. Even in “Vocabulary of Main Shinto Terms” (*Shintô yôgô shû* <1>), published in a bulletin of Kokugakuin University, we find this conventional explanation. There it is only mentioned in passing that in a humorous writing of Fujiwara-no Akahira (989–1066) there is a sentence, which prompts the existence of a custom to visit a certain number of Shinto shrines in a row “Calling at thousand shrines and dancing; making sacrifices of hundred sacred branches and running” <2>. But at the same time the author of this article makes a reservation, that is difficult to consider a possibility of existing of a certain number, be it one thousand or one hundred, of Shinto shrines organized in a unified pilgrimage system at that time. Moreover, according to this article, even during Kamakura and Muromachi period we cannot find any written evidence of pilgrimages (*junrei*<3>) to Shinto shrines [Asodani 1981, 209]. But the same author in an another article of the same vocabulary where he explains the notion of *sankei*<4> (which was published three years before), notes, that this term means “veneration (*ogamu*<5>) of kami and buddhas while visiting (*môde*<6>) Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples”, and that this term often appears in written sources of Heian period. He adds, that it was used to describe devotional visits not only to local shrines and temples, but to sacred places situated far away as well [Asodani 1978, 193]. This seeming contradiction can be solved quite easily if we consider a term *junrei* not as a universal term for description of any kind of pilgrimage phenomena in Japan, but merely as a subcategory of more general notion of *sankei* (*mairi*, *môde*). This term *sankei* should be considered as a most adequate equivalent in Japanese language to express the notion of pilgrimage with all its definitional vagueness¹, while *junrei* in both its written form should be understood as a word to define only a specific type of pilgrimage, namely a devotional visit to a certain, traditionally established and symbolically motivated number of temples or shrine preferably at a stretch. The fact that this last type of pilgrimage, *junrei*, which origination and development in Japan were undoubtedly greatly influenced by Buddhism, became in Japan the most widely spread and representative form of pilgrimage tradition in Japan, and therefore the very word *junrei* has been used traditionally almost as a synonym for the notion of pilgrimage in all multiplicity of its form, does not mean at all that this specific type of pilgrimage is the only one existing in Japan or it was developed and based exclusively on Buddhist doctrine, though it was dominant in this case.



Pilgrimage can be defined loosely as a practice of visiting sacred sites, usually situated on a considerable distance, for performing acts of religious devotion. This definition will certainly require some additional explanations. First of all, we come across the problem of “objectivity” of the sacred and, as a sequence, “reality” of sacred sites. It is difficult to me to accept a relativistic attitude, which becomes quite fashionable recently, which denies a clear distinction between sacred and profane spaces only basing itself on a quite simplified argumentation that a perception of the same space by different people is different. It was adopted, for example, by Ian Reader and Paul Swanson, who argues that for some people Ontake Mountain in Japan is a sacred spot while others consider it only a picturesque destination for satisfying their alpinist ambitions and not hallowed at all [Reader, Swanson 1997, 228–229].

I think it is appropriate to comment on this supposed demonstration of relativity of sacredness by using the following comparison. If somebody does not feel a specific living place to be his or her home, it does not mean that there is no clear distinction between home and a neighbour’s private living place. And if somebody

does not understand or feel the difference, it is nothing else but evidence that the person in question lacks the proper training. As John Hick, commenting on William Aston's argument, that "the supposed object of religious experience ... may well differ from the supposed object of sense experience" and thus "a human being will be aware of His (God's – *A.N.*) presence in any clear and unmistakable fashion only when certain special and difficult conditions are satisfied", puts it, "It is thus possible that religious experience differs from sense experience in just the ways that it ought to, given the fundamental difference between their objects. These differences thus do not, in themselves, constitute a reason for denying that religious experience may be a cognitive response to a transcendent divine reality" [Hick 1990, 79–80].

This idea of "validity" of the sacred knowledge, which I share, gradually becomes more acceptable among academics. As Carmichael in his editor's introduction to the collection of anthropological and archaeological papers admits, "There are different ways of knowing about the earth, about sacred places, and about archaeological sites. Some of the ways are scientific and some are spiritual. One way of knowing does not negate the validity of another" [Carmichael 1994, 7].

As it is widely accepted, there are quite objective, "material", though secondary from the standpoint of a sacred knowledge factors which allows us to define a certain space as sacred. But there is a quite important, typological difference between perception of sacred places in universal (world) and local (national) religions, in case of Japan between Buddhism and Shinto, which is, as I will attempt to demonstrate, an important factor that in many aspects defines the very nature and sense of pilgrimage practices in these traditions. Combination of these different views on the sacred, as well as a very phenomenon of Shinto-Buddhist syncretism (symbiosis) in general, exercised a decisive influence on formation and development of pilgrimage practices in Japan.



The different attitude to pilgrimages in universal and local religions is mainly formed by the different understanding of the sacred and sacred sites. Sacred places in case of universal religions can be called historical - they link to 1) an earthly life of their founders and most famous adepts – arhats, saints, prophets etc. (Lumbini, Jerusalem, Mecca etc.); to 2) recorded in sacred writings or approved by church authorities or popular beliefs apparitions (Lourdes, Compostella etc.); to 3) the presence in a certain place of sacred objects - mainly relics or exceptionally numinous (miracle-working) images of deities. Sacredness of a site can be linked also to 4) exceptional zeal in spiritual improvement of religious specialists in certain places, which therefore acquire in adepts opinion a special aura of sacredness ("prayed place").

The common characteristic of sacred sites in case of universal religions is that a spatial location of a sacred site is determined not by divinely interpreted certain physic-geographical features of a landscape, but by a event, an action or an object, which was not initially a natural component of a landscape, but which is interpreted as sacred or a source of sacredness. In universal religions physic-geographical features of a landscape are not completely ignored, but at the same time do not constitute a prime reason for perceiving a certain place to be sacred. As James Preston notes, "There is nothing particularly beautiful or extraordinary about the geographical locations of Mecca, Rome, or Jerusalem, yet they are located at the crossroads of previous civilizations that have been transformed and synthesized time and again into new worldviews by saints or prophets" [Preston 1991, 35].

But as it is frequently noted by many scholars studying different cultures, very often sacred sites of universal religions were established on the same place as sacred sites of local religions, displacing them (mainly in case of Christianity or Islam) or co-existing with them (more typical situation in case of Buddhism). For example, the first Christian church in Kyiv (Kiev) was erected exactly on the place of a main pagan sanctuary; many Christian churchyards in England may originally have been built close to yew trees, à megalithic monuments in Brittany (north-west France) were incorporated into early Christian churches [Park 1994, 247, 252]. Many sites are venerated as sacred by different denominations simultaneously, like Jerusalem or Ellora, which is considered a *tirtha* (sacred place) in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism [Malandra 1993, 13]. In case of Japan, a great number of symbiotic Shinto-Buddhist multiplexes existed till their forceful separation at the end of 19th century [Grapard 1992].

These examples show, that even in universal religions an idea of sacred space does not become completely universal, i.e. completely free from any link to certain spots. With former sacred sites of local religions, the

universal religions inherited to some extent an idea of physic-geographical localization of the sacred, which was contested by many most ardent adepts of universality, but this struggle in many cases remained fruitless, especially on a level of common religious person, who believes that his or her prayer to God will be more effective if pronounced on site in Jerusalem, Rome, Mecca or Kyiv. The most consistent (and practically successful) in its attempt to establish truly universal principles and overcoming residues of beliefs in a concrete localization of the sacred was Protestant branch of Christianity, and this success was quite logically expressed by most consistent denying of pilgrimages' religious value.

In contrast to universal religions, establishing of a sacred site in local religions are mainly linked to natural features of a certain place. Sacredness of a site normally explained in terms of a religious tradition as a presence of a sacred power that reveals itself in certain physical, natural features of a site. As usual, these sites, traditionally defined as spots where contact to the sacred is an easiest one or even as gates to the spiritual world, are located in places where certain physical features quite unambiguously represent symbolism of this breakthrough – they are mountains penetrating the sky (symbolism of the *axis mundi* with all its phallic connotations) or caves, ravines going deep into the earth (symbolism of the hub of the universe with all its womb's connotations)². Sacredness of a site is determined by an existence of the sacred power in it and according to a traditionalist explanation, human beings “cannot choose a sacred site, they can only seek and discover it by mysterious signs” [Eliade 1959, 27].

In local religions sacredness has a specific physical and mainly natural embodiment. Therefore, as a rule, sacred site of such cosmotheistic religions (a term of Carmichael) cannot be deconsecrated with the same relative easiness as sacred sites in universal religions. As Jane Hubert notes, “A church, for example, can be deconsecrated, by the carrying out of rituals, so that it becomes a secular site, an ordinary building that can then be used for any purpose. Thus the sacredness of the church is not something that is inherent in the place itself. Ritual leaders create a sacred place, and uncreate it” [Hubert 1994, 14–15]. Here we come across another interesting problem – possibility of creating new, “artificial” sacred sites in local religions. In case of Shinto we know that many new sacred sites were established by a certain ritual method. But here we have to solve another problem – are these ritual practices indigenous or lately adopted or created under influence of universal religious tradition, in case of Japan – Buddhism? Ritual practices are not something unchanged and initially predetermined. As all other human skills they change, develop and even progress in history. Just as human beings were gaining knowledge of natural phenomena and gradually acquiring skills to manage and control them, in the same way they were learning to understand the sacred, discovering and polishing methods to communicate or even manipulate it, i.e. ritual practices. It seems, that initially in Shinto as in many other local religions there were no special methods for creating sacred sites artificially. *Kami* themselves decided places for their veneration, revealing their will through methods, which Mircea Eliade classified as theophany and hierophany. Origination myths of two main Shinto sanctuaries – Izumo and Ise – are good archetypal examples of both methods for creation of sacred sites. In case of Izumo, a deity Susanoo, who is venerated there, founds the proper place himself – “Coming here, my heart is refreshed” and even building a place to live by himself [Kojiki 1968, 91]. In case of Ise, according of Nihongi, a priestess Yamato-hime-no mikoto departs from the imperial palace to find an appropriate new location for Amaterasu's enshrinement. When after quite a long journey she at last reached Ise province, the following oracle was revealed to her – “The province of Ise, of the divine wind, is the land whither repair the waves from the eternal world, the successive waves. It is secluded and pleasant land. In this land I wish to dwell” [Nihongi 1972, 176]. The journey of Yamato-hime-no mikoto can be interpreted as an archetypal example of a “professional” sacred journey-pilgrimage by a hierophant without any spatially localized goal (*yugyô*<7>), resulting in establishing (revealing) new sacred sites. Most important of these sacred sites may gradually develop into centres of mass pilgrimages, as it actually happened with both mentioned sites, especially in Ise.

Later in Shinto developed a special ritual practice for “artificial” establishing of new sacred places, but we have no clear evidences of its indigenous origination. It is quite possible, that the very idea as well as the ritual method developed in Shinto in a process of its evolution, which was greatly influenced, as it is well known, by Buddhism. As an indirect evidence of this hypothesis we can point to the very naming of this method, which was borrowed from Buddhism – *kanjô*<8>. According to *Bukkyôgo daijiten* [Nakamura 1991], it means “a request for the teaching”, “asking Buddha to preach Dharma”, being initially a translation of a

Sanskrit word *upamantrita*, “to urge”. Another meaning is “to venerate newly transferred spirits of buddhas and kami”, but the only sources for this latter interpretation cited in the dictionary are not doctrinal texts, but *belles-lettres* - *Heike-monogatari* and based on it the Noh play *Shunkan*. In *Shintō jiten* this term *kanjō*; is defined as “transferring, pacifying and embedding in a new location a ‘divide spirit’-*bunrei* of a principal *kami*”.

One of the earliest and widely known example of a ritual transfer of a *kami* from an original “natural” sacred site to another place is a story about Hachiman’s “visit” to Nara on the occasion of the “eyes opening” ceremony of the Great Buddha statue in Tōdaiji. After this ceremony Hachiman’s “divided spirit”-*bunrei* was pacified and entrenched in a newly established sanctuary on the territory of the monastery and was subsequently venerated as a *kami*-protector of this Buddhist establishment.

Even if the idea about possibility to relocate *kami* was an indigenous one by origin, it was, at least, further developed and sophisticated on the base of Buddhist beliefs and practices as it happened later with a concept and ritual practices of purification.

It is also quite important, that a new location for a sacred site, a *kami* abode, should has certain natural physical features (see below) or if they could not be found in a desired location, they should be reproduced artificially. As an example of the first case we can quote a famous episode from *Heike monogatari*, describing like “fervent adherents of Kumano faith” Yasuori and Naritsune, being exiled to the Kikai-ga-shima Island, were looking for appropriate place of worship: “They discovered a place where a remarkable grove of trees grew alongside a river, their multicoloured leaves like embroidered red brocade, and where extraordinary peaks soared above the clouds, their slopes like shimmering green gossamer. From the mountains to the trees, it was a site of surpassing beauty. To the south stretched the boundless sea, its distant billows dissolving into clouds and mists; to the north a hundred-foot cataract surged over a lofty precipice. The chill, awesome sound of the water and the pervasive aura of sanctity, heightened by the moan of the wind in the pines, were reminiscent indeed of Nachi, the mountain where waterfall deity dwells enshrined; and they promptly dubbed the spot Nachi. Then they named two peaks Hongū and Shingū, and identified other places with lesser shrines on the pilgrimage route” [Heike 1988, 89].

Another well-known early example of creating a new sacred site is Kasuga jinja, founded in 8th century by Fujiwara clan, near the foot of Mikasa Mountain in the newly established capital of Japan – Nara. But it is important to notice, that the famous shrine’s foundation story still use a traditional theophanic explanation for choosing a new abode for a *kami*³, whereas by Edo period a ritual technique for *kami* manipulation became elaborated enough and *kami* relocation was no longer required a divine apology.

As an example of the second case we can cite a history of the main Shinto shrine in Edo - Sannōsha (Sannō Hie Jinja). As it is well known, the *kami* of this shrine was venerated by Tokugawa family as an ancestor deity-*ubusuna kami*. According to Edo period guidebook *Edoshō* (1665), the principal *kami*, Sannō, “The Mountain Sovereign”, of the shrine, venerated in Tendai school initially as a local protector of its headquarter, was transferred three times – first to Kawagoe when a third patriarch of Tendai School Ennin (794–864) established there a temple; then Oota Dōkan (1432–1486), the famous military commander and an artist, a builder of the first Edo castle, moved it to the castle for its spiritual security (1459); later the second shōgun Tokugawa placed it outside the castle’s wall because of a large-scale reconstruction of the defending facilities (1654). For this purpose he ordered to create on the present location of the shrine an artificial mound-*tsukiyama*<23>, thus reproducing one of the essential feature of “natural” Shinto sacred sites [Ono 1981, 39].

Modern scientific knowledge attempts to find its own explanation for localization of sacred sites mainly using one of the two approaches. The first one can be called an attempt of a direct verification and objectivation of a sacred knowledge. Researches of this kind, which are not fully admitted by a prevailing modern scientific paradigm, are akin to attempts to find a materialistic explanation for paranormal phenomena. Here the sacred is considered to be as a certain type of a subtle energy, which, nevertheless, can be fixed and even measured objectively. For example, Ukrainian researches R. Furdui and Y. Shvardak, studying topographical peculiarities of religious institutions in Kiev, discovered that 80% of them are located directly over geological deep faults, emanating a kind of energy that has a positive influence on human beings [Zavgorodni, Ostapenko 1999, 247–275]. We can find a lot of studies of such kind that explain localization of sacred sites not by influence of geoenergy, but by some kind of cosmic rays, etc.

It is looked paradoxical on the first sight, but such “materialistic” explanation of the sacred are quite similar to the traditional explanations in local religions. Modern followers of Shinto tradition use the term *hadô*<9>, undulation, for a description of a high concentration of a sacred power in certain locations. According to them, Shinto shrines-*yashiro/jinja* located in places where this *hadô* is exceptionally strong. But this undulation-*hadô* is not always stable. It may increase as well as decrease and its intensity depends on regularity and accuracy of ritual activities, performed by religious specialists. Decrease of *hadô* results in decline of a sanctuary – adepts expectations are not satisfied because of weakness of sacred power at this spot and such sanctuary gradually losing its former popularity. As example I was cited a case of Imai Jinja in Chichibu, which was very popular in the past, but nowadays almost completely forgotten. I was also told, that *hadô* of a site can be restored by a certain ritual method.

The second approach, fully admitted by mainstream academic science can be called an attempt of indirect verification of a sacred knowledge and discovering the secondary features of sacred sites, mainly physico-geographical in our case. In case of Shinto Abe Hajime systematically applied this approach recently. He believes, that a sacred site in Shinto, a “kami’s place” (*kami-no basho*<10>), should comply with an image of “island” (*shima*<11>), surrounded by “cosmic water” (*utyûsui*<12>) in its celestial and thalassic embodiment, (*ame, ama*<13>) [Hajime 1995, 67]⁴. The main peculiarity of sacred sites in Shinto is that they protrude into sphere of these cosmic elements. It is a kind of a divine dwarf to which deities, living in the depths of cosmic water are landing from time to time. Therefore sacred sites are linked to (1) seas and oceans (capes, islands), or to (2) other water sources (like rivers, springs, hidden in gorges, caves etc.); or to (3) the sky (mountains which are divided into *kannabi*<14> type not so high mountains-hills with an *iwakura*<15> on the top, and *asama*<16> type - conic-shape volcanoes) [Hajime 1995, 73–88]. *Kami* that have landed at this spots may remain there if they found a satisfactory “dwelling place”, where they can “hide”. A “hiding place” for *kami* should comply with an image of *kura* - an enclosed dark space, a kind of a womb that is a source of life [Hajime 1995, 70–71]⁵. To this image comply such places like rocks and stones (*iwakura*), even whole mountains; certain unusual (exceptionally big, old or peculiarly located) trees (*sakaki*<17> in an original sense of this word - a sacred tree), sacred groves or parts of forests (*mori*<18> or *himorogi*<19>); or artificial “kami’s bodies” (*shintai*<20>, in this case mirrors, swords, jewels etc.), usually hid in specially erected structures (*shinden*<21> or *honden*<22>). It is quite clear, that the typology of sacred spaces in Shinto, suggested by Abe, perfectly coincides in main suggestions with the above-mentioned symbolism of a sacred space that is typical for the most of cosmotheistic local religions.

Summing up results of this inquiry, it is important to point out, that in cosmotheistic religions the main objective for visiting sacred sites is a contact with the sacred that is concentrated in certain places with certain physico-geographical features. Intensity of the sacred (in other words, a level of sacred energy, which could and should be sustained ritually) in such places determines their hierarchy, and, subsequently, their popularity as pilgrimage destinations⁶. We may say, that in local religions we observe various gradations of sacredness of space, which, nevertheless, never come to naught, and this reveals itself in the notion of sacredness of a whole land, a notion typical to most traditional culture⁷. Points of maximum concentration of the sacred in these traditions strictly localized and linked to the certain features of landscape.

If in case of local religions we observe a hierarchy of sacred spaces, determined mainly by “natural” sacred qualities of a place itself, in universal religions, with an exception of extraordinary events like apparitions, “physical” concentration of the sacred mainly linked to (1) a body of a religiously distinguished human being (a cult of relics)⁸; to (2) everything he or she had a direct bodily contact (places he or she visited or things touched); or to (3) artificially (divinely or humanly) created exceptional cultic objects like miraculous icons or statues. Sacred persons may also expose themselves to the devoted ones even after their earthly life, thus creating new sacred sites. And if in Protestantism, as in most consistent attempt to embody an ideal of a universal religion of spirit, there is no pilgrimage tradition, neither cult of relics or sacred objects, in Eastern Orthodoxy as in one of the most localized version of Christianity⁹ veneration of relics, sacred objects, especially miraculous icons, and, consequently, a pilgrimage tradition are of high importance. Therefore in this case we find that a hierarchy of sacred persons is more significant than a hierarchy of sacred spaces, which can be called secondary, depending exclusively on human or humanly mediated divine deeds. The more sacred these activities, the higher hierarchy of a church or a monastery where it happened.

Hence we can conclude, that a strict topographical localization of the sacred in cosmotheistic local religions is objectively a more dynamic stimulus for a potential pilgrim to visit a sacred space than in universal religions. In all local religions we find a tradition of pilgrimages and Shinto in this sense is not exception at all. Moreover, in medieval Japanese literature we can find a lot of evidence of pilgrimages, performed to local as well as faraway Shinto sanctuaries. The fact that this type of pilgrimage was not called *junrei*, i.e. visiting a symbolically important number of sacred sites mainly by a circular movement, by no means denies qualification of these sacred journeys as pilgrimages, or prove that an origination of this ritual practice was exclusively Buddhist.

¹ One of the key researcher of pilgrimages in Japan Hoshino Eiki in his comparatively recent paper uses, though somewhat inconsequently, the term a “far-distance pilgrimage” (*enkaku sankei*) as a general term for pilgrimages in all their variety (Hoshino 1995).

² See more in Porteous 1986.

³ See in more details about this legend in [Grapard 1992, 25–29] and [Tyler 1990, 46–54].

⁴ Abe Hajime believes, that separation of *cosmos* from *nomos* as well as general awareness of different qualities of the space starts in Japan in Yayoi period, while separation of the sacred from profane in Kofun period [Abe 1995, 69] He also writes, that heaven was considered by ancient Japanese as a water basin (*suiiki*). Vertically the world was delimited by heavenly water and horizontally – by earthly water (ocean, seas etc.), thus in ancient Japanese language there was a one word for a sky and a sea – *ame* or *ama* [Abe 1995, 58–59].

⁵ Abe Hajime notes, that *kura* – a rice granary – was perceived by ancient Japanese as a mysterious place where the spirit of rice was descending to revive a vital force of grain stored there [Abe 1995, 70]. This vital force reveals itself either in support of human life or as a birth of new sprouts in springtime. Thus it is not by chance that buildings of Ise Jingū have a form of such ancient granaries.

⁶ In Japan as well as in China an emperor awarded ranks to gods in the same way as he did for bureaucrats, thus establishing official hierarchy of sacred places, which is not always was the same as a ranking based on popular beliefs.

⁶ In Japan as well as in China an emperor awarded ranks to gods in the same way as he did for bureaucrats, thus establishing official hierarchy of sacred places, which is not always was the same as a ranking based on popular beliefs.

⁷ As Hubert notes, “Many indigenous peoples would extend the concept of sacredness to the whole of their land. This is a very important point, and to some extent indicates a different understanding of sacred and sacredness. The focus on sacred sites and sites of special significance, in the controversy between indigenous peoples and those who threaten them from outside, has been a necessary focus. But it should not obscure the fact that in some cultures the very land itself is sacred” [Hubert 1994, 16].

⁸ “In the Christian tradition sanctifying power is invested in man, God’s vice-regent, rather than in nature. The church does not adapt to the spirit of the land: it imparts spirit to its environs” [Tuan 1974, 148].

⁹ In comparison to Catholicism, Orthodox Church was not very active in its missionary zeal and the area of traditional influence of Eastern Orthodox Church had not changed a lot since 10th century, mainly spreading its influence with ways of emigrants from traditionally Orthodox countries territory. With some exaggerations it can be said that Orthodoxy became a local religion for many Central and Eastern European countries, especially for Russia where a traditional for local religions idea of sacredness of a land revealed itself as a well-known religious, ideological and political concept of *Svytaya Rus* (Sacred Rus), that in many aspects are practically identical to the Japanese ideologem of *shinkoku* (the country of kami). It can be also added that Athos, the second after Jerusalem in importance pilgrimage destination for Orthodox Christians is a place of extraordinary natural beauty, which combines all typical to sacred sites of local religions features – it is a mountainous cape surrounded by Aegean Sea with many deep gorges and water springs.

JITEPATYPA

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Додаток 1

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