

*Graduate Research Essay*

**JAPANESE TRAVEL CULTURE:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE LINKS BETWEEN  
EARLY JAPANESE PILGRIMAGE AND MODERN  
JAPANESE TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR**

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**Introduction: Pilgrimage and Tourism in Japan**

While in Western literature pilgrimage and tourism seem by nature to be dichotomous concepts—tourism being related to the profane and pilgrimage to the sacred—in Japanese culture no such contradiction exists and the two have developed side by side. A tourist has been defined as “one who travels for pleasure or culture, visiting a number of places for their objects of interest, scenery, or the like.” In contrast, a pilgrim is defined as “one who journeys to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989). The important difference between the definitions is the issue of purpose: a pilgrimage being “an act of religious devotion,” rather than an activity designed primarily for novelty and change. The issue of purpose for Japanese travellers is unclear for two reasons. Firstly, the divisions between the sacred and the profane, the godly and the worldly are much less clearly defined in Japanese society, so pilgrimage and travel can be viewed as complementary and not in any way opposite patterns of behaviour. Secondly, pilgrimage was the only option open to common people to justify travel, and was often used as the *tatemaie* (‘official purpose’), if only in order to get around tight travel restriction in Tokugawa Japan. True intent cannot, therefore, be clearly established. From the earliest period of Japanese history, the distinction between the two activities has always been obscure. The pilgrimages of courtiers were also pleasure trips, as we know from their diaries (Keene 1999). Likewise, while the journeys of common people did have sacred places as their destination, an important part of the trip was the

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pleasure derived from the novelty and change (Kato 1994). While pilgrimage in the Tokugawa period always included elements of non-spiritual pleasure, so modern pleasure travellers often include elements of pilgrimage in their travel.

Linguistic analysis also points to the strong connection between religion and tourism. The Japanese word for travel, *tabi*, originally meant military travel, but also has religious origins. The origin of the word *tabibito* (traveller) was *tabebito* “a wandering ascetic, a stranger who would ask for food, who could have been a (Buddhist) holy man asking for alms” (Graburn 1983: 60). In early times, “virtually all Japanese travel consisted of visits to shrines and temples, and the terms *sankei* (pilgrimage/visit to a shrine) and *tabi* (travel) were virtually synonymous in pre-modern Japan” (Reader 1993: 123).

Within the context of Japan’s culture, history and religious beliefs, there exists no clear line between tourism and pilgrimage; the two developed in tandem. Thus, Cohen’s (1979) definition of a pilgrimage as a form of “religious tourism,” combining elements of pilgrimage with those of ordinary tourism, is very applicable to Japan. As Graburn (1983) asserts, in the case of Japan at least, “the traveler does not have to decide between being a tourist or a pilgrim, for both modes are part of the larger whole; neither does he have to undergo sharp changes in attitude from awestruck reverence to playful secularity, for they are intertwined parts of one cultural structure” (60). In the context of Japanese culture, a journey to a place of nature or history may be considered as sacred as a journey to a temple or shrine, while a pilgrimage may be enjoyed merely for “novelty,” without moral restrictions on behaviour and intent, without losing its status as “pilgrimage.”

### **The Development of Pilgrimage**

Pilgrimage in Japan developed gradually. The ascetic wanderings of individuals took the form of pilgrimage routes, which were then adopted by the aristocracy and, later, the common masses. Pilgrimage became popular in the Heian period among the aristocracy, who visited places like Ise Shrine, Hasedera and Shitennoji. During the Edo period, pilgrimage became popular for all classes of people (Kodansha *Encyclopaedia of Japan* 1983). Perhaps the most famous pilgrimage in Japan—around the island of Shikoku—appears in chronicles of the Heian era (latter half of the eleventh century), when it developed as an ascetic practice involving religious sites (Reader 1987). By the seventeenth century a more structured route had developed, involving the eighty-eight temples still visited today. It seems that, in the latter part of the Muromachi period (1338-1573), the trip to Shikoku became “a widespread practice involving participants other than religious specialists

and ascetics” (Reader 1987: 116). By the mid-eighteenth century, pilgrimage was no longer solely for individual ascetic purposes, but was also common for farmers and townspeople travelling with a specific aim (such as prayers for good crops, safety and so on).

According to figures kept by pilgrim lodges in 1764, as many as 36,000-48,000 people over a six month period visited Shikoku for pilgrimage (Reader 1987). In order to accommodate these huge numbers of travellers, towns and pleasure quarters developed near major religious sites. *Monzen machi*—literally “town in front of the gate”—were commercial areas which developed around shrines or temples, offering accommodation, food, gift shopping and geisha establishments. These towns developed to serve the pilgrims they attracted, who required the services of an “embryonic tourist industry” (Campbell and Noble 1993: 1003).

Kato (1994) outlines the development of another popular pilgrimage route: to the shrine at Ise. Between April and May 1705, 3,620,000 visitors to this shrine were recorded. When the shrine was opened to commoners in the mid-Heian period, a set of ‘spiritual rules’ concerning taboos and proper behaviours to be observed were given to pilgrims. At the very least, this points to the growing numbers of common people undertaking pilgrimage; but this unfamiliarity with pilgrimage and appropriate religious behaviours also indicates perhaps that visitors were not purely religiously motivated. By the end of the Edo period, around Ise shrine, a pleasure quarter called *Ashiarai-ba* (literally ‘a place to wash the feet’) had developed within the boundaries of the outer shrine. Kato (1994) believes that pilgrims would “go through the motion of praying at the shrine and then spend the bulk of their trip in the pleasure quarters” (57). The atmosphere at Ise was described as “festive and uninhibited” (ibid. 59). Even at the time, this phenomenon was recognized and lamented by some. In *Kiyu Shoran*, a famous compendium of miscellaneous information published in 1830, scholar and bibliographer Kitamura Nobuyo wrote:

Nowadays people [living around Edo] are fond of going to tour Kyoto, Osaka and Nara, but they never go to visit the Kashima shrine [one of the most famous shrines in the vicinity] for worship. They are going to visit many shrines and temples, but it is only for nominal purpose. The true aim of the travel is absolutely for pleasure. Of course, they visit the Ise shrine, but only because it is just on the route of the popular tour to Kyoto, Osaka and Nara (cited in Fromanek 1998: 168).

Several authors have reviewed surviving literature and accounts of popular pilgrimages and support the idea that pleasure had indeed become an important aspect of pilgrimage. Susanne Fromanek (1998), for example, looked in detail at the pilgrimage to Mount Tateyama, and concluded that, by

the Edo period, pilgrimage involved institutionalized and commercialized trips in which “sightseeing and pleasure seeking was at least as important, if not more important than the religious goal” (178).

It is clear that, by the Edo period, religious reasons were only one part of ‘pilgrimage’ trips, which were concerned also with pleasure and enjoyment. This touristic side to pilgrimage was fostered by the development of facilities to serve and encourage pilgrims. As all travel in Japan at this time involved visits to temples and shrines, pilgrimage and tourism became inseparable; only the true intent of the individual, which cannot be known, differentiated the two activities. The following section will discuss restrictions on travel within Japan, and the effect these had on popularizing pilgrimage.

### **The Politics and Infrastructure Behind Pilgrimage and Early Travel**

One feature of pre-modern Japan that encouraged pilgrimage by the masses was the impressive infrastructure developed by the *bakufu* (Tokugawa government) to support travel. The original motivations for the network of overland communication infrastructure set up by the *bakufu* were political and economic (Vaporis 1994). The main route of this network linked Edo (present-day Tokyo) to Kyoto, and this developed into the *Gokaido* (‘five-highways’) which emanated from the capital. In 1635, a system of ‘alternate attendance’ was developed, whereby *daimyo* (lords) and their entourage were required to travel from their local area to Edo annually to wait on the Shogun, and this was one of the motivating factors for the establishment of central travel routes. “In its completed form, the *Gokaido* network consisted of 248 post stations, which were, depending on the road, spaced from four to twelve kilometers apart” (Vaporis 1994: 22). These were designed as rest stops, transportation and information centers, and around them grew recreation areas which included inns, eating and drinking establishments, and *meibutsu* (“famous things”).

Tokugawa Japan was considered at that time to have “attained the world’s highest level of overall infrastructure formation” (Vaporis 1994: 5). In combination with a political stability that was to last 265 years (after more than a century of civil war), and relative economic security, this well-developed travel infrastructure contributed to the emergence of travel as a form of recreation for the masses, which remains a national pastime for the Japanese to this day. However, despite the impressive infrastructure that was in place in Tokugawa Japan, government regulations regarding who could travel and for what purpose restricted travel for the common people. These restrictions played a large part in the secularization of pilgrimage and led to it

becoming merely an excuse to circumvent the active discouragement of pleasure travel (Vaporis 1995).

*Sekisho* (barriers) were established along major routes, officially to monitor compliance with the system of alternate attendance and to control travel to and from the capital for security reasons (Vaporis 1994). By 1625, a set of regulations regarding the procedure for passing through these check points was established, and ‘suspicious-looking people’ and women came under particular scrutiny. In order to pass these check points, travel permits were required. Two types of permits were available. The first, *sekisho tegata* (transit permits), were a form of identification for passing through *sekisho*. They were issued by the government and were generally only valid for passage through a particular station (Vaporis 1995). The second type, *orai tegata* (passports), were issued by local government offices or one’s local temple for pilgrimage or business, and could be used to pass through as many stations as needed over a given period of time (Izuru 1997). Passports were easier to obtain and more convenient than transit permits and, therefore, more popular. Because they were often issued by temples, pilgrimage was the obvious intention stated. Pilgrimage carried its own restrictions, which were instituted in order to control the amount of time common people spent away from their fields, and how much money was used outside their local area. Regulations covered the setting of certain economic qualifications for the issuance of travel permits; the determining of when and where travel was allowed; the determining of who was allowed to travel; and the length of time, as well as the number of times, a person could travel (Vaporis 1995: 29).

The Tokugawa government did not officially recognize the concept of pleasure travel, and, indeed, outwardly discouraged it. For economic and disciplinary reasons, it was considered vital that commoners remained at home working on the land. Tokuhisa (1980) links these constraints to the prevailing Confucian ethics of the time, which supported the idea that free time should be used for work, while “enjoyment for its own sake was frowned upon” (7). In 1721, in a treatise on civil administration, it was stated that “no one of any class [should] travel without reason” (Kanzaki 1992: 67).

The only accepted and legitimate reason for travel left to the common people was that of religious pilgrimage, which allowed “activities that might normally be frowned upon as impractical and frivolous” to be “condoned on the basis of their group-oriented, religious nature” (Kato 1994: 54). In reality, therefore, pilgrimage became the ostensible reason behind trips of a more pleasurable and secular orientation. Reader (1993) states that, “besides seeking miracles and salvation, then, there were pilgrims whose primary interest was in seeing places and enjoying themselves, and who travelled in the guise of the pilgrim because this provided legitimate cover for their intents” (123).

## Features of Japanese Pilgrimage/Travel

Certain features that developed in order to support and maintain the popularity of pilgrimage during the Edo period can be linked to modern Japanese travel habits. The first relates to the organization and style of group travel. Despite pilgrimage being available to the common masses in the Edo period, it was still restricted by financial constraints. This was overcome by the participation of individuals in *ko* (village or religious groups). A system developed whereby the members of the *ko* contributed money and selected several members to make a pilgrimage on the group's behalf. Travel arranged by the *ko* meant that representatives of one group travelled together with people from other villages in the area (Vaporis 1995).

Arrangements for the representative pilgrims were made by *oshi*, low-level priests connected to religious sites, who are thought to have emerged in this role around 1181, and who are now compared to modern-day travel agents (Kanzaki 1995: 44). According to Umesao (1995), these priests arranged everything, from “setting up the route from provincial villages to a particular shrine or temple, guides along the road, reservations at inns, tour guides, worship at the temple or shrine, entertainment such as theatres or visits to the pleasure quarters, and the provision of lodgings” (6). While *oshi* originally belonged to a particular shrine or temple, they later worked independently and, as the whole concept of pilgrimage became commercialized and secular, it seems the *oshi* and monks were “at least as eager to earn money as to bring about the religious edification of the pilgrims” (Fromanek 1998:30).

Another tradition to stem from the *ko* group was the giving of *miyage* (gifts), which is still such an important part of Japanese travel culture. Because pilgrims were travelling on behalf of—and thanks to the generosity of—fellow members, it was important that those at home be kept in mind throughout the pilgrimage and presented with a gift when the traveller returned. Graburn (1983) believes *miyage* to be an important legitimizing on-site marker, symbolizing the link between the traveller and those of their group left behind. In modern travel, money and *senbetsu* (other gifts) are still given to friends and family preparing to travel. The traveller must then return with *miyage* for all from whom they received *senbestu*. Graburn (1987) states that the giving of *miyage* is governed by two principles: “1) it must be a culturally accepted symbol or souvenir of that particular place, and 2) it must cost approximately half of the *senbetsu* given” (19).

In early Japan, these gifts were not only tokens of gratitude but also important for confirmation that chosen group members had completed the pilgrimage and reached their destination. *Kinen* (souvenirs) thus became an

important way to legitimize and commemorate the trip. Graburn (1987) defines *kinen* as, “culturally approved evidence of having been to the right place and done the right things” (21). In modern travel, perhaps the most important form of *kinen* is the photograph. It is extremely important for Japanese people to have their photo taken, as a group, in front of the ‘must see’ sights at each destination. A photograph of the site itself is not enough, it must include the travel group to be legitimate. *Kinen-stampu* (souvenir stamps) are now often given on tickets to attractions within Japan. This custom also developed from early pilgrimage; pilgrims carried books to be stamped at each temple as proof they had been there (Graburn 1987).

Another important concept to develop from the pilgrimage era is that of *meibutsu*. *Meibutsu* essentially means ‘famous things’ and refers to the specialty products and/or attractions a destination offers. Unless a destination is famous for something, whether it be food, craft items or attractions (including temples and shrines), it is often not thought to be worth visiting. Pilgrims and modern travellers travel to culturally approved places and return bearing *meibutsu* in the form of *miyage* and *kinen*.

In order to fulfil the pilgrims’ requirements for *miyage* and *kinen*, pleasure quarters and post stations near temples and shrines, as well as the religious institutions themselves, grew to include gift shops and stalls selling specialty items and *meibutsu* (religious talismans). By the late seventeenth century, this in itself had grown to be an important industry (Vaporis 1995), providing income for temples and shrines and further encouraging a more commercialized and secularized type of travel in which on-site markers became as important as the visit to the shrine or temple itself. Graburn (1987) summarizes the nature of Japanese tourism established through pilgrimage:

Each place is known by its central symbol, and each institution by its historically, culturally and naturally significant markers. The conceptual nature of travel is to pick a site, or a circuit of approved sites, to know what to expect when one gets there, to confirm through on-site markers that one is there, to record in material form that one has been there, and to carry back home material evidence that one has been there (20).

Ishimori (1995) looks at the wider links between tourism and religion in early Japan. He discusses the concept of *meisho* (famous place), originally made popular through mentions in early writings and poetry. As travel became accessible to the masses in the Edo period, these places became popular and actual tourist destinations. It is particularly interesting that sixty percent of the *meisho* published in the early nineteenth century book *Edo Meisho Zue (Famous Places of Edo)* were temples and shrines. Despite the fact that, by this time, pleasure travel had become a form of travel in its own

right and not under the auspices of religious pilgrimage, the majority of famous sites in Japan remained religious sites.

A brief look at the development and style of ‘pilgrimage’ in Japan has identified several important aspects of modern Japanese travel habits: a preference for group travel organized by a professional guide; a desire to visit well-known places, the importance of memorial photographs; and souvenirs, and the custom of purchasing *miyage* (gifts) for family and friends.

## Travel and Literature

Another development stemming from the popularity of pilgrimage throughout Japan was the publication of guidebooks, which began as early as the 1680s (Reader 1993). This literature grew to include illustrated books, maps, and how-to travel handbooks, and also saw the development of a specific ‘travel-diary’ genre of literature that became not only a popular form of general reading material, but also a catalyst for further growth in the popularity of travel.

One major exception to regulations on pleasure travel was that extended to writers and poets and “those who find solace or poetic inspiration” in travel (Kanzaki 1992: 67). The genre of *nikki* (diary) had long been a popular one in Japanese literature and it is not surprising that the Japanese enjoyment of travel was often recorded in diary form and became a popular extension of the diary genre in itself. In Japan, the *kiko* (travel diary) acquired the status of novels, essays and other forms of literature that are better known in the West.

The travel diary has its roots in the *Kiryoka* (travel poems) of the eighth century poetry anthology, *Man Yoshu* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*) (Campbell and Noble 1993: 93). The first true travel diary of note was the 935 *Tosa Nikki* (*Tosa Diary*). There were other diaries published in the Heian era, including *Ionushi* (*The Master of the Hut*) and *Kagero Nikki* (*The Gossamer Years*), but many more were written from the Edo period onwards. A feature of the travel diary is the use of *uta-makura*, poetry, and descriptions of the journey itself, rather than of extended stops along the way (Kodansha *Encyclopedia of Japan* 1983). *Uta-makura* refers to place names that are associated with certain standard images and feelings. These images and feelings developed with the use of the place name in literature, and poets who may never have been to the place would use the name to enrich their poetry. The use of *uta-makura* (stereotypical descriptions) of places along the way, ensured that such diaries were understood and enjoyed by a wide audience.

One of the most well-known travel diarists and poets in the Edo period was Matsuo Basho (1644–1694). Basho was truly one of those who gained



inspiration from travel, as “he perfected an aesthetics of wandering that for him was intimately connected to the art of poetry” (Heyd 2001: 10). Although leisurely, Basho’s wanderings were structured around visits to famous historical, religious or aesthetic sites, especially those spots made famous through *uta-makura*, and described in the poetry of his predecessors. Basho, on his journey to the Northlands during which he wrote *Oku no hosomichi* (*The Narrow Road of Oku*), set out to visit the *uta-makura* which he had heard so much about and to compose poetry at sites that had inspired other poets in the past. Like Basho, many Japanese people still prefer to travel to visit sights made famous through poetic association.

Travel diaries were kept by commoners as well as poets and writers, but naturally it was the literary quality of the latter that gained popularity and means that they remain famous works of literature today. Some were mere logs containing factual information, while others were written with the needs of future travellers in mind, like Yasumi Roan’s *Ryoko Yojin Shu* (*A Collection of Precautions for Travellers*), published in 1810 (Vaporis 1994: 235). These written accounts of individuals’ activities while travelling further reinforce the degree to which pilgrimage and tourism had become synonymous. An 1848 diary of a *ko* members’ pilgrimage to Ise (*Ise Sangu Kondate Dochuki*) noted “the restaurants the group ate at, the more than one hundred types of food products tasted during the two month long trip, the inns stayed at, the various local specialty products seen or purchased and the *meisho* (famous places) visited” (Vaporis 1994: 238). It is evident that, despite being a pilgrimage, travellers were spared no comfort, and the trip itself and the highlights it offered were as noteworthy as the visits to shrines and temples.

Travel diaries offer insights and facts regarding travel styles and facilities throughout the ages. The diary titled *Heishin Kiko* (*A Journey of 1616*) by Hayashi Razan, for example, is perhaps the first diary to mention the souvenirs available to travellers, indicating how early these had become a part of Japanese travel culture (Keene 1999). Basho’s diary, *Oi No Kobumi* (*Manuscript in my Knapsack*), written on a trip begun in 1687 describes the *senbetsu-miyage* custom which modern domestic and international Japanese travellers still adhere to: “old friends, acquaintances both intimate and casual, as well as disciples, visited and revealed their affection with their gifts of poems or essays of their composition or with money for my straw sandals. I had no need to worry myself with gathering provisions three months in advance” (cited in Keene 1999: 300).

Basho’s diary *The Narrow Road of Oku*, one of the best-known works in Japanese literature, offers insights into the importance of *meisho*, or visiting famous places. Reviewing the original diary, Keene (1999) notes:

He (Basho) had absolutely no desire to be the first ever to set foot atop a mountain peak or to notice some sight that earlier poets had ignored. On the contrary, no matter how spectacular a landscape might be, unless it had attracted the attention of his predecessors, the lack of poetic overtones deprived it of charm for Basho. When, for example, he traveled along a stretch of the sea of Japan coast that has inspired no important poems, he did not mention the scenery (311).

This aspect of Japanese travel remains true today in many ways, and Kalland (1995) argues that, even now, it is only when a destination has been classified as famous or beautiful that Japanese people are attracted to it.

### **Into the Present...**

Despite being one of the most popular forms of relaxation, and, by all accounts, a widespread activity in Tokugawa Japan, travel for pleasure remained frowned upon and was discouraged by the government. The Tokugawa policy was also one of “national seclusion,” and, for the two-and-a-half centuries of their rule, Japanese people were forbidden to leave the country. Takashina (1992) believes that, despite official prohibition, travel had emerged as a kind of national pastime during the eighteenth century. Although officially referred to as pilgrimage, “the term *monomi yusan* meaning ‘sightseeing jaunt’, expresses the spirit of these trips, in which the destination was less important than the process of getting from here to there, savoring all manner of unaccustomed experiences and amusements along the way” (Takashina 1992: 65). In the mid-nineteenth century, the military feudal regime was overthrown and a central government established, with the emperor nominally leading the country. Not only was this new government no more enthusiastic about travel for travel’s sake, but they also discouraged pilgrimage as it was seen as a “relic of a primitive past,” which hindered Japan’s attempts to become a ‘modern’ country (Graburn 1983: 54). This attitude to travel prevailed and “long distance travel for ordinary people was confined to seeking work in the cities, journeying home for annual events (to visit *haka* [family ancestral graves], and the shrine or temple of one’s allegiance), and making occasional pilgrimage, combined with sightseeing, to national religious sites” (Graburn 1983: 55). It was not until World War I, when Japan’s economy began to boom, that pleasure travel began to expand.

In the 1950s, the government, while encouraging inbound travel, instituted various barriers to Japanese people travelling overseas. These included passports that were only valid for one trip, a requirement for committee approval to travel overseas (tourism not being considered a valid reason), and a limit of \$500 on foreign currency to be taken out of Japan

(Carlile 1996). In effect, overseas travel was limited to “such people as government officials, participants in cultural exchange programs, those on special study programs and employees of international trading firms” (NZTP 1986: 2). The impetus for the easing of these restrictions was Japan’s entry into the OECD, where one of the conditions for entry was a liberalization of the system of foreign exchange and exit controls that had hindered outbound tourism (Carlile 1996). For the average Japanese citizen, this liberalization came into effect in 1964, when Japan held the Tokyo Olympics.

The result of Japan’s isolation and its relatively late entry to world tourism can be linked directly to the preference for package-tour-style travel. Not only was language a major hurdle for Japanese people intending to travel abroad, but, in every sense, they were inexperienced overseas travellers (Graburn 1983). Cultural barriers and a lack of facilities for Japanese customers meant that overseas travel was an exciting yet daunting proposition; the only ‘safe’ option was group travel with an experienced guide to take care of details. Travel at this time remained an expensive proposition for most Japanese people and was considered a ‘once in a lifetime’ experience. Carlile (1996) believes this meant that “tourists themselves demanded as much tangible ‘output’ from the experience as possible. Grueling multi-destination ‘if this is Tuesday it must be Brussels’ - style tours were thus preferred” (13).

By the early 1970s, the steady increase in overseas travel meant tourism had become a booming industry. Rising disposable incomes, an increase in leisure time, a decrease in airfares and the strength of the yen are considered the primary factors contributing to this boom (NZTP 1986; Carlile 1996; Tokuhisa 1980). In 1974, over two million Japanese travelled overseas, compared with only 128,000 just ten years earlier (Tokuhisa 1980). By the 1980s, the Japanese government had done a complete turn-around and was actively encouraging overseas travel, primarily to help reduce Japan’s huge surplus trade balance and promote better international relations. Citizens are now issued with multiple-entry passports, and the Japanese government has negotiated mutual visa waiver agreements with more than 51 countries. Japanese citizens can take an unlimited amount of foreign currency on their overseas trips. Other promotional measures taken by the Japanese government have included:

Conducting joint campaigns with travel-related industries to encourage Japanese workers to take longer holidays and to travel abroad, assisting public relations efforts by foreign tourism promotion organizations in Japan, providing tax incentives to encourage company recreation trips to foreign countries, promoting the use of regional airports for direct flights to and from foreign destinations, and allowing discount airfares

for family travel, youth, and advance-purchase tickets (Nishiyama 1996: 8).

Despite this relative boom, by 1985 only 4.1% of Japanese people travelled overseas. In comparison to other developed countries, this represents a very small percentage. In 1987, the government announced the “10 million plan,” with the goal of encouraging 10 million Japanese to travel overseas by 1992. This target was reached one year early, putting Japan in third place in international tourist arrivals (Cha, McCleary and Uysal 1995). The government’s current plan, “two-way tourism 21”, is aimed at enhancing understanding between Japan and other countries through the promotion of both inbound and outbound tourism.

### **Characteristics of Modern Japanese Travel Abroad**

Despite its relatively short history, the rapid growth in overseas travel has brought with it changes in Japanese travel styles and motivations. Overseas travel has become a more casual affair, expectations have risen, and individual Japanese have become more discerning in their choice of destinations and activities. According to JTB, in 2004, 48% of travellers were taking their first overseas trip, while 4% indicated it was their 10<sup>th</sup> or more trip. Since the first such survey in 1989, the number of Japanese people who have been overseas has steadily increased; 2004 data show that 51% of Japanese respondents have experienced overseas travel. These factors alone explain the growing sophistication of Japanese travellers. Japanese people now tend to stay longer in one destination rather than visiting as many places as possible, and want to ‘experience’ rather than just observe foreign lifestyles and cities (Nozawa 1992). According to Nozawa (1992), modern Japanese travellers are “high spenders, enthusiastic shoppers, service oriented and quality conscious; they are concerned about safety and difficulty communicating in foreign languages”. Long working hours and a lack of holidays remain the biggest constraints on overseas travel and, despite a new government initiative to make Japan a “lifestyle superpower” along with attempts to reduce work hours and increase holidays, Japanese companies remain resistant to change (Carlile 1996).

Escape consistently suggests itself as a major motivation for Japanese travellers. Travel to foreign countries is portrayed as an escape from city living—a chance to sample ‘nature’ and an opportunity to participate in sport and recreation activities tourists cannot regularly do at home. Travel brochures emphasise art and culture, and information is specifically related to a particular destination’s *meisho* (‘cultural markers’); in France, for example, these markers are fashion, cuisine and the Eiffel tower (Moeran 1989).

Nature is also a major theme in international tourism brochures and it is typically depicted by words such as *utsukushii* (beautiful), *yūdai* (grand), *yutaka* (opulent), and *yogore no nai* (unpolluted) (Moeran 1989). The focus is on nature in its totality rather than activities that can be enjoyed within nature, although Moeran notes that the younger generation are increasingly interested in experiencing nature rather than mere sightseeing. Food is another key theme in tourism brochures, and is portrayed as one way in which Japanese are invited to experience being abroad.

Other research into Japanese travel motivations suggests knowledge and adventure to be important motivations, and shows that Japanese place an emphasis on opportunities to explore the world and learn new things (Cha, McLeary and Uysal 1995; Moeran 1983; Nishiyama 1996; Woodside and Jacobs 1985; Kim and Lee 2000; Anderson, Prentice and Watanabe 2000; Heung, Qu and Chu 2001; Jang, Morrison and O'Leary 2002; NZTB 2005). The findings related to preferred destinations consistently indicate natural scenery, safety and history/culture to be major attractions for Japanese tourists (Morris 1990; Nozawa 1992; Moeran 1983; Nishiyama 1989; You, O'Leary, Morrison and Hong 2000). A review of the literature on activity choices indicates that nature and scenery, shopping, food and sightseeing are the main activities Japanese enjoy when travelling (JTB 2005; Lang, O'Leary and Morrison 1993; NZTB 2005).

The literature supports the cultural stereotype that the Japanese predominantly travel in package tours (Carlile 1996; Dace 1995; Lang, O'Leary and Morrison 1993; Nozawa 1992). Various explanations for this have been postulated, including: the cultural value of collectivism and the comfort found in group travel (Ahmed and Krohn 1992); practical issues, such as ease of organisation and cost (Carlile 1996); historical and cultural issues that continue to affect travel (as discussed above), and the lack of confidence and relative inexperience of Japanese travellers (Carlile 1996). From a sociological perspective, Nishiyama (1996) stresses the importance of cultural socialisation of Japanese in group travel. From kindergarten trips, to annual *shūgaku ryokō* (school excursions) and company recreation trips, he argues that this socialisation means that Japanese are much more familiar and comfortable with group travel than individual travel. Fukada (1979) notes that the difficulties of language, the feeling of being over-awed in a foreign city, and general feelings of unease associated with travel, mean that Japanese are more comfortable travelling as members of a group. According to JTB (2005), 45% of outbound Japanese tourists use package tours and 39% arrange their own travel. Trends over recent years show that package tours are remaining steady, while individually arranged travel is increasing and group travel decreasing.

In summary, a relatively consistent picture emerges from the extensive literature published on Japanese tourists: Japanese travellers are looking for

destinations that offer natural beauty, safety and culture, and that are famous or worthy of visiting (concepts of *meisho/meibutsu*). They enjoy scenery, shopping (for *miyage* and *kinen*), cuisine, and sightseeing, but are not particularly active tourists. Escape, relaxation and time with family are the major benefits sought from overseas travel. Package tours with experienced guides remain a popular form of travel, especially among the older segments. Service expectations are high, and language, time and expense appear to be the greatest restraints on travel.

### **Japanese Tourism in New Zealand**

Japan remains a key tourism market for New Zealand, both in terms of visitor numbers and spending. Research that looks specifically at Japanese tourists in New Zealand, shows an increase in the number of Japanese tourists travelling semi-independently, increasing from 15% in 2002 to 33% in the year to March 2005 (NZTB 2005). However, transportation and accommodation statistics support the idea that the majority of travellers still travel on organized tours. According to NZTB, Japanese travellers are becoming more independent in their decision making; group participants are looking for more free time; there is more demand for self-drive holidays; and customers are looking to slow down and relax their travel style. However, the more traditional group-tour market is still considerable in size. Gnoth and Watkins (2002) found that the top five attractions of New Zealand for Japanese tourist were (in order of importance): scenery and nature experiences, rest and relaxation, accommodation and food, cosiness and a familiar atmosphere, and the opportunity to learn new things.

Japan is presently our largest Asian market, but New Zealand is attracting a declining share of the growing, outbound Japanese travel market, in spite of the fact that New Zealand is rated as the seventh most desirable destination worldwide (NZTB 2006). This suggests that New Zealand may not be communicating its attractions and offerings clearly to potential Japanese visitors.

Research by NZTB (2006) has suggested that, for the Japanese market, New Zealand lacks “famous landmarks.” This paper explains the concepts of *meisho* and *meibutsu* and their importance to travel culture in Japan. New Zealand could certainly make more of its landmarks by promoting them as “famous,” both in promotional material and at the sites themselves. Pointing out world heritage sites, national parks, and other famous locations is vital to establishing the sites as ‘famous’ and encouraging the Japanese market to identify them as worthy of visiting. NZTB’s research also suggests a spiritual/restorative aspect to travel in New Zealand for the Japanese market. This paper has discussed the cultural links between spirituality/pilgrimage

and travel in Japan. Currently New Zealand promotes the eight *kaido* (eight paths), which appeal to the idea of traditional pathways and is reminiscent of pilgrimage routes, and this concept could certainly be built upon. The concept of pilgrimage and spirituality could be made more explicit, and New Zealand could be promoted as a location for getting in touch with the essence of life through an explicit link to pilgrimage and physical/psychological restoration.

## Conclusion

The ambiguous nature of Japanese religion means that pilgrimage and travel have long been synonymous in Japan, and an understanding of the development of pilgrimage is vital to an understanding of present-day Japanese travel habits. The infrastructure in place to support pilgrimage in early Japan made travel accessible to the masses, yet contributed to the secularisation of pilgrimage by insisting that all travel come under this definition. Many of the features of pilgrimage still remain important aspects of Japanese overseas travel habits. The *senbetsu-miyage* custom remains widespread, and, therefore, shopping for gifts is an important part of travel for Japanese people. *Meisho* (well-known destinations) and *meibutsu* (the things that make them famous) are important in determining destination choice and the selection of activities for Japanese travellers. Likewise, *kinen* and photographs are very important to the Japanese traveller, which explains why Japanese take group photographs at all famous locations. A look at the rich and insightful travel literature in early Japan highlights the development and popularity of travel through the ages and uncovers, among other things, reasons for the importance of well-known destinations to the Japanese. In the context of Japan's religion, its long and unique history of travel and pilgrimage, prolonged isolation, and the country's sudden and recent emergence into the world tourism arena, the more 'unique' Japanese travel habits become understandable. If New Zealand can adapt its tourism offerings and the communication of them to better fit the long-established travel culture of Japan, we can better meet the needs and desires of this market in a sustainable way.

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