

Buddhist and Shamanistic Syncretism in Okinawa : The Customs of Religious Visitation of the "Twelve-temples" in Shuri

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I Background

In this paper, I wish to introduce the folk religion of Okinawa, with a special emphasis on the syncretism of shamanism and Buddhism. I will begin by giving a historical background of Okinawa and outline of her religious system, because her culture and history are quite different from those of mainland Japan.

1) Historical Background of Okinawa

Okinawa is one of the prefectures of Japan at present, but until 1879, almost one hundred years ago, Okinawa was a kingdom which was called the Ryukyu Kingdom. According to historical records, formal relationship with China had commenced in 1372. Since her formal contact with China, Okinawa continued as a tribute state until 1874⁽¹⁾.

In the early modern period of Asia, China ruled over her neighboring countries—that paid tribute regularly to China, and in return, they were recognized as a suzerain kingdom of China. Under this system, Ryukyu Kingdom was closely related China and was affected by Chinese culture more than mainland Japan was. At the same time, Okinawa also had relationships with other tribute countries such as Korea, Java, Thailand and others. Until at the beginning of the 15th century, the Ryukyu Kingdom developed foreign trade and her own trade routes covered a wide area ranging from the East Asia to the Southeast Asia⁽²⁾. Along with absorbing different cultures of different countries, the Ryukyu Kingdom made her own culture in the process.

In 1609, the Ryukyu Kingdom was conquered by the Satsuma Clan—a term which was used also to name the prefecture of Japan. Ryukyu Kingdom belonged to it as a tributary vassal. Since then until the direct annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom by Japan in 1879, she had a two-fold status: one as a tribute vassal of a prefecture of Japan and another as a tribute kingdom of China. The annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom by the post-restoration government of Japan put an end to it and it became Okinawa prefecture. The policy of the new government aimed

to eradicate Okinawan culture and to transform Okinawans into a Japanese national—that is, it was the so-called Japanization of Okinawa. Various kind of institutional reforms were enforced and progressively Okinawa became integrated into the Japanese nation.

However, 66 years after annexation, at the end of World War II in 1945, Okinawa came under United military administration. Okinawa was called “the key stone of the Pacific” because of its strategic position. She was separated from mainland Japan by the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1952. In 1972 Okinawa returned to her status of Okinawa prefecture of Japan again.

Owing to such a historical background, Okinawan culture is not merely a provincial entity but rather it is a distinct culture evincing varying degree of affiliations with her surrounding cultures. In making a comparison, Dr. D. Harring, an American anthropologist says, “the Okinawan culture differs more from that of Japan than the difference between Ireland and England or Quebec and Ontario”⁽³⁾. Not only are the material culture—large tomb, house, food, clothes—but also basic differences in social organization, religion and values are obvious. In particular, religious organizations and female dominance in religion have been noted as significant distinctions from the early stages of Okinawan studies.

2) Outline of Religious Organization

Traditionally, an Okinawan religious organization has been subsumed within the context of social institutions: the state, community, kingroup, and household. The whole kingdom was organized under religious as well as political structure. The official hierarchy of hereditary priestess, ranging from village—community through districts, culminated in the office of the chief priestess, a close relative of the ruler and virtually his equal. This was not a pluralistic state but rather a single system composed of two mutual aspects: a religious hierarchy of females paralleling a political hierarchy of males.⁽⁴⁾

The priests are concerned primarily with propitiating the gods through ritual efforts conducted on behalf of the human group which they represent. The chief of the national religious organization was called “kikoeogimi” and customarily was selected from among the sisters or from the eldest of the ruler’s daughter. The function of the kikoeogimi was to officiate at national rites and to pray regularly for the prosperity of the ruler and the country. The ritual activities at the

community level are conducted by hereditary specialists who inherit their office on the basis of membership within certain family. The chief priest at the community level, called "nuru", officiates and controls rituals of the community. The occupant of the office was given a semi-divine status by the community.

After the end of the Ryukyu Kingdom, the upper ranks of the hierarchy gradually withered and disappeared. At the village or community level, the priest organization contracted, but, still persisted and continued to function in the rural areas.

The other influential factor of the Okinawan indigenous religion is shamanism. It is based on animistic doctrines that attribute to all natural phenomena spirits or gods which affect all aspects of a person and one's environment. The shaman, known as "guta," was believed to have supernatural powers of communicating with the gods directly. On the basis of their supernatural powers of possessing, seeing, and hearing, they discern the causes of misfortune and suggest or demand remedial action. They are selected by a "call" from the gods, usually through experiences that bring them much hardship, sickness, and near-death experiences. They function mainly at the family or individual level. Compared with the institutionized and structured priests, the shamans are unstructured. Rather, in stride with the establishment of national religious ranking system, they were gradually eliminated and suppressed. In spite of such history, shamans have survived and have responded to the religious need of the Okinawan people.⁽⁵⁾

During the past one hundred years, the enveloping circumstances of Okinawa have been subject to extensive changes, and at the same time, the progress of urbanization and industrialization have brought many changes in the contents of social, cultural, and religious system. It has been pointed out that although the religious organizations at the community level have been declining, the functions of the shamans have been expanding. It is also obvious that the numbers of the religious sects—Christianity, Buddhism, new religions and others—have increased and that they have grown and developed.⁽⁶⁾

Given the current situation, how has the indigenous religion changed in the course of adapting to this new situation? "Buddhist and shamanistic syncretism" constitutes a quick response to such a question, and hence the contents of this paper will be discussed in that context. In order to clarify the various aspects of folk custom that play an important role in the discussion of Buddhist and

shamanistic syncretism, I have conducted a survey to gather data in support of my views. The survey was conducted by visiting the so-called "Twelve-temples" in Shuri which was the capital city during the Ryukyu Kingdom period.

II Buddhism in Okinawa

1) Historical Process of the Acceptance Buddhism

According to historical accounts, Buddhism was introduced by the Japanese monk Zenkan, whose boat is said to have drifted and reached in the shore of Okinawa the 13th century. King Eiso was influenced by him and constructed the first Buddhist temple. In the 14th century, the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism was introduced by the monk Raiju. In the middle of the 15th century, the monk Kaiin introduced the Rinzai Zen school. In the 16th century, the monk Nissho, who was washed ashore and rescued by the northern Okinawan villagers on his way back to Japan after practicing Buddhism in China, introduced Buddhism to the common people in northern area. Next, the monk Taichu was sent to introduce the Jodo Shin school that affected the Royal Family and the other high class people.⁽⁷⁾

Buddhism was brought to Ryukyu by Japanese monk and flourished under the patronage of the Royal family and the other high class people. According to "Ryukyu Shintoki", which was written by the monk Taichu, there were 39 Buddhist temples until the 17th century. In the historical record of the early modern period, 96 temples were recorded. However, after the Satsuma clan ruled the Ryukyu Kingdom, the Satsuma clan restricted the activities of even Buddhism. At first, Satsuma prohibited construction of new temples. Next in 1638, it restricted the Jodo Shin school. In 1663, it restricted missionary activity and in 1774 it prohibited monks from leaving the Satsuma clan boundary. Under such restrictions, Buddhism declined gradually, until in 1873, the number of the temples decreased to 44, which was almost half of what it was.⁽⁸⁾

Until the direct annexation of the post restoration government of Japan, Buddhist temples were under the direct jurisdiction of the Ryukyu Kingdom. Institutionally, the finances of the temple were provided by the Ryukyu Kingdom. Some of the big temples had their own sub-temples. After the annexation, the Japanese government reformed the religious systems that included the organization

of Buddhist temples. Buddhist temples in the Ryukyu Kingdom were removed from the political administrative structure and put under the organization of mainland temples. Thus, the Ryukyu Kingdom temples lost their official status and financial support. The reform resulted in great financial damage to the temples. As a result, many small temples and sub-temples disappeared.⁽⁹⁾ The number of temples was only 30 before World War II.⁽¹⁰⁾

World War II brought destruction to temples, and almost all temples except 3, were burnt down. Under U.S military occupation, reconstruction of Buddhist temples was started. Okinawan Buddhist Association was re-organized in 1952, but, the reconstruction of each temple fell behind. According to the census, we can know the number of the temples only in terms of religious organization, and not by the actual numbers of buildings. The count was 28 before the reversion of 1972.⁽¹¹⁾

After the reversion, various Buddhist sects from mainland Japan came in and tried to establish their organization. At the same time, temples of Okinawa moved to reinforcement their organization. According to the 1994 census, the number of Buddhist groups was 75, which was double of what it was at the time of the reversion.⁽¹²⁾

The historical development of Buddhism in Okinawa passed from the acceptance of Buddhism by the Royal family and high class people, to being sustained by the kingdom, restricted by Satsuma, financially damaged by the reform of the reversion Japanese government, destroyed by the war, reconstructed after the war, and rapidly changing after the reversion.

2) The Feature of the Acceptance in Okinawa

Which were the characteristic factors of the Buddhism that expressed its acceptance in Okinawa? The first is that Buddhism developed as almost exclusively as a state religion and not as a popular religion of the people.⁽¹³⁾ Buddhist temples closely inter-linked themselves to the Kingdom, royal family and higher class people and functioned as official prayer temple or as royal family and higher class people temples. These temples could neither meet the needs of the common people nor organize them, because of the Satsuma-clan restrictions. Most of the temples located in Shuri and Naha, the capital cities of the Ryukyu Kingdom, and there were only a few in the rural areas. The Danka system and the difference of Buddhist schools that characterized the Japanese Buddhist organizations were

completely lacking in the Buddhism found among the Okinawan people.

The second point was that Buddhism was accepted with respect to its ancestral rituals and death rites. It has been pointed out already that the temples found in the Ryukyu Kingdom were royal family temples; however, after the annexation some of them became the private temple of a royal family. The Buddhist custom of keeping memorial tablets of the deceased was accepted in the early stages by the royal family and the higher class people, because such a custom was an expression of the hierarchical rank system which was established on the bases of Confucianism and which continued until the 18th century. After that the custom was adopted among the officer class and family, after the 19th century, the custom was introduced to the common people.

The third point is that it was within the framework of traditional religious system indigenous to the folk society that the Buddhist customs were accepted. However, people accepted Buddhist customs selectively and partly⁽¹⁴⁾. The Buddhist ideologies were modified rather than developed, and it was the shamanistic specialists that played the role of introducing such Buddhist customs into the folk society.

The fourth point is that the people regarded the Buddhist temples as sacred places of the indigenous religions. In the former Ryukyu Kingdom, there were certain kinds of pilgrimages in which it was customary for priestess of the community and kinship groups to visit certain major ritual sites. Some of the major temples were worshipped as such sacred sites and prayer were held in them. The practise of pilgrimage was done by all—by individuals, families, communities and kinship groups.

The above four points express the characteristic features of the acceptance of Buddhism in Okinawa. However, what should be emphasized is the role of the shamanistic specialist in the acceptance of Buddhism among the people in the folk society. Therefore, I now turn to a discussion on the Buddhist and shamanistic syncretism by relating the “ Twelve—temples visiting custom” in Shuri.

III “ Twelve— temples Visiting Custom” in Shuri

The “Twelve—temples visiting custom” in Shuri refers to the practice of praying to the protector image of the twelve horary signs of the temple. Consequently, the

number twelve does not refer to the number of temples but rather the number refer to the twelve horary signs—viz., rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, cock, dog and boar. The protector images are related to the twelve horary signs as follows: The thousand arms Kannon to the rat; Kokuzou—Bosatsu to the ox and tiger; Monjyu—Bosatsu to the rabbit; Fugen—Bosatsu to the dragon and snake; Seji—Bosatsu to the horse; Dainichi—Nyorai to the goat and monkey; Fudo—myo—o the cock; and Amida—Nyorai to the dog and boar. In accordance with the year of one's birth, people visit the temple and pray for one's health and safety to one's appropriate protector image that corresponds to one's horary sign. This custom can be dated back to the 18th century.⁽¹⁵⁾

The temples that enshrine the protector images are located in Shuri and Naha, but in general, it is the temple in Syuri which is associated with the custom of visiting "twelve—temples." Until 1990, there were five temples in enshrined the protector images, but became one was abolished as a visiting prayer temple and its protector images moved to other temples, there are four temples at present.

I have conducted a survey in order to collect information on the custom of visiting twelve—temples. The survey was administrated twelve times from 1993 until 1994 at Annkoku—temple, which enshrines the horary—sign image of the cock. The methodology of the survey was to tabulate data concerning 1) the number of people who visit the temple, 2) kinds of prayers, 3) the participation of religious specialists.

1) The Numbers of People who Visit the Temple

In the survey the data which I gathered first was with regard to numbers; that is, in addressing the question of how many people visited the temple, the question of whether the people came individually or in groups, of the differentiation of the sexes, and of whether the number of visitors varied according to the seasons or the particular days were taken into consideration.

During a twelve day period, the number of people that I could record was 1,634, because on one occasion there were so many people who visited at once, I was unable to make an accurate count of them. This number of people was then considered in the light of an "unit". The term "unit" is used in this context to refer to those individuals or groups who brought ⁽¹⁶⁾ binshi or offerings to the temple. In other words, the unit of a pyayer group may have been a single person or a group

of people, but in each case, there was a binshi to identify such as unit. Some of these units consisted of an individual, some consisted of groups of individuals, some consisted of kinship groups, and others consisted of community people, or people accompanied by religious specialists. At any rate, among those who I was able to count, the total unit number of twelve days was 1,024 units, and the maximum number of people in an unit was six.

The difference of the sexes was such that at the females out number the males indicatory that this custom was related closely to the females.

The number of visitors varied according to whether the visitation took on a special day or not. Special day can be determined as a temple activity or by an individual, groups, or families needs. Further these stipulated days may occur just once or may continues on.

2) Kinds of Prayers

The custom of prayer can be divided into two categories in view of the time frame—ie., whether the custom of prayer takes place within a designated period or within an irregular period. The designated period refers to periodical visitation in January, April, September, and December of the lunar calender. For example, these is the first prayer of the year in January or a prayer of health on a choosen date in January or the Kannon rite on January 13 or 18.

Prayers done in the so-called irregular period refer to prayers done on dates determined by the particular prayer unit—individual, family, community etc.

In view of contents, prayers are done for the sake of health, dead rites, ancestral rituals, house and homestead rituals, rituals for sick and the misfortunate, rituals for dieties, rituals in search of guardian dieties, and so on.

3) The Participation of the Religious Specialists

It is difficult to explain all of the variants in the time allotted, but this much can be said. The kinds of prayers are complex, are many, but, generally speaking, the prayers held during the so-called irregular period, were ones in which the religious specialists were closely associated. The highest rate was the case in which 77 percent and eight of ten units were accompanied by religious specialists and the lowest rate was seen in two cases—one in which 15 percent and the other in which 23 percent were accompanied by religious specialists.

IV The Perspective of the Shamanistic Specialist

In the custom of "visiting the twelve-temples," the people and the shamanistic specialists are not related to each other only with respect to the aspect of practice as noted above. The shamanistic specialists, for example, may give suggestions to or even make demand of the practitioner. By carrying out what has been suggested or demanded, the people take on a special relationship with the religious specialist through prayers and through the divine communication with the gods. The role of the religious specialists, therefore, should be seen in this light— ie., 1) the role of the religious specialist as divine, 2) the role of the religious specialist both as divine and as prayers, and 3) the role of the religious specialist as prayer only. For the purpose of the present paper, I shall discuss only one— viz, 1) the role of the religious specialist as divine.

Ms. A is 73 years old. She functions a divine by communicating directly with gods. In her childhood she was weak and she frequently became ill without cause. When she was 17 years old, she received communication from god and after that, she had frequent visits from god in her dream. God showed her various places and took her to unseen worlds. When, at 28, she became pregnant, god said to her, "you must work for the benefit of the people. Unless you do so, I will make it so that you cannot do any work for even yourself." She considered that statement a "call" from god. She thought that if she did not heed god's "call", the baby would surely die. She accepted god's "call" and finding her own guardian god called chiji, she began to pray. At 30, she began to say the words of god unconsciously. Even since then, she begun her function as a divine. It is said that in her role as a divine, her guardian god show her the phenomenon just like as photograph in her mind.

At the age of 37, her guardian god should her how to pray to the Kannon image. She obtained a Kannon image from the temple in Shuri, placed it on her sacred alter, and prayed in front of it. She conducts her own Kannon ritual three times a year in front of her alter and offers grains, eggs, fruits, rice-cakes, fish, and red azuki rice. Although she practiced the "visitation of the twelve-temples" in the past by herself, she has put a stop to it because her legs have become weaker.

According to her, the "visitation of the twelve-temples" is done for health prayers or ancestral rituals. It is not a practice related to the rituals for the gods. The

things that are offered differ depending upon the kind of prayer. The number of incense used depends upon the functionary. She uses 24 incense sticks for gods of heaven, the earth, and sea, 12 for the gods of the twelve horary signs, and 3 for her guardian god. It was her guardian god who taught her how many incense sticks to use, how to pray, and all about prayers.

In summary, the shamanistic specialists were initiated with a "call" from the dieties, they then searched for their own guardian god. In so far as they had been selected by diety and communicated directly with the diety, they are, so-to-speak, shamanistic specialists. The customs of visiting prayers and having protector images are part of the shamanistic ideology and their meeting of their protector image under the suggestion of their diety gives credibility to the shamanistic specialist's role as a functionary. It is this role as functionary that makes the shamanistic specialist a mediator between the people and the super-natural world.

V The Reaction of the Temple

The custom of "visitation of twelve-temples" is, without doubt, a Buddhist practice, but as discussed above, it is generally conducted under the leadership of a shamanistic specialist and not under the leadership of the temple. The ideology embedded in the custom is not always in agreement with the temple ideology. What is the reaction of the temple to this custom? Have the reactions of the temple changed over the time? If changes have taken place, have they developed or reinforced Buddhist organization after the reversion?

Three different patterns of temple reaction can be seen. First, there is the traditional pattern wherein the visitation of the believers is accepted as an ordinary, indigenous custom. This pattern can be found in the Ankoku Temple and the other two temples. The Ankoku Temple, according to the result of my survey, seemed willing to accept visitors except when such visits interfered with the temple business. For example, when a funeral or a Buddhist service is to be held at the temple, no visitors are allowed. In short, the temple business before all others!

The second pattern that emerged can be called a purist type that adheres closely to the principles of the Buddhist school. This second pattern was found in the case of Bansho-in Temple. The temple is active in missionary work and publishes many works and a newspaper. Owing to such missionary activities, the

temple has abolished its function as visiting—prayer temple and as a result, it has moved its protector images to other temples.

The third pattern, which I shall refer to as the syncretistic pattern, aims to incorporate shamanistic specialists as sect members. This pattern was found in Daruma Temple. According to the chief priest, because it is the religious specialists who take an active interest in the temple and its activities, they should not be excluded. Rather, it is his opinion that in Okinawa the best method of doing missionary work is to include them in temple affairs and activities.

VI Conclusion

After the reversion, the number of religious sects increased and the religious organization has grown and developed. This prompted the question of how indigenous religion has changed in the course of adapting this situation of growth and development. This paper was an attempt to clarify various aspects of the Twelve—temple visiting custom from the perspective of shamanistic specialists and functionaries at temple.

Shamanistic specialists who are deeply involved with Buddhism are accepted in the folk society of Okinawa. They have modified many aspects of the Buddhism to make it compatible with their traditional concepts of dieties. On the other hand, the temples have demonstrated three different patterns of adaptation: the traditional, the purist and the syncretistic.

These three have illustrate the dynamics of co—existence, opposition and syncretism that seem to take place when an universal religion comes into contact with folk religious beliefs that are mediated by shamanistic specialists.

Notes

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- (2) Kurayoshi, Takara. 1980. Ryūkyū no Jidai, 1980.
- (3) Haring, Douglas G. 1952. The Island of Amami Oshima in the Northern Ryukyus. SIRI Report No 2.
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- (6) Kazumi, Takanashi. 1989. "Kami ni Owareru Onnatachi," Fu to Fushin — Shirīzu Josei to Bukkyō No 4. Heibon Sha.
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- (9) Kenzaburō, Torigoe. 1965. Ryūkyū Syūkyōshi no Kenkyū. Kadokawa Shoten.
- (10) Yoshiaki, Nakō. 1968. Okinawa Bukkyōshi. Gokoku Ji.
- (11) Masao, Fujii. 1976. "Bukkyō ni tsuite" Okinawa—Shizen・Bunka・Kōbun Dō.
- (12) Syūkyō Nenkan. 1993. Bunnka Chō.
- (13) Kenzaburō, Torigoe. Ibid.
- (14) Masao, Fujii. 1978. "Senzo Kuyō" Okinawa no Gairai Syūkyō. Kōbun Dō.
- (15) Yoshiharu, Heshiki. 1983. "Jyūnikasho Meguri" Okinawa Daihyakka Jiten. Okinawa Taimusu Sha.
- (16) A set of offerings which are consist of wine and rise.

〔付記〕

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沖縄における仏教とシャーマニズムの重層構造 —— 「首里十二カ所巡り」の習俗をめぐって ——

要 旨

復帰以降、沖縄では宗教各派の組織的強化、増加がめだつ。それに対し、在来のいわば民間宗教がどう対応し、どう変わったのか、「首里十二カ所巡り」と呼ばれる寺院巡拝の慣行をとりあげ、その実態をシャーマンの職能者および寺院の論理も絡めつつみた。沖縄の仏教受容のあり様は、在来の祖霊観や死霊観、神観念と結びついた枠組みの中でなされ、そこにシャーマンの職能者が深く関与している。職能者の側からみると、それは新しい神々を自らの世界に取り込み、職能に組み込んでいく課程である。それに対する寺院側の対応は、従来通り巡拝を許容する〈伝統並存型〉に加え、それを廃した〈純粹教義型〉、職能者を信徒として組織化した〈融合強化型〉と三様に整理できる。それらは、組織宗教と民間宗教ないしはその職能者の論理の並存、対立、融合という両者の習合のありようを示す〈型〉ともいえるのではないだろうか。

(稲福みき子)