

## Sōtō Zen in a Japanese Town

### Field Notes on a Once-Every-Thirty-Three-Years Kannon Festival

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*This article reports on a thirty-three-day celebration of the bodhisattva Kannon, which occurred in July and August of 1993 as the latest enactment of a thirty-three-year cycle of such celebrations, at a Sōtō Zen temple in Niigata Japan known as Jingū-ji. Its three parts describe the geographical and historical context of Jingū-ji and its tradition of Kannon worship; the planning, fund raising, sequence of events, and social significance of the thirty-three-day festival last year; and the significance of Jingū-ji's Kannon festival as a contemporary example of Sōtō Zen in a Japanese town. It analyzes how the Kannon celebration functions on a local level as a medium for the preservation and reconstitution of local community identity. It concludes by questioning the validity of widespread scholarly categorizations that separate the study of Buddhist traditions, such as Zen, from their common cultural manifestations in popular religious practices, such as Kannon worship.*

EVERY THIRTY-THREE YEARS Jingū-ji 神宮寺, a small Sōtō Zen temple in the Snow Country region of central Japan, stages thirty-three days of ceremonies commemorating the temple's main image of the bodhisattva Kannon 観音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara). Thirty-three is a sacred number for devotees of Kannon because this Buddhist deity of compassion is said to work miracles of salvation in this world while appearing in some thirty-three different stereotypical guises, ranging from a military general or king to a wife, child, or local god. Although *jingū-ji*, "shrine-temple," is a general term for the small Buddhist chapels (*ji*

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寺) once commonly found on the grounds of regional Japanese shrines (*jingū* 神宮) dedicated to local gods (*kami* 神), this particular Jingū-ji stands alone, and has never been associated with a local shrine or any particular kami.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the surrounding region, moreover, no other Buddhist temple is now or ever has been a *jingū-ji*. The current priests at Jingū-ji believe that it originally must have been seen as a regional shrine-temple serving the entire area. Jingū-ji's central Kannon image, therefore, would have embodied the fundamental Buddha-nature (*honji butsu* 本地仏) expressed by all the various kami and shrines throughout the region (TAKEUCHI 1992, pp. 486–88, 503–504).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jingū-ji's Kannon image is a "concealed Buddha" (*hibutsu* 秘仏), hidden from view within a small cabinet placed high on the altar of the temple's Kannon Hall. Perhaps because the Kannon represents the unseen ultimate reality that is merely suggested by the kami who appear in the daily lives of people, in ancient times Jingū-ji's Kannon could be worshiped only indirectly, by worshiping the local kami. No one other than monks whose meditative powers placed them in contact with the true nature of reality could be allowed to approach the Kannon. During the thirty-three days of ceremonies, however, the Kannon becomes accessible in a celebration referred to as an extended *kaichō* 開帳 (revealing). Throughout this thirty-three-day *kaichō* period the doors of the cabinet are open, the majesty of the image is revealed, and a series of religious ceremonies and special events reaffirm the temple's importance to the local community.<sup>2</sup>

Jingū-ji's *kaichō* reveals more than just its Kannon image. It also highlights the special relationships that exist in Japan between rural Zen temples, the local communities they depend on for support, and traditions of Buddhist devotionism. Jingū-ji, in fact, owes its continued economic viability to the expressions of faith generated by its once-every-thirty-three-years *kaichō*. Formal planning, fund-raising, and preparations for the ceremonies begin more than a year in advance.

<sup>1</sup> In this article I am following the established English-language convention of referring to religious buildings that house Buddhist images as "temples" and of referring to those that enshrine kami as "shrines." Historical reality does not really permit this artificial distinction, however, because prior to the modern creation of State Shinto during the Meiji period (ca. 1868–1912) and its artificial distinctions between Buddhist institutions and kami-centered institutions (now known as Shinto shrines) kami could assume the iconographic form of Buddhas, and Buddhas were often seen as kami. Today there is a small Gion shrine located in the town about 350 meters away from Jingū-ji, but it is thought to date from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, long after the temple had been established.

<sup>2</sup> The doors to the main Kannon image's cabinet are opened on other occasions, but usually for no more than a few hours.

By the time the thirty-three-day *kaichō* actually commences, people from all levels of the community, from government officials to businessmen, and from neighboring temple priests to block captains, have enlisted in the organization, financing, and performance of various events associated with the *kaichō*. Over the course of the preparations and performances the *kaichō* becomes a major occasion for reflection on the vicissitudes of village affairs. Participants and observers alike cannot help but remember how life has changed since the previous *kaichō* thirty-three years ago. Many pause to wonder what village life might be like thirty-three years hence. Community leaders express the opinion that as long as Jingū-ji's *kaichō* tradition continues, then the shared sense of village identity and cohesion will remain intact.

This article reports on Jingū-ji's most recent thirty-three day *kaichō*, which occurred in July and August of 1993. It presents data based on direct observation of the ceremonies accompanying the first two weeks of the *kaichō*, on Jingū-ji documents, and on secondary sources. Its findings are of necessity preliminary and descriptive. Yet even the limited data sheds much light not just on the communal significance of the *kaichō* ceremonies but also on how Jingū-ji (and other similar rural Zen temples) function as Buddhist cultic centers in contemporary Japan. The three parts of this report present, first, a brief overview of the *kaichō*'s geographical and historical context; second, a description of the current *kaichō*; third, reflections on the significance of Jingū-ji's *kaichō* as a contemporary example of Sōtō Zen in a Japanese town.<sup>3</sup>

### *Geographical and Historical Context*

Jingū-ji is located in the Tsumari 妻有 region of Niigata Prefecture near the banks of the Shinano River in what used to be the village of Yokkamachi 四日町, now a subsection of Tōkamachi City 十日町市 (a composite entity created by the merging together of several villages in 1954).<sup>4</sup> Local people pride themselves on the hardy stock of their ancestors, who prospered in spite of the harsh winters and severe snowfalls that routinely afflict the Tsumari plain. About forty feet of

<sup>3</sup> The title "Sōtō Zen in a Japanese Town" appeared by mistake in advance publicity brochures distributed by the University of Hawaii Press for my book, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan*. I liked the title so much that I could not resist using it for this article, for which it seems perfectly suited. The observations and data presented herein, however, are based on separate research not related to the above book.

<sup>4</sup> The place names "Yokkamachi" (literally, fourth-day town) and "Tōkamachi" (tenth-day town) originally referred to the day of the month on which the local market was held.

heavy, moist snow falls every winter, producing an average snowpack more than eight feet deep.<sup>5</sup> Buildings and roofs are built extra strong to withstand the enormous pressures exerted by the snow. Nonetheless, every year substantial snowfalls cause much damage. Snowstorms in 1841, for example, caused the thick thatched roof of Jingū-ji's Kannon Hall to collapse. Although such extensive destruction is rare, repair of snow damage to the thatched roofs of the Kannon Hall and the Main Gate (*sanmon* 山門) accounts for Jingū-ji's largest regular maintenance expense (currently about ¥2,000,000 per year).<sup>6</sup> In pre-modern Tsumari the long winter months were devoted to weaving a soft fine clothing crepe (*Echigo-chijimi* 越後縮) for which the region gained renown throughout Japan. Today textiles, especially the manufacture of silk cloth for traditional Japanese kimono, remain the largest industry in Tōkamachi. But despite local economic developments about half the area's high-school graduates eventually leave to find employment elsewhere. The official population of Tōkamachi as of March 1993 totalled 46,148, a decline of more than 3,000 since 1973.<sup>7</sup>

The vast majority of Buddhist temples in the Tsumari area are affiliated with either Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 or Sōtō Zen 曹洞禅, two denominations with roots in the late medieval period (i.e., fourteenth–sixteenth centuries). Jōdo Shinshū claims the allegiance of 1,196 temples (divided among seven sects, of which the Ōtani/Higashi Honganji 大谷/東本願寺 is the largest, with 852 temples), while Sōtō accounts for 883 temples. Other Buddhist schools are represented by a few temples each: Shingon 真言 with 214, Jishū 時宗 with 22, Tendai 天台 with 13, Shugendō 修験道 with 10, and Rinzaï Zen 臨濟禅 with 4. Yet the number of affiliated temples does not always indicate a religious denomination's true strength. In Tōkamachi, for example, at first glance Sōtō temples seem to be preeminent. Of the 53 temples found within the city limits 30 are affiliated with Sōtō, 8 with

<sup>5</sup> In living memory the most snowfall in one winter was sixty-nine feet, which fell in 1944–1945 (for a detailed account of snow in local culture, see TŌKAMACHI-SHI HAKUBUTSUKAN 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Maintenance of Jingū-ji's thatched roofs is one of the temple's major concerns. At present only about four or five men in Tōkamachi know how to repair a thatched roof in such a way that it can withstand heavy snowfalls. All of these men are over sixty years old, and none have any disciples to whom they can teach their skills. The roof of Jingū-ji's Main Gate was last replaced in 1978. At that time, although the work was supervised by a roofer from Tōkamachi, the workers were hired from other locations. As a result the shape of the new roof differs from its former appearance.

<sup>7</sup> Detailed information on Tsumari and Tōkamachi was supplied by the staff of the Tōkamachi City Museum (Tōkamachi-shi Hakubutsukan). Population figures for Yokkamachi alone were unavailable.

Shugendō, 7 with Tendai, 6 with Jōdo Shinshū, and only 2 with Jishū. However, just one Jishū temple, Raigō-ji 來迎寺 (known locally as Raikō-ji), commands the loyalties of half the families within Tōkamachi (TAKEUCHI 1989, p. 19–23). With *danka* 檀家 (affiliated households) of such numbers, clearly Raigō-ji must be the wealthiest (and most powerful) Buddhist temple in Tōkamachi.

#### AFFILIATED HOUSEHOLDS (*DANKA*)

Having a large number of *danka* insures a temple's financial security in a number of ways (see MARCURE 1985). First, *danka* contribute regular dues. They also provide free labor for maintenance and special events. They elect representatives to supervise the temple's affairs and manage annual festivals. Most importantly, they pay money (often great sums) to temple priests to perform funeral services and memorial rites for their ancestors. Usually the family tombstones and ancestral tablets (*ihai* 位牌) for each *danka* are physically located on the grounds of the Buddhist temple to which they are affiliated. It would be almost impossible to change one's temple affiliation, therefore, without losing contact with one's familial roots. In other words, temple affiliation is based not on any particularly Buddhist sentiments but inherited as a key component of filial piety. Even people who no longer feel any religious sentiments or personal ties to their family's temple usually will continue to pay money to that temple for funeral and memorial services. Businessmen will often contribute money not because they want the temple to prosper but because they believe that doing so will benefit the spirits of their ancestors, who in turn will help their descendants' businesses to prosper. For these reasons Occupation reforms at the end of World War II that eliminated the legal status of the concepts of *danka* and "household" failed to remove their social reality. The economic livelihood of most rural Buddhist temples continues to depend on the efforts of temple priests to maintain the traditional ancestral ties of *danka*.<sup>8</sup>

Jingū-ji is unique among Buddhist temples in Tōkamachi in that it has no *danka*. Jingū-ji's grounds contain no tombstones; its altars house no ancestral tablets, except those recording the names of its own previous priests. The current priests residing at Jingū-ji have never been called on to officiate at funerals or memorial services for lay people. Thus there are no families with ancestral ties whose members feel obligated from generation to generation to make donations to

<sup>8</sup> The complexity of the relationship between Buddhist temples and ancestors precludes a detailed discussion here. For useful overviews (with extensive bibliographies), see NEWELL 1976, and DEVOS and SOFUE 1984.



the temple. The lack of *danka* and the loss of all land rents in postwar land reforms has left Jingū-ji, the priests say, the poorest temple in Tōkamachi.<sup>9</sup> All three of the priests affiliated to Jingū-ji support themselves through full-time employment unrelated to the temple. Two are professors of Buddhist studies at colleges located in other cities; one is a historian at the Tōkamachi City Museum. Even their combined salaries, however, could never cover the expenses of maintaining Jingū-ji's grounds and buildings. Funds for this purpose must be raised from among the *danka* of Tōkamachi's other Buddhist temples. Ceremonies such as Jingū-ji's *kaichō* once every thirty-three years, therefore, assume special importance as fund-raising occasions. People donate funds to Jingū-ji, help organize the *kaichō*, and attend the *kaichō* ceremonies not out of any sense of familial obligation but because of the social and religious connections they feel to the temple and to its Kannon. Jingū-ji is a rare example of a Japanese village temple that depends upon local faith in its central image to generate most of its income (TAKEUCHI 1992, p. 454).

#### JINGŪ-JI'S KANNON

Jingū-ji's central image possesses all the necessary attributes for this task. It is actually a triad consisting of a Kannon in esoteric form, with a thousand arms and eleven heads, flanked by two attendants who are usually identified as Bishamonten 毘沙門天 (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa) and Kōmokuten 広目天 (Skt. Virūpākṣa). Only the Kannon is kept concealed. The two attendants stand exposed on either side of the special cabinet housing the Kannon. The government has designated all three images as protected cultural properties (*bunkazai*). Each image was carved out of a single piece of wood (cherry in the case of the Kannon and zelkova wood for the two attendants), which were then lacquered and decorated. Although the images retain some of their original lacquer and decorations, they also show signs of age and weathering. Their majestic ancient appearance is reinforced with the proper legendary pedigrees. Temple records written in 1683 state that the Kannon image was carved by Gyōgi 行基 (668–749, a popular Buddhist folk hero), that the two attendant images were carved by Enchin 円珍 (814–891, an early patriarch of the Tendai school), and that the image(s) were brought to Tsumari in 807 by the celebrated general Sakanoue-no-Tamuramaro 坂上田村麻呂 (758–811), who founded Jingū-ji in 808 after his successful military campaigns to extend the

<sup>9</sup> Before the land reforms, which occurred after World War II in 1945 and 1946, Jingū-ji received annual produce (twenty "bundles" [*tawara* 俵]) and rents from tenant farmers. Today, however, Jingū-ji has no fixed sources of income (HARADA 1981b, p. 29).

authority of the central court over the region (TAKEUCHI 1974, p. 10).

It is impossible, of course, to accept these assertions as historical fact. Art historians who have examined Jingū-ji's Kannon triad conclude that they probably date from the twelfth century and that their style suggests that they were fabricated outside of the cultural circle of Japan's central elite (SATŌ 1974, p. 16). Nonetheless, temple brochures and promotional literature often emphasize the more impressive-sounding eighth-century origins of the Kannon image. The temple tradition attributing great age to the images itself has a long history. In 1972, when the image of Kōmokuten was removed for repairs, an inscription dated 1370 was discovered on a strip of wood attached to the image. It stated that the three images, "already five hundred years old," had been repaired in 1370 after the abbot of Jingū-ji (the temple is identified by name and by location) successfully raised funds (*kanjin* 勧進) for the purpose of restoring the temple buildings. In other words, already in 1370 priests at Jingū-ji believed that the attendant images dated from about 870 (i.e., during Enchō's lifetime) and were citing the great age of the images in their fund-raising efforts (TAKEUCHI 1973, pp. 65–67). Local folklorists, moreover, assert that Tōkamachi's Jingū-ji is the "Jingū-ji Kannon Chapel of Echigo Province" mentioned in the central court's tenth-century tax rolls (TAKEUCHI 1992, pp. 504–506).<sup>10</sup> This identification, however, is mere speculation. Other than the above-mentioned 1370 inscription, no temple records date from before 1683.

#### JINGŪ-JI'S KAICHŌ TRADITION

Jingū-ji's Kannon image had probably remained virtually unseen from the time it was repaired in 1370 until 1681, when the cabinet doors are said to have magically opened by themselves. Only one year before, a Sōtō monk named Hakugan Dōjun 朴巖菴淳 (1640–1733) had taken up residence in the then-deserted Jingū-ji. When Hakugan saw the Kannon exposed, he immediately closed the cabinet doors. Evidently the experience frightened him a great deal, for he promptly began a program of austerities. He wrote that he eventually recited Mahāyāna scriptures one hundred times, recited *dhāraṇī* (mystical syllables) 33,300 times, and performed full prostrations 33,333 times. Hakugan's efforts kept the image quiet for a while, but in early 1686 he reported many additional supernatural signs. Hakugan believed that these signs (he did not specify their nature) indicated that the

<sup>10</sup> TAKEUCHI (1992, pp. 504–506) cites NAKAUONUMA-GUN KYŌIKUKAI 1919, pp. 470–71; and *Engishiki* (ca. 927), fasc. 26, rpt. in *KOKUSHI TAIKEI* 1937, vol. 26, p. 648, ll. 8–9. The *Engishiki* tax rolls mention an "Echigo Jingū-ji Kannon-in" 越後神宮寺觀音院 but it is impossible to verify the precise referent.

Kannon image wanted to be revealed and wanted Jingū-ji to prosper. He therefore organized a series of ceremonies for Jingū-ji's first thirty-three-day extended *kaichō*, which he conducted during the summer of that year.

This first *kaichō* must have generated many expressions of support. Hakugan reported receiving donations of one hundred thirty-three lanterns, numerous incense burners, scriptures, flower vases, and so forth. Moreover many trees were planted (TAKEUCHI 1992, pp. 464–66). Temple tradition considers 1680, the year Hakugan first came to Jingū-ji, as the official date Jingū-ji became affiliated with the Sōtō order, but actually Hakugan did not receive permission from the Bakufu to restore the temple buildings until thirty years later, in 1710 (TAKEUCHI 1981, p. 5). By this time, presumably, all the households in the vicinity had been assigned *danka* status at other temples.

When Hakugan first arrived the only temple building was a small, run-down Kannon Hall. Hakugan repaired and enlarged this hall in 1710, but could not add other buildings. During his successors' terms the temple received the donation of guardian figures (*niō* 仁王) for a proper gatehouse and ordered plans for one to be drawn, but no construction occurred. Jingū-ji's present Kannon Hall and Main Gate were constructed under the direction of the temple's fourth abbot, Shuzan Ryōhaku 守山良朴 (d. 1798). Shuzan Ryōhaku accomplished much more than the designs of his predecessors. He must have been a gifted fund-raiser. Over a twenty-three-year period, from 1761 until 1783—a time marked by local famines and peasant uprisings—he organized a series of major construction projects. His campaign to erect the main gate commenced in 1761. Actual framing began in 1763. The guardian figures were enshrined in the lower portals and in 1766 a triad of the Buddha Amida flanked by two bodhisattvas was placed in the second level. The following year thirty-three images of Kannon, each housed in its own cabinet and each representing one of the thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage sites of western Japan (Saikoku 西国, i.e., Kansai), were placed in the gatehouse's second level. As soon as the gatehouse was dedicated in 1769, he raised funds for the construction of a shrine (completed in 1772) dedicated to Inari, the kami of fertility and prosperity usually depicted in the form of a fox. He then turned his attention to the construction of an entirely new, enlarged Kannon Hall, which was completed ten years later in 1782. Finally, in 1783 he erected another smaller hall to house a large bronze image of a seated Kannon (TAKEUCHI 1981, pp. 5–8).

*Kaichō* ceremonies must have played a prominent role in Shuzan's fund-raising activities. The record of his accomplishments, however, only mentions results, not his means of attaining them. Using the

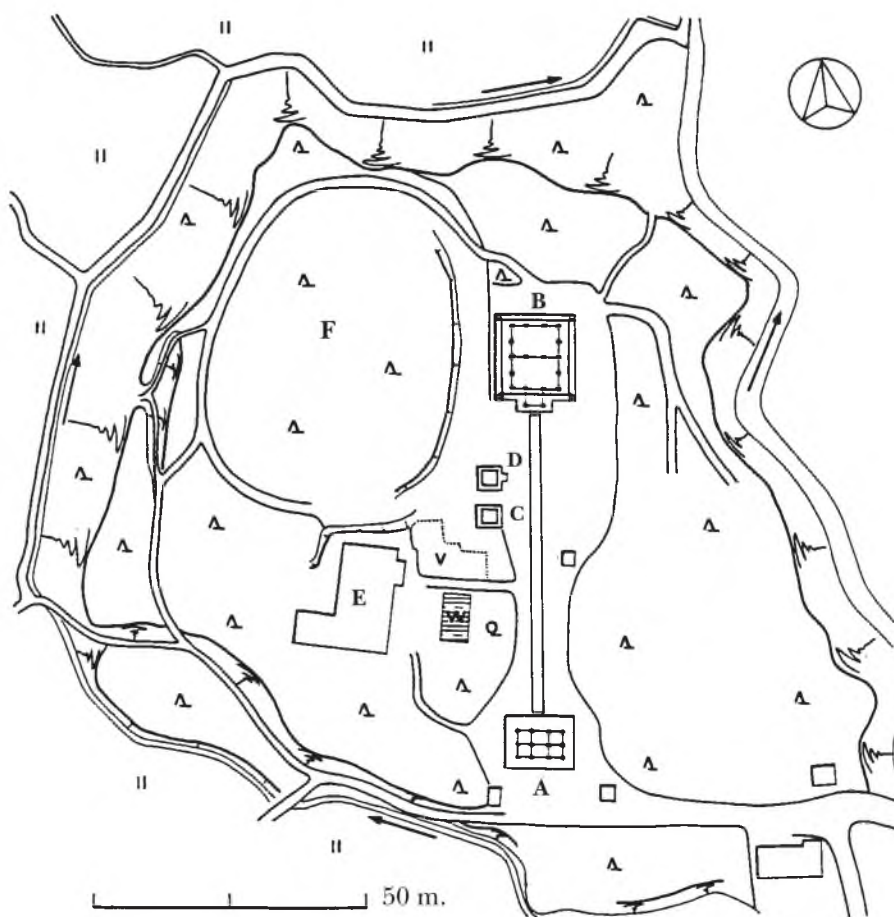


stock expressions typical of such accounts, it merely states that Shuzan converted people of all types, and erected new buildings as offerings for the emperor's long life, for peace in the nation, for seasonal regularity, for abundant harvests, for all beings in the six realms of existence, for the elimination of suffering, for the attainment of pleasure, and so forth (TAKEUCHI 1981, p. 7). Since late medieval times *kaichō* ceremonies have been standard occasions for fund-raising (*kanjin*) campaigns at temples across Japan. A *kaichō* is an event for which temples can freely solicit funds from pilgrims and patrons at large. It would be highly unlikely that Shuzan's efforts were an exception. After Jingū-ji's first thirty-three-day *kaichō* ceremonies in 1686, however, no records indicate when the next one occurred. Various evidence suggests that the current practice of staging a thirty-three-day *kaichō* once every thirty-three years goes back at least as early as 1828. Thus, extended *kaichō* ceremonies on this cycle occurred in 1828, 1861, 1894, 1927, 1960, and 1993. The next one is scheduled for the year 2026.

#### JINGŪ-JI AS PUBLIC SPACE

Although Jingū-ji might be financially poor because of its lack of *danka*, it is rich in cultural assets. The Main Gate and Kannon Hall erected by Shuzan are widely recognized as the most impressive religious architectural structures in the Tsumari region. Their wood frames stand tall and narrow, giving an impression of relative lightness, in contrast to which the massive thatched roofs soaring over them appear impossibly overweight. The steep pitch of their roofs (about 45 degrees), which helps the abundant snowfalls to slide off, result in rooflines that constitute more than half of each building's overall height. The Main Gate and Kannon Hall have no doors; anyone can enter them day or night (ARAKI 1981, pp. 10–15). The government has designated both as protected cultural properties. The natural setting of Jingū-ji's buildings, which sit amidst a shady forest of about five hundred tall cryptomeria, enhances their charm. Other temples in Tōkamachi might have more spacious main halls, but none of them can match Jingū-ji's refinement. The other temples typically consist of a single modern building with a metal roof, plain siding, and closed doors. If they are fortunate enough to possess spacious grounds, they are surrounded by tombstones instead of trees. From first glance they appear different in character and function from

<sup>11</sup> Inside these *danka* temples there is always a special room, usually located behind the main altar, in which are placed the ancestral tablets (*ihai*) for each *danka* household. On entering one of these rooms usually it is immediately apparent which families in the local community are the wealthiest or most prestigious, because they will possess the most impressive tablets, displayed in the most honored locations. The arrangement of the other tablets



Map of Jingū-ji

▲ = forest

Q = garden

☐ = pond

|| = rice paddy

A. Main Gate 山門

B. Kannon Hall 観音堂

C. Smaller Kannon Chapel 十一面観音堂

D. Inari Shrine 稻荷社

E. Residence 庫院 (*kuin*)

F. Former Race Track

Jingū-ji.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout much of its recent history Jingū-ji has performed the important social role of providing an open public space where community events can occur. During the Meiji and Taishō periods (1868–1925), when the government encouraged all Japanese to visit the Ise Shrine, groups of Ise pilgrims from the area began their journeys with a rendezvous at Jingū-ji and ended them by returning to the temple, where their families and friends would be waiting for them. The group's safe return would be celebrated in the Kannon Hall with much food, drink, and humorous stories of the travelers' adventures. In the 1930s temple priests organized a Nenbutsu Society 念仏講. Its members were mostly elderly men who would gather at the Kannon Hall at periodic intervals for evenings that would begin with some Buddhist chanting and end with singing and drinking. Village housewives also scheduled regular meetings at the Kannon Hall for pot-luck dinners and to trade recipes and gossip. Even teenage girls who merely wanted to step out of the house and enjoy the fresh evening air could readily do so on the pretext of going to visit the Kannon Hall. Today the Kannon Hall no longer witnesses these events. No one leads group pilgrimages to Ise. The Nenbutsu Society gradually fell apart after the government opened a community center in 1960. Local housewives occasionally still enjoy spending an evening talking and drinking tea at Jingū-ji, but teenagers will go to one of the movie theaters, shopping centers, or restaurants that have appeared in the past twenty years (HARADA 1981b, pp. 31–32).

The community events that people most often associate with Jingū-ji are the old horse market and horse races. Farmers in the Tsumari region have always raised plow horses. After the turn of the century, when the Imperial Japanese Army attempted to harness these plow horses for military maneuvers, however, they discovered that the local breeds lacked the necessary strength and stamina. In response, farmers in Tsumari formed a stockbreeders' association to raise new breeds. Beginning in 1911 they held an annual market at Jingū-ji. During market week a festival atmosphere would ensue. Large crowds of spectators came just to admire the animals. Local merchants set up stalls

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often, to a certain extent, reflects the social hierarchy among the *danka*. The location of this room behind the main altar is deliberate. It insures that when members of affiliated households prostrate before the altar, they also prostrate before the tablets commemorating their ancestors, and all the ancestors of the *danka*. Standing in the middle of one of these rooms surrounded by ancestral tablets is like standing in a bank vault full of gold bars. The rows and rows of tablets reaching to the ceiling represent untold wealth—maybe not monetary wealth, but a wealth of emotional commitments and familial connections.

selling fresh fruit, snack foods, saké, and craft goods. Once buyers and sellers had reached a mutually agreeable price, they usually drank saké together at one of the stalls to seal the bargain. During a typical market week seventy to eighty horses changed hands.

After 1914 the stockbreeders also organized horse races at Jingū-ji. They laid out an oval track and spectator stands next to the Kannon Hall. During the 1930s it was the most popular annual event in the region. Local government leaders officiated. The contestants were local farmers, some in their 40s and 50s, riding their own farm horses. Before each match they prayed (accompanied by their horses) at the Kannon Hall. Of course they always threw money in the offering box. Some placed bets. Most rode bareback, but they decorated their horses with ribbons. The races always occurred on the morning of the Yokkamachi summer festival. Thus the day's festivities began at Jingū-ji and then moved down the street to the town's Gion Shrine in the afternoon. The outcome of the races determined which neighborhood groups carried the *mikoshi* 神輿 (portable shrine) through the village. The markets and races all but disappeared during the Second World War when the army confiscated most horses. The events revived briefly after the war ended, but stopped altogether in 1955 as mechanized agriculture eliminated the market for plow horses (HARADA 1981b, pp. 32–34).

### *The 1993 Kaichō*

The current head priest of Jingū-ji, Takeuchi Michio, states that few villagers would notice, initially at least, if the once-every-thirty-three-years *kaichō* did not reoccur. He insists that the ceremonies conducted during the thirty-three-day *kaichō* represent only the priests' attempts to maintain a temple tradition and do not reflect the villagers' desires or sentiments. He recalls how his predecessor always taught him that the thirty-third-year *kaichō* is performed as an expression of gratitude for Shuzan Ryōhaku's labors in constructing the Main Gate and Kannon Hall and asserts that the *kaichō* is for the temple, not for the village.

Villagers, nevertheless, have a direct voice in the management of both Jingū-ji and the *kaichō* itself. Villagers raise the funds that support the temple, and they largely determine how the revenue is spent. The villagers become more visibly emotional and sentimental during the *kaichō* events. Only the minutiae of the ritual ceremonies performed by the priests remain outside the province of villager purview. Yet even these rituals are designed to draw the villagers into the reli-

gious world of Jingū-ji's Kannon. Moreover, the arcane priestly rituals occur within a larger contextual frame of other social events and entertainments staged for the enjoyment of the entire community.

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Jingū-ji's usual financial affairs are supervised by a committee officially known as the Society for the Maintenance of the Cultural Treasure Kannon Image (*Bunkazai Kanzeon gojikai* 文化財観世音護持会). It consists of a president (*kaichō* 会長), two vice presidents (*fuku-kaichō* 副会長), seven congregational representatives (*shinto sōdai* 信徒惣代), a board of trustees (*hyōgi-in* 評議員) with about fifty members, and about seven-hundred member households. Each member household contributes yearly dues, which pay for the basic maintenance of Jingū-ji's buildings and grounds. These dues cover only a fraction of Jingū-ji's overall expenses. Annual religious events (i.e., ritual ceremonies and community festivals) must support themselves by attracting special patrons and donations. Extensive repairs or special events require separate fund-raising drives. In most of these cases Jingū-ji's priests and the congregational representatives first meet to draft a proposed budget, which then must be submitted to the trustees for approval. Once the board of trustees agrees on the budget, designated trustees will solicit additional contributions from the member households. The trustees meet only twice a year, but the congregational representatives, informally known as the temple's caretakers (*sewanin* 世話人), meet much more often. Because they oversee the actual financial expenditures, their regular presence insures that no hint of scandal arises from misuse of temple funds.<sup>12</sup> An additional group of lay volunteer workers (*deiri* 出入), most of whom are retirees, perform the physical tasks necessary for Jingū-ji's daily operations (HARADA 1981b, pp. 29–30).

The planning and management of Jingū-ji's extended *kaichō* required the formation of a larger specialized committee (*jikkōkai* 実行会) that could devote its full attention solely to this one affair. The Jikkōkai's organizational outline listed the names of one hundred forty individuals, grouped in the following categories: a president, two vice presidents, advisers (*komon* 顧問, i.e., the mayor and other city officials), consultants (*san'yo* 参与, i.e., four local businessmen who directed the fund-raising), two accountants (*kanji* 監事), an eleven-

<sup>12</sup> Temple priests must be especially careful in their expenditures during and after any fund-raising campaigns. One of Jingū-ji's priests, for example, said that he replaced his automobile the year before the *kaichō* even though the car probably could have been used for another year. If he had waited for the car to wear out completely, he risked creating the inappropriate appearance of seeming to improve his own living standards at a time when the temple was seeking additional contributions.



member executive committee (*kanji* 幹事), Jingū-ji's priests, a subcommittee on religious ceremonies, a subcommittee of local specialists (e.g., folk dance, drama groups, housewife groups, poetry, tourism, etc.), congregational representatives, temple workers, as well as groups of regional representatives for major businesses, for other temples, and for each neighborhood block (JINGŪ-JI 1993b, p. 4). The committee's president was a prominent community leader who served mainly as a prestigious figurehead, while the vice presidents actually supervised the committee's work. Although long-term planning for the *kaichō* began several years in advance, the bulk of the Jikkōkai's meetings occurred during the fourteen-month period preceding the events. During this time frame Jingū-ji's buildings and images had to be renovated, the ceremonies planned, guest lists compiled, seating charts drawn, souvenirs designed, pamphlets printed, workers recruited, and many special goods (curtains, stationery, ritual implements, etc.) ordered.

#### FUND-RAISING

Of all the tasks confronted by the Jikkōkai none required more time and attention than fund-raising (see the chronology of Jikkōkai meetings in JINGŪ-JI 1993b, pp. 2–3). The *kaichō* naturally generated income from many different sources. The temple's offering boxes (wooden receptacles strategically located before each altar), for example, collected more contributions simply because larger numbers of people visited the temple. Honored guests invited to attend one or another of the *kaichō* ceremonies naturally came bearing gifts. Most seem to have given large gift boxes of saké, which by the end of the *kaichō* filled the temple storeroom. Visitors also purchased a wide variety of Jingū-ji souvenirs, such as headbands, curtains, boxes of matches, postcards, playing cards, telephone cards (used in Japanese pay phones), posters, photographs, and commemorative saké (sold in three different grades)—all adorned with images of Jingū-ji or Jingū-ji's Kannon and the date of the *kaichō*. The most common design element used in the souvenirs reproduced a wood-block print that depicted one of the horse races formerly held at Jingū-ji. Clearly, for most older villagers Jingū-ji's horse races represented a cherished time in their lives. Several of the Buddhist rituals performed during the course of the *kaichō* also generated revenue. The ceremony for chanting the Great Perfection of Wisdom Scripture (*Daihannya-e* 大般若会) on 17 July, for example, served to consecrate protective talismans (*kitō fuda* 祈禱札) for local villagers who gave donations for this particular purpose. Likewise, the Kannon prayer services (*kitō-e* 祈禱会) on 27 July

and 8 August attracted separate contributions from villagers who believe that donations presented for these rituals must render their own prayers spiritually more efficacious.

The Jikkōkai, however, concerned itself not with revenues generated by activities during the *kaichō* but with the direct solicitations (*kanjin* 勧進) conducted in advance. The Jikkōkai calculated the budget for all preparations, restorations, ceremonies, meals, and gifts during the *kaichō* based on their estimates of how much money could be raised by direct solicitation, by far the single largest source of revenue. The list of potential donors included everyone who might have a connection, no matter how tenuous, to Jingū-ji—not just the usual member households, but also city officials, prominent businessmen, local landowners, and anyone who had sold materials to Jingū-ji or organized a public event there. The trickiest part of the planning was deciding which households should be approached first and how large a donation should be requested of them. Members of the Jikkōkai believe that this step largely determines the subsequent course of any fund-raising drive. This is because all subsequent contributors will first ask how much was donated by the village's prominent families and landowners. Then they will calculate the amount of their own contribution on the basis of how they judge their relative social standing vis-à-vis the village's leading families. In other words, the Jikkōkai fund-raisers believe that most households determine the amount of their contributions as much on the basis of their understanding of traditional village social hierarchy as on any personal religious sentiment (cf. MARSHALL 1985). According to this line of thought, if a household's social standing is substantially lower than that of landowner "X," then their contribution also will be significantly less.

After months of careful planning, during which the variety, scale, and budget of all the *kaichō* activities were determined, the Jikkōkai began active solicitations in September 1992. At that time the president of the Jikkōkai, Takizawa Tōchō, and Jingū-ji's head priest, Takeuchi Michio, mailed letters of solicitation (*kaichō kanjin shuisho* 開帳勧進趣意書), which briefly explained the purpose and budget of the *kaichō*, to several thousand potential supporters. The text of the letters began as follows:

One thousand twelve-hundred years have passed since Jingū-ji's main image, a Kannon with eleven heads and one thousand arms, came here to become the protective deity of the Tsumari region. Throughout the ages this Kannon has been praised for responding to the prayers of local people and for granting numerous miracles to people in Tsumari and to peo-

ple everywhere who have deep faith.

Moreover, in recent years its value as an Important Cultural Property has been duly recognized. Niigata Prefecture has designated the main Kannon image, its two attendant images of Bishamonten and Kōmokuten, the Kannon Hall, and the Main Gate as Cultural Properties. The city of Tōkamachi has recognized Jingū-ji's forest and grounds as a Historical Landmark.

This ancient temple and its holy grounds, which have been maintained through the faith and labors of our ancestors, will conduct its Once-Every-Thirty-Three-Years Extended Thirty-Three-Day Kaichō next year from 15 July to 18 August. In meeting this memorable occasion, the likes of which is so difficult to encounter, we will realize the great significance of this Buddhist connection and properly repay our indebtedness to our ancestors. For this purpose we have drawn up the following plans to delight and benefit all the citizens of this region....

The letter next outlined the major expenses entailed in the preparations and performance of the *kaichō*. The costs were considerable. This *kaichō* represented Jingū-ji's first real opportunity during the past thirty-three years to raise funds for major maintenance expenditures, such as new buildings for the seated Kannon image and the Inari Shrine (rebuilt at a cost of about ¥7,000,000 apiece), refinishing for all the thirty-three images of Kannon in the Main Gate, new lacquer for the cabinets that house the various Kannon images, major foundation work on the Kannon Hall (the rear of which had begun to collapse), the purchase of new curtains and mats, and so forth. All the temple buildings were cleaned and fixed up to a degree far beyond their usual state of benign neglect. Having properly readied the site of the *kaichō* ceremonies, naturally no expense could be spared in staging them. The temple grounds were equipped with a reception booth, viewing stands, floodlights, and a public address system. No fewer than fifteen Buddhist ritual services were performed, involving the participation of priests from eighteen other temples in the Tōkamachi area as well as a visit by the abbot of Sōji-ji 総持寺, one of the dual headquarter temples for the entire Sōtō Zen order. Several of these rituals were accompanied by public entertainments (described below) for the enjoyment of the community; all were staged in ways that encouraged lay involvement. Finally, certain expenses resulted from the need to properly thank those who contributed money. Guests of honor were invited to each ritual service and afterwards invited into the temple to eat and drink with the priests. Every contributor received special gifts and souvenirs, carefully calibrated to correspond to the

amount of the contribution. The letter of solicitation stated a fund-raising goal of ¥35,000,000.

In addition to the broad-based letter of solicitation, the Jikkōkai also solicited narrow-purpose contributions from selected individuals. The prime example of fund-raising for specific purposes concerns the thirty-three small Kannon images housed in the second level of Jingū-ji's Main Gate, which were refurbished (cleaned, repaired, and relacquered) for this *kaichō*. These images had been donated to Jingū-ji in 1767 and were last repaired in 1882. Next to each image is a small wooden plaque written in 1882 that recorded who donated how much money for the repair work on that particular image. In most cases the Jikkōkai could locate descendants of these 1882 donors living in the local area. The descendants then were asked to contribute money to maintain the same image to which their ancestors had already established a family link. In what could be called an "Adopt a Kannon" program, nineteen families of descendants responded with donations. In return each sponsor received a large-format glossy color photograph of his own Kannon statue, properly engraved with an acknowledgment of his sponsorship, as well as a Kannon talisman, a small Kannon pillar (*tōba* 塔婆) to place in his home altar (*butsudan* 仏壇), a copy of the Kannon Sūtra embossed with Jingū-ji's name and the date of the *kaichō*, as well as other gifts. New sponsors (who received the same types of gifts) were found for the remaining Kannon images. New plaques recording the names of each sponsor were also placed next to each image.

Almost without question everyone on Jingū-ji's list of potential *kaichō* sponsors was the *danka* of another local temple.<sup>13</sup> Because Jingū-ji maintains cordial relations with Tōkamachi's other temples, this type of extra-congregational fund-raising created no conflicts. In fact, priests from many of the neighboring temples cooperated closely in planning the *kaichō* and participated in its rituals. Most local Sōtō priests stood to benefit from their participation, because the greater the success of Jingū-ji's fund-raising the more complex the *kaichō* ceremonies would become, and the larger would be the cash gifts received by the visiting priests. The priests of Shinjō-in 真浄院 (Jingū-ji's head temple) and of Chisen-ji 智泉寺 (the head temple for all of Tōkamachi's Sōtō institutions), in particular, strongly encouraged their temples' *danka* to support Jingū-ji's *kaichō* with generosity. Shinjō-in's extra support derived from its institutional links to Jingū-ji;

<sup>13</sup> Members of the Jikkōkai and Jingū-ji's priests believed that no Christians or members of other non-Buddhist religions had been solicited for contributions, but no one was certain of this.

in the case of Chisen-ji, its head priest is a “Dharma relative” (*hōru* 法類) of the head priest of Jingū-ji because both are disciples of the same Zen master.<sup>14</sup> Extra-congregational cooperation was not limited just to Sōtō temples, however. The priest from a local Tendai temple, Daiju-ji 大寿寺, for example, also participated in several of Jingū-ji’s *kaichō* rituals.

Jingū-ji’s direct fund-raising drive was a great success. By the time the *kaichō* ceremonies were ready to begin the Jikkōkai had already received cash contributions from more than three thousand sponsors, for a combined total of more than ¥50,000,000, an amount which easily exceeded their original goal of ¥35,000,000. The success of the fund-raising drive resulted from a variety of factors, but one that should not be underestimated is the psychological effect of the *kaichō*’s time frame (i.e., its cycle of once every thirty-three years). Many villagers clearly felt that the right time had come to express their appreciation of the temple and what it represented to the community. People, particularly those who had some kind of long-standing relationship with Jingū-ji, were eager to volunteer their time and resources, even when not solicited. An extreme example of an unsolicited donation was one provided by a man who raises goldfish in a pond that borders Jingū-ji. The goldfish pond is fed by fresh springwater, which bubbles up out of the side of the hill that marks the boundary of Jingū-ji’s forest. Jingū-ji does not own the springwater that helps create an ideal environment for goldfish. Nonetheless, the goldfish breeder had won many prizes and earned a good income. To express his gratitude to Jingū-ji he built a large stone pool around the spot where the springwater emerges from the ground and donated a large stone image of Kannon (labeled a *kiyomizu* 清水, or “pure water,” Kannon) to guard over the site. Certainly the goldfish breeder expected the Kannon image to benefit him as much as it benefited Jingū-ji, but it is extremely unlikely that he would have donated it at any other time. In the eyes of local observers the fact that it was donated for the *kaichō*, and thus would be consecrated during the *kaichō* events, rendered the gift all the more significant.

#### NOSTALGIA

When measured against an average human lifetime, the thirty-three years that separate each of Jingū-ji’s extended *kaichō* ceremonies represent a considerable span of time. Many of the planners, participants, and observers of the *kaichō*, therefore, described their involvement in

<sup>14</sup> Although the concept of “Dharma relative” (*hōru*) technically refers only to the priests who share the same Dharma lineage, in casual speech this term is applied directly to the temples at which they reside. Thus, Chisen-ji is referred to as Jingū-ji’s *hōru*.



the *kaichō* in terms of life stages. Someone who experiences a *kaichō* as a child will have attained full status as an adult (and probably have become a parent) by the time of the next *kaichō*, and will have become an elder member of the community (probably facing retirement) by the time of the one after that. Someone who was born shortly after one *kaichō* probably can expect to experience only two during his or her lifetime. The emotional significance of this time frame is not immediately obvious, but becomes clear through conversations with residents of Yokkamachi. After numerous discussions in which villagers were asked to explain what the *kaichō* represented to them, a common pattern emerged in their responses. Person after person said that as a child or young adult they had hardly noticed the previous *kaichō* thirty-three years earlier. When they first heard of plans for this *kaichō*, too, they gave it little thought, but over the year-long course of the planning and preparations their attitudes gradually changed. They began to identify the *kaichō* not just with Jinguji's Kannon but also with a heartfelt nostalgia over the changing seasons of their own lives.

In conversations the themes of death and of the bonds between generations predominated. The most commonly repeated statement by older villagers was: "I won't be alive in another thirty-three years." Such statements were delivered not with sadness or bitterness, but in such a way as to justify the speaker's full commitment to the *kaichō* ceremonies. One lay worker made this assertion explicit when he said: "This might be my last chance to do a good job." An elderly city official said, "Thirty-three years ago I hardly thought anything about the *kaichō*. Today, though, the past thirty-three years come back and I feel very moved." People stressed that they worked hard for the *kaichō* ceremonies to be a success not for themselves but for their children. They expressed the desire that their children inherit knowledge of their local traditions and learn what aspects of local life have assumed special meaning over the years. One of the *kaichō* events was a special day of children's activities (e.g., nature walks, athletic contests, a kids' luncheon, and the burying of a time capsule). Even priests found themselves caught up in the sentimental atmosphere of the occasion. A priest from another Sōtō temple said: "These rituals are nothing special for us. We perform them just as we would any other temple ceremony. But inwardly I cannot help but calculate that the next time this event occurs I will be 82 years old. In spite of myself the ceremonies assume a special significance."

This priest's statement hints at a key element in the strong emotions evoked by the thirty-three-year *kaichō* cycle: namely, it leads people not just to look to the past but also to contemplate the future—a future in

which the current observers might not exist. Perhaps because Tōkamachi is a rural town of declining population, the *kaichō* seemed relatively uninfluenced by recent trends, popular in growing urban areas, to construct an artificial culture of nostalgia (KELLY 1986, ROBERTSON 1987, 1988). Overall, the *kaichō* lacked any overt attempt to recapture the spirit of earlier times deemed lost. None of Jingū-ji's *kaichō* ceremonies consciously evoked themes of "return" or "renewal," or themes that could be labeled a "reinvention of tradition." Throughout the *kaichō* Jingū-ji staged the usual types of ceremonies and events that Jingū-ji priests perform on other occasions during the calendar year. The only difference was that the events were staged one after another, on a grander scale. At most of these events a villager unaware of the "once-every-thirty-three years" context probably would not notice anything remarkable except that there were many more priests than usual and the temple buildings had been cleaned, fixed up, and decorated. Yet simply because so many of Jingū-ji's routine ceremonies were concentrated into a thirty-three day time frame they reinforced one another and reminded people of the many times Jingū-ji played a role in their lives. In this way the *kaichō* linked Jingū-ji to the passage of time, especially to the impermanence of human life, and assumed overtones of nostalgia.

Another notable feature of the *kaichō* was its isolation from urban tourists. Although in recent years a growing number of rural shrines and temples have widely advertised religious events to attract tourism from urban Japanese who wish to rediscover the so-called (and often newly invented) "traditional" Japanese culture of their grandparents, Jingū-ji made no efforts to publicize the *kaichō* in the national media or even outside Tōkamachi. Unlike many other religious events in modern Japan, no posters appeared in bus and train stations, no television cameras broadcast highlights on local or national news programs, and no tourists came to partake of the native heritage they represent. In all respects the ceremonies remained strictly local, noncommercial affairs. Even within Tōkamachi's city limits, posters or signs mentioning the *kaichō* could be found only within the historical boundaries of Yokkamachi. The few street booths (*tekiya*) stationed next to Jingū-ji's Main Gate were manned by Yokkamachi merchants, not by the professional peddlers who travel a circuit from festival to festival.

#### CEREMONIES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

Full details of the Buddhist ritual services performed during the thirty-three-day period of Jingū-ji's *kaichō* need not be recounted here. Most

<sup>15</sup> For detailed textual descriptions of the standard format of most Sōtō rituals, see FUJII 1977, HOSHIMI KENKYŪKAI SŌTŌBU 1983, and SŌTOSHŪ SHUMUCHŌ KYŌGAKUBU 1988.

of them followed the same standard formats observed at most Japanese Sōtō Zen temples.<sup>15</sup> (A list of the *kaichō* ceremonies appears in Appendix 1.) The social context of the rituals, however, deserves careful attention, especially the ways in which this context facilitated lay participation in the rituals and blended together formal priestly rituals with popular entertainments. These aspects of the *kaichō* ceremonies can be illustrated by a brief consideration of two events that formally began the *kaichō*: the consecration of the site and images, and the revealing of the main Kannon image.

Images used as objects of worship in Japanese Buddhism derive their spiritual potency mainly from the religious mental state of the worshiper, but also to a certain degree from the artist who created the image (thus the tendency to link temple images with famous Buddhist saints such as Gyōgi), and from the priest who consecrated the image. Consecrations involve both visible, physical actions (e.g., *tengen* 点眼, literally “dotting of the eyes” of the image) performed by the ritual master, and the spiritual process (*kaigen* 開眼, “opening the eyes” of the image) by which the master’s intangible mind of enlightenment is conferred on the image (SUGIMOTO 1982, pp. 84–93). In common Japanese Buddhist practice any newly crafted image must be properly consecrated before it can be regarded as a living manifestation of Buddhist enlightenment and thus function as an appropriate object of reverence. In many cases, images will also be consecrated again after they (or the altars/cabinets holding them) have been moved, repaired, or refurbished, or before any important ceremony in which they will play a central role. In Jingū-ji’s case, not only had many of the temple’s images been restored, they were also to be the focus of a major event that occurs only once every thirty-three years. Thus the first few days of Jingū-ji’s *kaichō* witnessed a series of consecrations.

In Sōtō Zen, consecration rituals provide temple priests with an opportunity to enact the rarefied role of “Zen Master,” giving full display to all the traditional symbols of Zen enlightenment. In the example of Jingū-ji, the head priest wore his finest embroidered robes. On his head sat a special peaked hood and in his hand was a large whisk (*hossu* 拂子)—both symbols of spiritual authority. At the appropriate ritual moments the head priest delivered a sermon in Sino-Japanese (which he had composed in Classical Chinese for the occasion), waved his Zen whisk to draw large circles in the air, picked up a dry writing brush to dot in imaginary eyes (the items being consecrated were not actually touched), and gave a loud Zen shout. His every gesture was arcane, stylized, and charged with dramatic intensity. To add grandeur to the rituals he was surrounded by a full contingent of priests, who also wore fine colored robes (although ones not as fine as the head

priest's). The surrounding priests carried incense burners, oblation vases, flower petals, gongs, drums, and bells. The entire group marched in formation to the ritual site, bowed repeatedly, handed religious implements back and forth, changed positions several times, chanted various scriptures, sounded various musical instruments, and generally conveyed an image of being intensely engaged in a spiritual exercise beyond the ken of the average person. In fact, almost the entire consecration ritual seemed designed to mystify the uninitiated and to emphasize the spiritual gap separating the common-sense world inhabited by lay people from the ritual realm of the priests.

Yet the larger context of these same rituals indivisibly bonded priests and laity together. All the rituals occurred in front of a lay audience consisting of invited guests, city officials, major sponsors, and general members of the community. Most of the audience joined the priests at banquets immediately following each ritual, during which they were personally thanked for their financial support. They heard explanations of the overall religious significance of the ritual, the arcane meaning of the various ritual gestures, and a modern-language translation of the sermon delivered earlier in Sino-Japanese. During the banquets, of course, priests and laity exchanged toasts and drinks; they concluded the meal by singing local folk songs. In other words, the laity gained knowledge of priestly lore while the priests reentered the layman's world of social values and hierarchy. Clearly the consecration rituals were community events, at which the priests merely represented (responded to and directed) communal religious aspirations.

More significant than the mere presence of the laity was the fact that they were also invited to participate in the ritual worship led by the priests. Each consecration ritual concluded with a similar series of actions (JINGŪ-JI 1993f). After formally dedicating the image, the priests lit incense, recited scripture, redirected the merit of these actions toward the benefit of all sentient beings, and ritually bowed before the image. Next the lay people in attendance lined up between the priests to approach the image one-by-one. The lay people stood at the same temporary altar as had the priests, felt the smoke from the incense (which had been lit earlier by the priests) waft over their faces and clothes, and bowed their heads in prayer as the priests, who stood on either side, chanted. Thus lay people not only occupied the center of the ritual site, but their devotions, mingled with the reverberations of the priests' voices, concluded the spiritual drama staged by the priests. During the consecration of the Inari Shrine, moreover, the lay worshipers reenacted the offerings of the priests, which they had wit-

nessed just moments before. In this case the distinctions between priestly ritual and lay worship, or between Buddhist lore (which identifies Inari as a tutelary spirit that protects monastic property) and lay religiosity (which responds to Inari as a kami of fecundity and commerce) completely disappeared. Whether any particular ritual act embodied one or all of these elements depended solely on the observer's point of view.

This blurring together of seemingly disparate social and religious functions also was a key feature of the ceremonial revealing of the main Kannon image. This early evening event was one of the best attended of the entire thirty-three days. People packed into the Kannon Hall and onto the special viewing stands that had been erected around the outside of the hall to accommodate the overflow crowds. This time the priests clearly played to an enthusiastic audience, adding many dramatic elements to their ritual performance. A housewife choir (on loan from another temple's *danka*) sang Buddhist hymns as the ritual began. When the Sino-Japanese sermon had been delivered, the head priest interrupted the ritual to explain the words and to stress the importance of teaching community traditions to the younger generation.

When it became time to open the cabinet doors, the voices of the chanting priests became lower and lower, and they began rhythmically twirling small *vajra* bells, producing a sound effect just like a circus drumroll. Then the lights went out. Everyone in the audience strained their necks to see what might happen next. Under the cover of darkness the head priest ascended the altar, opened the Kannon cabinet, and tied the ends of a multicolored rope to the Kannon's hands. (The rope stretched across the Kannon Hall to the bell that hung at its entryway, and from there to a commemorative pillar, or *tōba*, that had been consecrated to signal the start of the thirty-three-day *kaichō*.) When the lights were switched back on, the electricity seemed to run through the audience. This ritual, like the consecrations, concluded as the villagers (many with tears in their eyes) lined up to offer their individual sticks of incense and to bow their heads in prayer.

The dramatic revealing of the Kannon marked only the beginning of that night's ceremonies. First, there was a brief break for the evening meal. The guests of honor and the priests enjoyed a special banquet. Most villagers remained in the Kannon Hall and ate prepared foods that they had brought to the event. In fact, the number of people crowding into the Kannon Hall grew larger, indicating that the evening's main event had yet to begin. Finally the crowd was rewarded



for their patience. For the rest of the evening (until early morning) the Kannon altar became the stage for a series of professional entertainments. The Enshinkai Drama Company performed a comedy (in the local dialect, of course) about a poor woodcutter and his wife who encounter Daikokuten 大黒天, one of the seven gods of good fortune. The play ended as the impoverished couple seized Daikokuten's magic mallet to call forth rice, saké, and gold, which Daikokuten threw out to the children sitting in the audience in the form of various kinds of candy. A magician, George Honda, performed a Western-style magic show, complete with card tricks, a disappearing female assistant, and the conjuring of white doves out of handkerchiefs. A well-known singer (who also spoke the local dialect), Hanawa Mieko, sang folk songs of the region, joked with the audience, and concluded the evening with a powerful display of her forceful *taiko* drumming.

Significantly, there was no overt religious theme to the shows. All the performances would have been just as well received at a secular night club or concert hall. Yet the event occurred right at the Buddhist altar, in celebration of the Kannon image. Throughout the entire evening's performances the Kannon image gazed down from its open cabinet on the actors and audience. The spiritual joy evoked by the revealed image merged with the magic of the drama, illusions, and songs to provide an obvious emotional uplift to the entire crowd. When asked whether the Kannon or the entertainers provided the main attraction of the evening, most villagers refused to make any distinction. Surely the Kannon was responsible for the entire night of entertainments. The performers would not have appeared except for the opportunity afforded by the *kaichō*.

Although at first glance popular entertainments might appear incongruous with the ascetic, spiritual atmosphere of a Buddhist temple, festivity and communal fun are ways that the Japanese commonly express religiosity (ASHKENAZI 1993). At Jingū-ji, in particular, major religious ritual events have always been the occasion for social amusements otherwise unavailable to the community. For many years Jingū-ji's horse races (which coincided with Jingū-ji's largest scripture recitation ritual) were the most popular social event in the Tsumari region. By the time of the previous *kaichō* in 1960, however, the horse races had ended. Jingū-ji's priests had to find another entertainment, preferably one just as popular. After the Kannon image was revealed in a formal Buddhist ceremony, the temple priests placed a television set on the altar of the Kannon Hall and switched it on. At that time almost no one in the area owned their own television set. For thirty-three days many came every night to watch the broadcasts and discuss

them among friends. People who were only children at the time recalled how sad they felt at the end of the *kaichō*, not because the Kannon image disappeared but because they missed television.

The previous *kaichō* occurred at a time of technological change, a juncture between the community-centered entertainments of traditional Japan and the vast array of personal diversions offered by modern society. For earlier *kaichō* ceremonies local community groups had staged their own amateur productions of well-known dramas, such as *Chūshingura* (The Forty-Seven Loyal Rōnin). This time amateur performers could not have drawn people away from local movie theaters or home televisions. Thus, three different professional shows were booked for the occasion. One can only wonder if Jingū-ji will be able to compete with the entertainment options available by the time of the next *kaichō* in 2026.

### *Sōtō Zen in a Japanese Town*

Jingū-ji's priests are the first to say that Japanese traditions of Kannon worship, typified by Jingū-ji's *kaichō*, have no connection with the teachings of Sōtō Zen as advocated by Dōgen 菊元 (1200–1253), the school's first Japanese patriarch. But their comments reflect an academic viewpoint that they assume mainly when talking to other scholars. Jingū-ji's brochures and the priests' own pronouncements during the *kaichō* create a very different impression.

The newsletter Jingū-ji mails to its supporters, for example, is titled *Kannon*. Its January 1993 issue begins by quoting one of Dōgen's statements: "When I speak of the bodhisattva of Great Compassion, I refer to Kannon. One must understand Kannon as being the father and mother of all Buddhas." The newsletter goes on to explain that Dōgen's magnum opus, the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, includes a chapter on Kannon, that Dōgen encouraged all his students to master the compassionate heart of Kannon, that Dōgen had lost his own mother and father at an early age and, thus, looked to Kannon as a surrogate parent.<sup>16</sup> It repeats the legend of how the ship that Dōgen was on when he returned to Japan from China had been rescued from a terrible storm because Dōgen called on Kannon. It states that Dōgen had emphasized the saying that "the entire self is [Kannon's] hands and eyes," which (according to the newsletter) means that Kannon's great heart of compassion extends throughout Kannon's entire being, thus its

<sup>16</sup> This interpretation calls to mind the assertion by Melford E. SPIRO (1984, pp. 46–47) that Japanese Kannon worship represents a collective, Freudian transfer of the *amae* (dependency) relationship with the mother.

whole self is hands and eyes that reach out to people. Finally, it notes that the words “Entire Self is Hands and Eyes” are written on the plaque that hangs on the front of Jingū-ji’s Main Gate. This newsletter definitely suggests that Kannon worship lies at the essence of Dōgen’s religion and, thus, the Sōtō tradition represented by Jingū-ji.

Clearly, Jingū-ji owes its existence and continued financial viability to its Kannon image. To encourage the faithful, another of Jingū-ji’s brochures (1993e, p. 7b) states that the *kaichō* ceremonies offer a chance once every thirty-three years to deliver one’s prayers directly to the Kannon image, while monks softly chant scriptures in the background. This brochure strongly implies that prayers bring better results during the *kaichō*. In fact, the rare opportunity to gain direct access to Kannon attracted the greatest popular response. The two best-attended events of the thirty-three-day *kaichō* were the ritual unveiling on the first night and the miniature Kannon pilgrimage that occurred three days later.<sup>17</sup> In Jingū-ji’s newsletter, the temple’s head priest, Takeuchi Michio, explained the significance of Jingū-ji’s Kannon as follows:

Jingū-ji’s Kannon with eleven heads and one thousand arms was carved in the Heian period in the style of a kami so that, as a fundamental (*honji* 本地) Buddha, it could embody the spiritual qualities of both kami and buddhas. It represents the vow of kami and buddhas to join hands in great compassion and great loving kindness to save all people. Jingū-ji, with a long history of twelve-hundred years, is the spiritual protector (*sō chinju* 総鎮守) of the Tsumari region. Thus it has survived to the present day as a holy site and religious institution that attracts the worship of good men and good women of various localities and sectarian affiliations.

To explain in modern terms, one is able to enter the realm

<sup>17</sup> The pilgrimage consisted of a two-part ceremony. First, priests conducted a consecration ritual for the thirty-three small images of Kannon housed in the second level of Jingū-ji’s Main Gate. Each of these thirty-three images represents one of the thirty-three Kannon temples along the well-known Saikoku pilgrimage route in Kinki. In the second part of the ceremony, priests took earth that had been collected earlier from the grounds of the pilgrimage temples in Kinki and spread it around the perimeter of Jingū-ji’s Kannon Hall. Although the smaller Kannon images remained in the second level of the Main Gate, thirty-three small altars were placed around the perimeter of the Kannon Hall where the earth had been scattered. Once this site was properly consecrated, lay people lined up to complete a miniature Saikoku pilgrimage by stopping to pray at each of the thirty-three altars outside the Kannon Hall. In other words, the entire spiritual power of the Saikoku pilgrimage route had been brought to Jingū-ji, miniaturized and, thus, enhanced for the spiritual benefit of local villagers who need not ever travel to Kinki (STEIN 1990, pp. 49–53). More than a thousand families completed the pilgrimage. There were young couples with babies, grandmothers with grandchildren, and some families walking together as a group.

of enlightenment realized by Sākyamuni Buddha by worshipping Kannon, because one thereby cultivates within oneself a heart and personality like Sākyamuni's. This compassionate heart and good character transcend all limitations of national boundaries and religious antagonism. Yet, because they also recognize [religious and national] autonomy and promote harmony and mutual existence, they are the basis for the actualization of a world of true peace and happiness.

The coming twenty-first century must witness the rebirth of religion. I believe that mankind can never create a peaceful existence without this true, spiritual religious heart. By seizing the opportunity afforded by the once-every-thirty-three-years *kaichō*, working together, sharing sacrifices, striving, and cultivating [Kannon's] heart and personality, we are seeking true spiritual religion and joining hands in advancing cheerfully down the road to the twenty-first century. (TAKEUCHI 1993, 1c-d)

From the above description, which states that Jingū-ji's Kannon transcends all forms of religious sectarianism, one might well question if Jingū-ji's *kaichō* ceremonies possess any connection with Zen. Should these ceremonies be seen simply as typical expressions of Japanese Kannon worship that just happen to occur at a temple affiliated to the Sōtō school? If asked directly, the Zen priests at Jingū-ji will, as mentioned earlier, affirm this interpretation. Yet, their answer is perhaps too simple. It does not explain why almost all the Sōtō temples in the Tsumari region are Kannon temples. (The local Tsumari Kannon pilgrimage route begins at Chisen-ji, Tōkamachi's largest Sōtō temple, and ends at Jingū-ji.) It does not help us understand the religious functions of rural Sōtō Zen temples, 3,817 (more than one-fourth) of which are Kannon temples (SAKAUCHI 1974). It allows them, and us, to ignore difficult historical and social problems, such as the role of Kannon worship (and other devotional traditions) in Zen practice. Dōgen is not the only Sōtō patriarch whose biography contains tales of Kannon's powers. These legends are the rule, rather than the exception, in Sōtō literature.

In other words, the scholarly categorization of Zen (or any other Buddhist tradition) as something distinct from and untouched by local patterns of lay religiosity must be problematized. The fact that the same Zen priests who adhere to a Zen lineage founded and transmitted by devotees of Kannon, who reside at Zen/Kannon temples, who celebrate regular Kannon-worship services, who publish newsletters extolling the role of Kannon in Zen legends, and who preach the powers of Kannon to villagers, can themselves mentally disassociate

Zen and Kannon should not be allowed to pass unchallenged, but should alert us to blind spots in the ways that scholars (both in and outside Japan) typically study Buddhism and Japanese religions. All too often Buddhism is taught and studied only in terms of the “great traditions” of separate schools, each with distinctive practices and doctrinal assertions. The so-called “little traditions” of local lay religious practices usually are dismissed as “magical” or “superstitious.” This bifurcation of religious phenomena, however, obscures precisely what needs to be clarified, namely, the ways in which a single ritual or cultic complex produces multivalent religious meanings that find simultaneous expression in many different cultural and social contexts. The so-called great traditions, in fact, sustain themselves on the piety and income generated by local religion, such as that found at Jingū-ji.<sup>18</sup> Scholarly protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, it is clear that Jingū-ji’s Zen priests use specific sectarian strategies to fuse popular religious sentiments with Jingū-ji’s Zen identity. Not just in rural Zen, but in all forms of Japanese Buddhism, abstract doctrinal concepts and distinctive priestly practices find expression in cultic practices, in institutional claims to authority, and in local religious cultures.

This overview of Jingū-ji’s Kannon should suggest, at least, that there is more to Japanese Zen than most textbook descriptions allow. In addition to the mind-to-mind transmission of enlightenment that is the focus of so much Zen literature, there is, for example, the social expression of that enlightenment among the communities of lay supporters. In this regard one comment, repeated by about half the Zen priests participating in the *kaichō* events, seemed especially significant. Upon being introduced and told that I would be observing the *kaichō* ceremonies, priests typically said that I would be able to see how Zen rituals differ from those of other Buddhists, because “Zen is strict (*kibishii*).” When pressed to explain further, it became clear that they meant that Zen monks perform rituals correctly. They obviously took great pride in their expertise. They assured me that when their arms or backs should be straight, they would be straight. When they should be bent, they would assume a graceful bow. Their rituals are more elaborate, with more priests performing more complex actions and chanting longer and more euphonious scriptures. The priests met many times in advance of the ceremonies to map out each sequence of procedures. They were very concerned that the rituals be carefully

<sup>18</sup> Here I am using the term “local religion” in a sense similar to William A. CHRISTIAN, Jr. (1981, p. 3) as “one based on particular sacred places, images, and relics, locally chosen patron saints, idiosyncratic ceremonies, and a unique calendar built up from the settlement’s own sacred history.”



staged and performed without any unforeseen incidents or mistakes. The sermons were composed and delivered in Sino-Japanese (i.e., pseudo-Classical Chinese) regardless of the fact that no one would be able to understand them, simply because it was the correct language. In every action they strove to create an impression of religious professionalism. Moreover, the sermon in Sino-Japanese, the circles drawn in the air with the large whisk, the Zen shout, and so forth, helped create an impression of something more, something ineffable. Perhaps it was the charisma of Zen enlightenment.

Certainly this *kaichō* was not the iconoclastic Zen, with its irrational language and dramatic behavior, described so well by D. T. Suzuki. Nor was it the “just sitting” (*shikan taza* 只管打坐) style of Zen now associated with Dōgen, which supposedly is characterized by a total lack of incense, worshipful prostrations, visualizations, repentance rites, or chanting. Moreover, it stands in sharp contrast to the Zen of Korea, which does not explicitly identify itself with ritual performance (BUSWELL 1992, pp. 40–42).<sup>19</sup> It is, rather, the Zen of the local village, where the religious aspirations of the local community predominate. It is the Sōtō Zen that one finds outside of the major monasteries and modern universities, in the towns of old (and modern) Japan.

## APPENDIXES

### 1. LIST OF KAICHŌ EVENTS

- 7/15 4:00 p.m. Consecration of Commemorative Pillar (*daitōba kaigen* 大塔婆開眼)  
 5:00 p.m. Ceremonial Revealing of Kannon Image (*gokaichō* 御開帳)  
 8:00 p.m. Special Events: Drama in Local Dialect (Enshinkai); Magic Show (George Honda), and Local Folk Songs (Hanawa Mieko)
- 7/16 10:00 a.m. Consecration of Inari Shrine, Consecration of Smaller Kannon Hall
- 7/17 9:00 a.m. Memorial Services for Hakugan Dōjun (1640–1733) and for Shuzan Ryōhaku (d. 1798)  
 10:30 a.m. Scripture Recitation (*Daihannya-e* 大般若会) and Prayer Service

<sup>19</sup> Even in Korea, however, Kannon worship seems to play an important role in the life stories of leading Zen masters (see, for example, BUSWELL 1992, p. 64).

- 11:30 a.m. Public Sermon (*hōwa* 法話) by Satsumi Kiichi, Abbot of Anjū-ji
- 7/18 5:00 p.m. Consecration of Thirty-three Kannon Images in Second Level of Main Gate
- 6:00 p.m. Miniature Kannon Pilgrimage
- 7/24 5:00 p.m. Family Reunion for All Branches of the Ōita Family Lineage
- 7/25 12:00 p.m. Poetry Offerings
- 7/27 10:00 a.m. Prayer Ceremonies (*dai kitō-e* 大祈祷会)
- 7/31 2:00 p.m. Children's Fair, with Nature Walks, Athletic Contests, Treasure Hunts, Time Capsule, Evening Meal, etc.
- 8/1 7:30 p.m. Local Songs, Dance, and Folktale Fair
- 8/3 9:30 a.m. Memorial Service for Previous Abbot & His Wife
- 8/8 9:30 a.m. Public Sermon by Ogasawara Yanin, titled "Kannon's Compassion"
- 10:30 a.m. Kannon Prayer Service (*Kannon kitō*)
- 11:00 a.m. Ceremony of Thanksgiving (*dai sejiki-e* 大施食会) [actually, ceremony for feeding hungry ghosts], performed by Saitō Shingi, Abbot of Sōji-ji
- 1:00 p.m. Traditional Dance Show
- 8/15 10:00 a.m. Memorial Service for Local War Dead
- 8/18 10:00 a.m. Public Sermon by Abbot of Chōsen-ji 長泉寺
- 11:00 a.m. Ceremony for Concealing Kannon Image

## 2. TEXT OF JINGŪ-JI'S *KAICHŌ* BROCHURE

### *What is Kannon-sama?*

What we refer to as "Kannon-sama" is a translation of an ancient India Sanskrit name that means "The Buddha Who Observes the Cries of All the People in the Universe." This being is also called Kanzeon Bosatsu.

Kannon is a personification of the Buddha Śākyamuni's great heart of compassion. When we call out the name or even just think of the word "Kannon," then this Buddha hears our inner voice and offers salvation. Kannon's extensive compassion is comparable to a mother's love for her infant child. Any mother who hears her baby cry will offer arms of unconditional love. This is the same manner in which Kannon, who dotes on all people as if they were Kannon's own children, will respond to our calls for help by extending arms of salvation

regardless of the time or place.

Among various types of Kannon, the one at Jingū-ji is a Kanzeon Bosatsu with eleven heads and one thousand arms. The many heads and arms (actually forty arms, each of which functions throughout twenty-five different world systems, thereby constituting one thousand) symbolize the strict vows of this Kannon to offer a response to any and all requests. How fortunate we are to have this Kannon as our fundamental (*honji* 本地) Buddha [the basis of all local Buddhas and kami].

Since the second year of the Taidō era, 807, when this Kannon first came to the Ōita region to be the comprehensive tutelary deity (*sō chinju* 総鎮守) for the Tsumari area, for more than twelve hundred long years down to the present day, it has protected us and our ancestors.

#### *What Is an Extended Unveiling?*

Since ancient times tradition has stated that Kannon assumes thirty-three different bodily transformations to save all types of people.

The number thirty-three, which actually represents an infinite amount, implies that Kannon responds to the needs of beings by adopting innumerable forms and transcending space and time to reveal the Dharma and to ward off all our fears. The number thirty-three has become familiar to the average Japanese through the popularization of Kannon pilgrimage routes composed of thirty-three Kannon temples, such as those found in Saikoku, Chichibu, and Bandō.

Based on the number thirty-three, the Extended Unveiling at this temple is a major event that occurs only once every thirty-three years.

This event, an opportunity that occurs only once every thirty-three years, is not something that one expects to encounter often during a limited human lifetime. How fortunate we are to encounter such a rare [karmic] connection. This blessed Buddha connection—being touched by the heart of Kannon—is a splendid occasion for reflecting on one's own values and beliefs.

We hope you, your family, and your friends will come to worship together.

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