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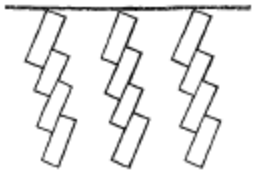
Benefits in the Religious System
Settings and Dynamics



Hōzanji is a Buddhist temple situated on the upper slopes of the Ikoma Hills that separate the city of Osaka from the plains around the ancient Japanese capital of Nara. It is famed as a center of worship of Kankiten, a deity of Hindu origins and one of those many figures of worship that have been assimilated into Buddhism through its encounters with other religious traditions. Depictions of practices associated with the deity and aimed at preventing misfortunes and acquiring the support of Kankiten through ritual worship can be found in a number of Buddhist texts, such as the *Daishō-ten Kangi-shōshin binayaka hō*, which, as Alexander Kabanoff notes, describes ritual procedures to be followed in order to "expel all disasters."[1] Kabanoff, in providing details of other textual references to Kankiten, shows how this deity came to be transmitted from India to China (and hence to Japan) as a deity of the Esoteric Tantric tradition. He notes, moreover, that the Chinese found Tantrism attractive "not for its philosophic doctrines," but rather for practical aspects such as the promise of worldly benefits. Kabanoff's list of such worldly benefits includes defeating enemies, becoming wealthy, attaining longevity, dispelling diseases, securing high positions, and winning someone's love.[2] Although the veneration of Kankiten flourished in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*) from around the ninth century, Kabanoff notes that Kankiten was regarded with a certain ambiguity. The deity contained potentially dark sides as a ferocious and demanding deity associated inter alia with angry spirits and capable of divine wrath. Kankiten thus required special veneration and offerings, as well as pledges of faith and commitment, in order to harness its powers for the benefit of the petitioner.[3]

Kankiten is known by a variety of other names as well. The most common is Shōten,[4] and it is this name, linked to the temple's geographical location, that gives Hōzanji the name by which it is popularly known: Ikoma Shōten. Hōzanji developed as a center of Kankiten worship from the seventeenth century onward: its founder, the monk Hōzan Tankai, was a worshiper of the deity and hence enshrined Kankiten at the temple he founded. Kankiten is not, however, the *honzon,* or main image of worship, enshrined at the temple. (The official *honzon* at Hōzanji is Fudō.)[5] And, like Japanese temples and shrines in general, Hōzanji is not a location with a single focus of worship or indeed a single purpose in the benefits it provides. Rather, it consists of a number of halls of worship and figures of worship that are scattered through its precincts and enshrine various buddhas and other deities. Besides Kankiten the temple enshrines Monju (the Buddha of Wisdom), Kannon (the bodhisattva of compassion), Jizō (the protective bodhisattva), and many others, and its courtyard contains numerous subtemples housing these and other figures of worship.

Hōzanji features prominently in an extended series of studies of the religious culture of the Ikoma Hills carried out by a group of Japanese sociologists of religion during the 1980s and early 1990s.[6] Iida Takafumi, one of the participants in that research project, has described the Ikoma Hills as a "marketplace for this-worldly benefits" (*genze riyaku ichiba*) and Hōzanji specifically as a "mecca for faith in this-worldly benefits" (*genze riyaku shinkō no mekka*).[7] Hōzanji is but one, however, of the vast number of shrines and temples of all sizes that are scattered throughout the Ikoma Hills and cater to the needs of the people of Osaka and the surrounding region. These include most notably Ishikiri Shrine, whose deities of worship are famed for healing and assisting in recovery from surgery, and Chōgosonshiji, better known as Shigisan, whose main figure of worship, Bishamonten, is one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune (*shichifukujin*), a popular group of deities who are commonly depicted as riding together across the seas in a treasure boat (*takarabune*) with treasures and benefits they will distribute to those who seek them. The benefits Bishamonten offers at Shigisan are diverse, but he is especially active and efficacious, according to the temple's literature, for business prosperity, family safety, and the development of good luck.[8] The reputation of these three places in terms of providing this-worldly benefits is such that each receives several million visitors per year: in all it has been estimated that around 10 million people visit the shrines and temples of Ikoma each year, the majority visiting the three major centers of Hōzanji, Ishikiri, and Shigisan.[9] All three have developed networks of religious associations and groups of wor-

shipers centered on faith in the efficacy of these places in terms of this-worldly benefits. Besides these major institutions, the Ikoma Hills are home to hundreds of other shrines and temples of varying sizes that also attract visitors and adherents.

Hōzanji is well known in the region for, among other benefits, those of *shōbai hanjō* (business prosperity) and *tachimono* (giving up something or abstaining from something that is not good for one).[10] Kankiten is, as noted, a potent deity but one that needs to be properly appeased. In seeking Kankiten's assistance one is not just harnessing the deity's powers of moral support in the struggle for abstention but opening oneself to its wrath if, after pledging abstinence and asking for its help, one reneges on this commitment.[11] Hōzanji's *ema* (votive tablets) symbolize this benefit and the commitment it involves: they depict a padlock and are inscribed with the Japanese ideogram "*kokoro*" (spirit/mind) to signify mental determination and the locking of the mind against temptation. On these tablets people write their wishes and pleas before hanging them up at the temple; among the petitions, vows, and requests that have been noted by observers of the Hōzanji votive tablets are those for giving up alcohol, stopping illicit relations with a member of the opposite sex, giving up tobacco, and, reflecting the ways in which prayers and petitions manifest changing social situations and patterns, giving up drugs.[12]

According to temple lore, Shōten (Kankiten) will respond to requests that have failed to be realized through petitions at other shrines and temples:[13] in short, this is a deity that is powerful and responsive especially to those in great need. The power of Kankiten to grant wishes and benefits is affirmed by the temple's numerous publications outlining cases of miraculous events experienced by petitioners and worshipers, whose passing on of such stories and rumors of benefits has played a large part in the development of the temple's reputation.[14] Such indeed is the gratitude of successful petitioners that grateful worshipers often donate large sums of money to the temple. According to Murata Jūhachi, it is not uncommon for believers to give as much as 1 or 2 million yen when their prayers have been realized.[15]

Hōzanji is a thriving temple, and its steady flow of clients support a number of commercial enterprises that constitute its *monzenmachi*, "the town before the temple gate," which refers to commercial settlements that have grown around shrines and temples. On the steep steps leading up to it from the nearest local train station there are a number of inns as well as shops and food stalls. The numbers of customers also help support a cable car railway that runs close by, and although it also leads to the summit of the Ikoma Hills and a large funfair there, many of its passengers are headed for the temple. On

Sundays, when most people do not have to work, the temple receives large numbers of visitors who, seeking benefits from Kankiten, perform various practices ranging from simple acts of veneration—lighting a stick of incense, making a small offering of a few coins, purchasing a talisman or amulet, praying briefly—to ritual austerities designed to facilitate this transaction, such as the *hyakudo mairi*. This practice, meaning "one hundred times around," involves walking around a designated area, usually two stone markers set within a shrine or temple courtyard, one hundred times to demonstrate one's sincerity to a deity when making a request. At Hōzanji the *hyakudo mairi* is generally performed around one of the halls of worship within the courtyard and is often done barefoot.[16]

Figures given by the temple and by Japanese scholars estimate that it receives around 3 million visitors per year.[17] While this figure may well be somewhat speculative—given that people may access the temple from a number of different entrances and there is no check at any of them to assess the flow of visitors—it nonetheless indicates a general feeling by those who have studied the temple and those who work there that Hōzanji receives a fairly large number of visitors.[18] The figures themselves imply that an average of 57,000 visitors go to Hōzanji every week. In reality the flow of visitors is a little more uneven, for there are a number of festive occasions that draw extremely large crowds, while the normal weekly traffic is rather less, although still, certainly on Sundays, busy. Hōzanji draws its biggest crowds on special occasions in the temple's ritual calendar: like most shrines and temples Hōzanji has a series of yearly events and rituals (*nenjū gyōji*) that punctuate the yearly cycle, provide the basic framework for the temple's general activities, and demarcate its holy days and main religious observances.

At Hōzanji, for example, the first and sixteenth days of each month are regarded as particularly efficacious days for praying there. These days are *ennichi,* a term with multiple but related meanings. Each deity and figure of worship has (like saints in the Catholic tradition) its own special holy day or days that are pregnant with religious meaning, days on which the deity is especially accessible to petitions and prayers and when visits to its centers of worship are considered to have greatest merit. An *ennichi* is thus the holy day of a deity, the day (*nichi*) when the opportunity to develop karmic fortunes, affinities, and connections (*en*) with the deity is at its highest. Because it is a special day in this respect, it may also be a festival day (another related meaning of *ennichi*) or a day when a fair or market (also an *ennichi*) may be held at the shrine or temple. The multiple meanings of *ennichi*—encompassing issues of increased sanctity, enhanced karmic connections, the significance of certain phases in the calendrical

cycle as special religious occasions, and the importance of festivity, commerce, and economic activity—are by no means random. Indeed, as we shall see throughout this book, all these themes are intertwined and form a whole, in which there is little contradiction between the economic and the spiritual. The economic dimensions of temple and shrine activity, signified by the *ennichi* as a commercial market, do not conflict with the notion that such days are specially holy days when the deity may be especially responsive to petitioners. Rather, they reinforce each other: the economic lure of the market that draws people to the place can increase the numbers who will, in the course of their visit, pray to the deity; the attraction of a special receptiveness to petitions on that day will not only bring increased numbers to the religious center but boost the size of the crowds at the market and increase its economic potential. Religious events such as *ennichi,* occasions of festivity, prayer, and veneration, are equally occasions for economic barter and activity and an opportunity for the religious institutions themselves to acquire and increase the economic support they need to function.

The interplay of festivity, economic activity, sanctity, prayer, and worship permeates Hōzanji's yearly calender. Besides its two monthly *ennichi* the temple has a number of other special religious festivals: the *setsubun* festival in early February in which rituals are enacted to drive away evil and beckon the coming of spring and warm weather; a grand *goma* (Esoteric Buddhist fire ritual) on April 1; the celebration of the Buddha's birthday on May 8; and several other events throughout the year.[19] But the occasion when the greatest crowds visit the temple are the first three days of the year—the occasion of the *hatsumōde* or first shrine or temple visit of the year. This event is part of a wider cycle of social and religious rituals covering the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new year, rituals full of the symbolism of eradicating the misfortunes and hindrances of the past and ushering in renewal.[20] At New Year it is customary to pay a visit (or indeed a series of visits, since many people visit not one but many places at this time) to a shrine or temple to make a first greeting of the year to the gods and buddhas. In the process of greeting the gods, it is the general practice to make wishes and ask favors for the coming year and acquire various talismans, amulets, and other lucky objects that are taken home as signs of the spiritual benevolence and protection of the gods or buddhas.

The number of people who perform *hatsumōde* visits has grown steadily in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the figures released each year by the Japanese police, the numbers of those who have taken part in this practice have exceeded 80 million (approximately two-thirds of the entire population) each year.[21] Participation

can be affected slightly by the weather: in 1989, for example, a small decline in numbers from the previous year was blamed on inclement weather, while the rise in numbers between 1992 and 1993 was partly attributed to good weather. But the economic climate is also considered to influence the turnout. The economic troubles of the 1990s are seen as closely linked to the increase in the numbers of participants in *hatsumōde*. According to interpretations widely circulated in the media, the uncertainties caused by Japan's economic crisis—and people's need to "turn to the gods" for reassurance and seek increased help, support, and benefits as a result of that crisis—account for this growth.[22] The 1994 figures (coming at a time when the economic recession had already gone on longer than many had expected it to) showed the largest number ever of people performing this rite: 85,440,000, over half a million higher than the year before.[23]

Every year newspapers publish a list of the most visited religious centers. The list is usually topped by major shrines and temples such as Meiji Shrine in Tokyo (which in 1993 received 3.5 million *hatsumōde* visitors); Kawasaki Daishi, a temple in Kawasaki, southwest of Tokyo; and Shinshōji, at Narita, a temple popularly known as Narita-san and famed as a place to obtain traffic safety amulets and to have one's car blessed and placed under divine protection. In the Kansai (western Japan) region, the most widely visited centers tend to be Fushimi Inari (widely regarded as the country's most important shrine to the deity Inari) in southern Kyoto and Sumiyoshi Shrine in Osaka. Such religious centers are certainly national in that they attract visitors from across Japan and are usually featured on national television each New Year to show the size of the crowds taking part in this annual ritual.

Hōzanji, although it is one of the most important temples dedicated to Kankiten in Japan, is not as widely known as the places just cited. Unlike the famed temples and shrines of Kyoto, it is not regarded as a tourist attraction or a special example of Japanese cultural or artistic achievement and hence worthy of a visit to admire its architectural splendor or cultural treasures. Moreover, it never makes it to the "Top Ten" list of the most visited shrines and temples published by the newspapers at *hatsumōde*. Nonetheless, it receives around half a million visitors on average during the first three days of the year, approximately one-sixth of its annual visitors.[24] Along with businesspeople and merchants who are attracted by Kankiten's reputation as a source of benefits related to business prosperity, the temple is especially popular with those who work in Osaka's "water trade" (*mizu shōbai*), the vast nightlife industry in Japan centered around drinking, bars, nightclubs, and sexual entertainment: praying

at Ikoma for Kankiten's protection and support is seen as a rite of passage necessary for those wishing to enter this business.[25]

Hōzanji is not what is commonly termed in Japan a *bodaiji*—that is, a Buddhist temple with a parish that includes a number of households (*danka*) affiliated with it and for whom the temple conducts ritual services relating largely to ancestor and mortuary rites. This *danka* relationship, and the fees from the temple's services in these contexts, form the primary economic underpinning for the large majority of Buddhist temples in Japan. Hōzanji has no *danka* and hence it occupies no fixed place in the social structure of community religion. Economically it depends on attracting visitors who will make donations, purchase amulets, pay for their prayers and petitions to be offered to Kankiten, and so on. This dependence (which is not limited to Hōzanji but affects any temple in Japan that has no affiliated parishioners or households) is a motivating factor in the development and promotion of *genze riyaku* activities at Hōzanji and elsewhere.

The importance of this point, in the present context, is that Hōzanji receives visitors not because of its formal position in Japanese social structure but because of voluntary associations related to seasonal events, occupational factors, personal needs, and even through casual circumstances—accompanying a friend or family member who wishes to make a petition, for example, or while visiting other places in the area. As noted earlier, there is a large funfair nearby, a little further up the hillside, and people may visit both places during the course of a day out. Although Hōzanji has a sectarian affiliation (it is in fact a *daihonzan,* or head temple, of the Shingon Risshū Buddhist sect) its visitors, like those of other popular institutions dealing with *genze riyaku*, are not limited to that sect alone. Shingon Risshū has 105,000 affiliated members, according to 1994 figures,[26] considerably less than the number of people who visit Hōzanji at New Year. This nonsectarian nature of shrine and temple visiting and praying for this-worldly benefits indicates Hōzanji's accessibility as a center of the common religion.

We shall encounter Hōzanji again in a number of chapters. Here we have focused on it to emphasize a series of vital points. Hōzanji tells us of a religion that, as noted in the Introduction, is *practiced*—a religion that is pragmatic and related to daily real-life concerns, to occupational and locational identities (attracting as it does people from the Osaka water trade), and to seasonal and temporal changes. The pragmatic nature of religion is demonstrated through Hōzanji's primary claims to fame and its predominant functions. The temple deals with the pertinent needs and worries that concern people in all walks of life, handling all manner of issues from business prosperity

to painful addictions. This pragmatism relates to the ways in which people may visit the temple, as well, and to the flexible nature of religious veneration in Japan: while some visitors may be driven by urgent personal crises, such as addiction to drugs or alcohol, others may be far more casual, dropping in on their way to the funfair or during a hike in the surrounding hills. There is, for example, a pleasant hike that can be made from Ishikiri Shrine across the hills to Hōzanji (or vice versa). Temple officiants do not discriminate among the different types of visitor: all may be accommodated, none is left out. And in operating as a protective temple related to a particular industry, Hōzanji tells us also of the extent to which occupation and social circumstance may exert a religious influence on people and, indeed, frame their religious culture and activities.

In praying and asking for favors, however, people incur moral obligations and become involved in a series of ethical considerations relating to what they should do to thank Kankiten and the duties they take on when making requests. Given the demanding nature of its deity, Hōzanji informs us of the moral obligations incurred by petitioners and the ethical dimension of their activities. Praying for benefits implies an obligation to express gratitude for the rewards that come from prayer. While this obligation need not involve the large financial donations mentioned earlier, it does necessitate returning the favors granted by expressing gratitude—themes we discuss more fully in Chapter 3, where we encounter stories of what may happen when these procedures are not correctly followed and the debts of obligation incurred through prayer and supplication are not fulfilled. Hōzanji's dependence on the provision of this-worldly benefits to sustain itself economically informs us also of the necessity for temples and shrines to publicize such issues in order to gain and maintain customers. Hence the importance of publicizing cases where benefits have been acquired and affirming the truth claims (the miracles and efficacious provisions of benefits) that these imply.

From Hōzanji we can also discern something of the extent of prayers for this-worldly benefits and the extent of such pragmatic religious activity in Japan in general. Hōzanji, as pointed out earlier, is a flourishing temple specializing in this-worldly benefits: it receives large numbers of petitioners not just at special occasions such as *hatsumōde* but throughout the year. Yet it is only one of a number of religious centers in the Kansai region around Osaka and Kyoto and is by no means the most famous of them. It is only one of many centers catering to various forms of this-worldly benefits even within the Ikoma region. Nonetheless it can still count its visitors in the millions. Although the extent of praying for practical benefits is infinitely difficult to discern in statistical terms, the indicators suggest it is ex-

tremely widespread. The *hatsumōde* figures alone would suggest so, and while one cannot—given its special nature as a social and cultural occasion—claim that this particular occasion is *representative* of Japanese religious practice, it does show the popularity of seasonal and calendrical occasions with religious themes. High levels of participation in religious occasions and events are a recognized characteristic of Japanese religion in general, as is its concern with seeking this-worldly benefits.[27] The extent of this practice is indicated in various major surveys of religious attitudes such as those carried out by the Japanese Broadcasting Network (NHK). The responses to the 1983 NHK survey, to cite but one example, show a high level of activity related to the acquisition and use of amulets and talismans, objects that are closely associated with the pursuit of practical benefits: the numbers using such charms either often or sometimes were around 75 percent of all respondents, with a high point of 80 percent for those in their twenties and thirties.[28] The extent of such prayers may be more discernible when one looks at specific needs, occupations, and situations. As has often been observed, for example, many students follow the common practice of praying for success before their school or university entrance examinations.

In introducing Hōzanji we are in effect rejecting the notion that religion is irrelevant in Japanese society and culture, an impression suggested by Reischauer and Jansen and gleaned by artificial questions about belief and "true religion." Such an impression falls apart when we look at what happens on a day-to-day basis at such religious centers. Hōzanji tells us of a genuine and *practiced* religious culture, concerned with ordinary needs, deeply embedded in Japanese society.

Comprehensive Responses: Types and Extent of Practical Benefits

The benefits offered at Hōzanji, such as business prosperity and assistance in giving up harmful addictions, are just a sample of the many and varying forms of benefits that may be had at shrines and temples in Japan. Their scope and extent are enormous, relating to every conceivable need, aspiration, and circumstance of individuals and social groups. Nor are they static. New forms and variations may appear at any time in line with changing social and individual needs, the demands of petitioners, and the inventiveness of religious officiants. Here we outline their general scope and extent while indicating how new forms of benefit may emerge.

It is possible to discern two main divisions in the forms of benefits that are proffered at shrines and temples: benefits that relate to pro-

tection from external dangers—in other words, benefits acquired through warding off negative forces to avoid bad luck—and benefits that are directly beckoned through actions designed to induce good fortune. In Japanese terms these categories can best be described by two broad and generic labels (which themselves are categories of *riyaku* widely prayed for in their own right): *yakuyoke* (the prevention of danger) and *kaiun* (the opening up of good fortune).

Yakuyoke is preventative. Its mechanics are perhaps best illustrated by referring to one of the most commonly used religious objects connected to this-worldly benefits. *Omamori* are amulets that represent manifestations of a spiritual entity such as a god or buddha: the Japanese verb "*mamoru*" means "to defend, to protect." Although *omamori* may also have beckoning functions to induce good fortune, they are widely used in this preventative sense to guard against misfortune and defend against bad luck. These amulets normally consist of a prayer or some form of religious inscription, invocation, or sacred text placed in a brocade bag or similar container and carried on the person. Sacralized by religious rituals that transform them into *bunshin* (spiritual offshoots) or *kesshin* (manifestations) of the deity, they are physical objects that contain the spiritual essence and powers of a deity or buddha. One of the more common forms of *omamori* is the *migawari omamori. Migawari,* meaning "changing or substituting one's body," refers to the notion that a particular buddha, bodhisattva, deity, or other figure of spiritual power can offer itself in place of the person it protects and thus absorb any negative forces that might otherwise afflict the person. A *migawari Jizō omamori,* therefore, is an amulet that represents the bodhisattva Jizō and, by force of religious ritual, has become transformed into the body of Jizō. Such an amulet is worn or carried by the person seeking protection. If the person is threatened by ill fortune, the spiritual force of Jizō is thought to act as a *migawari,* or substitute, absorbing or deflecting any bad luck or negative forces to hand, leaving the person unharmed, and thus opening the way for the enjoyment of good fortune.

Amulets and benefits, however, are not only prophylactic. As noted earlier, they may also be concerned with beckoning good fortune—as typified by the term "*kaiun.*" Besides warding off bad luck, one also seeks to attract good luck, to beckon blessings and benefits, often through the use of a variety of lucky objects (*engimono*) that represent the presence of a *kami,* buddha, or some other spiritual entity who, it is believed, will help the possessor attract benefits. Thus the intent of an amulet for success in education (*gōkaku omamori*) is to beckon good fortune for its owner. The most commonly petitioned deity for educational issues in Japan is Tenjin, a Shinto *kami* whose main

shrines are the Dazaifu Tenmangū Shrine (at Dazaifu near Fukuoka in Kyushu) and the Kitano Tenmangū Shrine in Kyoto: a Tenjin *gōkaku omamori* would thus be utilizing Tenjin's spiritual powers as a deity of education to bring good fortune to the petitioner. Among the lucky objects commonly used is a set of pencils especially blessed for writing successful exams.

Although it is possible to differentiate benefits into these two primary categories—protecting against misfortune and bringing good fortune—the two overlap and may be found in many diversified forms. To give some insight into this complexity of forms and indicate the scope, extent, and nature of the benefits people seek, we turn now to a popular guidebook to practical benefits. (We focus specifically on guidebooks in Chapter 7, but our intention here is to illustrate this wide variety of benefits and their availability within a given geographical area.) Naitō Masatoshi and Shimokawa Akihito's *Tōkyō no jisha* (The shrines and temples of Tokyo) is basically a guidebook to shrines and temples providing this-worldly benefits in the Tokyo area.[29] Its focus on a particular region is not unique, for many similar guidebooks have a specific geographical focus such as Tokyo, Osaka, or the Kansai. In their table of contents, Naitō and Shimokawa divide the world of benefits into a number of categories within a geographical framework that deals with each ward and section of the Tokyo area in turn. Such is the scope of the book that its table of contents, which merely lists categories of benefits and the temples and shrines covered in the book, takes up twelve pages. The book divides benefits into five broad types: prosperity in daily life (*seikatsu no han'ei*); male/female relations (*danjo kankei*); human life issues connected with childbirth and childrearing (*hito no issei*); the prevention of accidents and misfortune (*sainan yoke*); and recovery or healing from illness (*byōki no kaifuku*). Each of these five major categories is divided more narrowly into specified forms of benefit with entries for the various shrines and temples that can be visited in connection with each of them. In all there are forty-six types of benefits listed under these five main headings (as well as several subdivisions within these types).

Under prosperity in daily life, for example, seven major benefits are categorized: *kin'un* (increasing one's money); *shōbai hanjō* (business prosperity); *shōbu un* (winning); *kaiun* and *shōfuku* (beckoning or opening up of good fortune); *sarariman kankei* (matters of concern to office workers); *gakugyō jōju* and *juken kigan* (educational advancement and success in examinations); and *gigei jōtatsu* (progress in the arts). Several of these have their own subcategories. Under business prosperity, for example, we find not just entries for shrines and

temples that cater to this benefit in general but also specific entries that deal with particular occupations and forms of business activity, including noodle shops (*sobaya*), seaweed merchants (*noriya*), pharmacies (*kusuriya*), tofu makers (*tōfuya*), fish sellers (*uoya*), drapers (*orimonoya*), seal makers (*hankoya*), silk dealers (*kingyō*), and jockeys (*kishu*). The occupations given in this section might be described as "traditional" occupations rather than those associated with the modern urban economic environment. Such "newer" occupations associated with the modern business world are, however, dealt with under such headings as *sarariiman kankei.* In the section on winning there are references to shrines and temples where one can pray for success in winning lawsuits, achieving victory at sports, and being successful at gambling.[30] (The latter two wishes are dealt with by the shrine Kanda Myōjin in Chiyoda ward.) One should note here that the system of practical benefits, being pragmatic and situational, is not without its internal contradictions. Kankiten may, as we have seen with the votive tablets at Ikoma Shōten, be prayed to in order to help the petitioner stop addictive vices such as gambling; but elsewhere deities can be found who support one's gambling endeavors and hence act as an encouragement.

Categories such as male/female relations (*danjo kankei*) include various forms of benefit that cater to every eventuality in human relations and wishes—from linking two people together in a relationship (*enmusubi*) to severing bonds between them (*engiri*) when their love wanes or one of them realizes the detrimental effects of their relationship. Human life (*hito no isshō*) benefits range from being blessed with children (*kodakara*) to giving birth safely (*anzan*). (Under this heading there is, somewhat contradictorily, a reference to *mizuko kuyō,* the performance of memorial services for fetuses that die, most commonly because of abortion, in the womb.) Thus there are religious centers where one can pray for producing adequate mother's milk for babies (*chichi no de o yokusuru*), for help in childrearing, and for the prevention of various children's problems (such as prevention of worms, a common medical problem for children). Following on from childrearing, the benefits under this category of human life issues include safety from illnesses and disasters as well as longevity and a happy rebirth in paradise (*gokuraku ōjō*). The inclusion of rebirth in a volume that is clearly focused on this-worldly benefits demonstrates the extent to which even after-death benefits such as entry into paradise can have a this-worldly dimension. By assuring recipients of their ultimate fates, they grant them confidence and thus contribute to their happiness and sense of salvation in this world.

Although these categories have focused largely on achieving or beckoning certain types of good fortune and benefit, the table of contents deals with two major categories relating to prophylactic action: the prevention of accidents and misfortune (*sainan yoke*) and the recovery from (and prevention of) illness (*byōki no kaifuku*). The category of *sainan yoke* includes protection against theft (*tōnan yoke*), traffic safety (*kōtsū anzen*), protection against fires (*kanan yoke*), and various other general forms of protection ranging from the ubiquitous *yaku yoke* (prevention of danger) to the specific, such as protection against being struck by lightning (*kaminari yoke*) and prevention of bad dreams (*akumu tsuihō*). Traffic safety may be general or specific: there are subcategories of places where one can pray for the protection of one's children as they go to and from school (*gakudō tōkō anzen*), for safe air travel (*kōkū anzen*), and for safety at sea (*kōkai anzen*).

The general category of recovery from illness and protection against disease is broken down, in the guidebook, into specific parts of the body (shrines and temples good for problems with the head, ears, eyes, and so on) and specific complaints. There are temples and shrines that provide protection against (or healing of) one or more of the following: colds, measles, coughs, whooping cough, toothaches, rheumatism, nervous diseases, intestinal and stomach disorders, skin complaints (from warts and corns to boils and ringworms), sexual diseases, "women's medical problems" (*fujinbyō*) (such as irregular menstruation), fevers, hemorrhoids, and complaints of the feet or hands. Besides these (some of which may be dealt with by the same temple or shrine) there are places that offer general help in repelling diseases. Included under the general rubric of prevention and protection against disease are a number of institutions that offer help in resisting the temptation to drink or smoke (*kinshu, kin'en*).

We cite this particular guidebook not because it is somehow special but because it represents an important genre of religious literature related to the widespread practice of this-worldly benefits and illustrates the broad varieties of benefits that may be found within one geographical area. Nor is it comprehensive: while Naitō and Shimokawa introduce several hundred institutions within the Tokyo area alone with religious specializations relating to various forms of worldly benefit, their book does not cover every type of benefit that one could find on offer somewhere in the region and they do not detail every institution in Tokyo that has some renown connected with this-worldly benefits. One could easily find additional examples of general and specific benefits mentioned in other guidebooks or advertised at religious centers.

The Social Geography of Benefits: Benefits and Religious Identity

Naitō and Shimokawa's guidebook, then, is but a sign, rather than a complete compendium, of the comprehensive and ubiquitous provision of this-worldly benefits in Japan. Although the table of contents divides its material by different types of benefit, the organization of the book itself is regional, dealing with all the various parts of Tokyo in turn, thus enabling the reader to readily determine what benefits are on offer in any particular area.

To take one example: the book outlines some forty-six different types of benefits offered within the boundaries of Taitō ward alone at a number of different institutions and ranging from air travel safety to the healing of ear diseases.[31] Several institutions provide a multiplicity of benefits. Sensōji, the temple popularly known as Asakusa Kannon, is a major center for this-worldly benefits: the main temple and its various subshrines between them take up some fourteen pages of the book and offer a total of twenty-five different forms of benefit. Residents of Taitō ward, given this range of benefits, could thus deal with virtually all of their worldly religious needs within the boundaries of the district in which they live. Members of one family in the ward, for example, said they normally visit a local shrine, a block from their house, to pay their first respects to the gods at New Year and to acquire a talisman, but they also visit Asakusa Kannon, the largest, most encompassing, and powerful institution in the area, during the New Year period and at other times depending on their needs.

Given the efficiency of modern urban transportation, access to other religious centers may be equally easy. Thus the network of locations providing benefits within reach of the Taitō ward dweller is enormous. Yet there is also a sense of local religious identity relating to this-worldly needs—an issue we hinted at earlier when we noted the role of Hōzanji in dealing with the needs of certain local occupations and trades, as well as the network of temples and shrines around Osaka that offer this-worldly benefits. The point is that these networks of temples and shrines constitute a form of social religious geography and a sense of religious identity that relates to location.

This issue was emphasized in an interview with a couple in their sixties who were on a pilgrimage on the island of Shikoku.[32] They were "Osakans" (*Osakajin*), they said, and their religious activities centered around important shrines and temples in the Osaka region and were not limited to the Tendai Buddhist sect to which they belonged. Thus Shitennōji, the major Buddhist temple in southern Osaka, was where they went to pray for their ancestors and seek

benefits on occasions such as the temple's monthly *ennichi* related to Kōbō Daishi, while Sumiyoshi Shrine, a focal point for businesses and merchants, was their place of choice for the New Year's *hatsumōde*. As retired proprietors of a small shop, they had a high regard for Ebisu—one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune and a deity especially important for small businesses and merchants. Hence they always participated in the *hatsu Ebisu* festival (the first holy day of the year for Ebisu) in January at the Nishinomiya Ebisu Shrine halfway between Osaka and Kobe.[33] Among other points of reference on their religious and social compass were Kōyasan, the religious center founded by Kōbō Daishi, to whom they felt a special reverence (reflected in the fact that they were then engaged in the Shikoku pilgrimage), and Sefukuji (also known as Makinoodera) outside of Osaka, which is one of the Saikoku pilgrimage temples but has especially close associations with Kōbō Daishi as well.

Such regional patterns take precedence over sectarian affiliation even for members of the Jodō Shin sect, which officially rejects the pursuit of benefits as superstition. A college student—a Jodō Shin member well versed in the teachings of her sect—described in an interview her religious activities, which included a *hatsumōde* to the local shrine in her neighborhood and visits to nearby shrines and temples to acquire *omamori* for traffic safety, academic success, and a good marriage partner. When asked if her religious conduct conflicted with the teachings of her sect, she acknowledged the discrepancy but then defended her actions by saying, "But I am only being a good Japanese."[34]

For this student and the couple mentioned earlier, regional religious affiliations related to calendrical cycles and the seeking of benefits defined their religious identity and activities far more than did their official sectarian affiliation. The patterns they displayed were little different from the inhabitants of Edo (seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tokyo) studied through their journals by Miyata Noboru. Miyata draws a picture of socially oriented religious behavior in which the prime coordinates are occasions (especially seasonal and calendrical events and festivals) and needs. Citing the journal of the Edo inhabitant Saitō Gesshin as an example, Miyata notes that Saitō's life had a structure related to the changing of the seasons, which was reflected in his visits to different shrines and temples and attendance at different religious rituals.[35] Saitō's journal thus informs us that a person from Edo (*Edojin*) such as himself lived within a sociocultural and religious framework in which certain places and times fitted together as parts of the social calendar of ritual-religious behavior.

The social geography of benefits therefore provides a nexus of religious behavior and a sense of religious identity that transcends

sectarian affiliations. To the outline of Osakan religion touched on by the couple on pilgrimage, one could add various other religious centers within the region that are frequently visited by people from that city and its environs. Ishikiri Shrine is a widely visited religious institution for people in the Osaka area before they (or a relative or friend) undergo surgery; Nakayama-dera, at Takarazuka just northeast of Osaka, is generally considered to be *the* religious center for dealing with pregnancies and safe childbirth.[36] One could extend such lists to institutions like Kiyoshi Kōjin (to give it its popular name),[37] which enshrines the protective deity of the cooking cauldron. Given that the kitchen (at least in the days when cooking was done over open fires) is the most likely place for a house fire to start, Kiyoshi Kōjin has come to be seen as a protector against fires (*hinan yoke*). For Osakans wanting this benefit, Kiyoshi Kōjin is *the* place, or one of the places, to go in this respect.[38]

The social geography of benefits helps to frame the religious culture and identity of the region. Visits to specific religious centers at particular times throughout the year become part of the area's identity structure, and certain temples and shrines are seen as symbols of local and regional culture and belonging. This does not, of course, mean that people are limited to a specific region in the pursuit of benefits, but it does suggest that journeys further afield are more likely to be undertaken in order to make use of a specifically powerful provider of benefit or in times of great need. Thus a priest at Kawasaki Daishi—one of Japan's most famed locations for the benefit of *yakuyoke*, though it caters to numerous other benefits besides—noted that visitors from outside the temple's immediate catchment area were more likely to come in order to pray for *yakuyoke* than anything else. He said that the temple received quite a few visitors from the Chiba prefecture district that is on the opposite side of Tokyo from Kawasaki Daishi. People from Chiba who had prayer rituals (*kitō*) said at Kawasaki Daishi, according to this priest, usually focused on *yakuyoke* but did not as a rule petition for traffic safety (*kōtsū anzen*), although this was a recent specialty of the temple. They did not need to travel to Kawasaki Daishi for this request because in their immediate area was the temple Shinshōji, one of the most prominent centers in the whole of Japan for *kōtsū anzen*.[39]

Thus people may travel further afield for important needs and visit the deities and buddhas most widely famed for a specific benefit, but in general terms they tend to seek help within their local geographical sphere, which offers a network of benefits and locations of worship relevant to their local needs and identities. To this extent we suggest a slight modification of the comments made in the Introduction, where we implied that rather than being (say) "Buddhist" or "Shinto,"

Japanese people really are members of a common Japanese religion centered on practical benefits. Although the vast numbers of benefits available, covering every aspect of life, do justify this notion, we should note that this common religion is closely linked to questions of identity and belonging and generally has a regional focus. Thus common religion is linked not just to general customs, beliefs, and practices but to a series of relationships and visits to set locations in a specific region. And this location itself is therefore part and parcel of the common conceptual framework and ritual structure. In describing her visits to local shrines and temples as the activities of a "good Japanese," the Jodō Shin college student exemplifies the way in which the pursuit of this-worldly benefits partakes of the commonalties within a local area as well as the common religion of the nation as a whole.

Changing Times and New Benefits

Although many of the benefits cited in Naitō and Shimokawa's book relate to traditional aspects of Japan, we also note the occurrence of institutions catering to new professions and new concerns. Within the benefits market, as it were, there is a constantly modernizing dynamic, and new forms of benefits related to contemporary needs appear with regularity and often with great speed. Travel safety is one such area where new developments occur regularly because of the expanding and changing nature of travel. In this area, for example, we have seen the appearance of rituals of purification of automobiles in order to ward off potential accidents—a form of activity that emerged in the early 1960s but has grown rapidly in line with the growth in car ownership since that era—and the appearance of seat belt amulets when new laws made wearing seat belts compulsory in the 1980s.[40]

Air traffic safety is another new form of benefit that has flourished in recent years, as increasing numbers of Japanese have begun to travel regularly by air. In the early 1980s it was quite rare to come across talismans, amulets, deities, or institutions that catered specifically to this form of protective benefit, which tended to be subsumed within the wider category of *kōtsū anzen* (traffic safety). Through the 1980s, however, the growth of air travel—coupled, at least according to some priests, to a number of air crashes involving Japanese, most particularly the 1985 crash of a jumbo jet in Gumma prefecture which killed over five hundred people—created an anxiety that developed into the specific benefit of air travel safety, the production of amulets for this purpose, and the evolution of certain deities and figures of worship into protectors of air travelers. Increased air travel and in-

creased awareness of its dangers have thus created unease. As a priest at Saidaiji, a popular prayer temple outside Okayama, remarked, the rapid increase in the numbers of Japanese who travel overseas for holidays and the like has heightened fears about the perils of traveling overseas, becoming ill in another country, losing their money, and all the other apparent dangers of stepping outside the familiar into the unfamiliar.[41] Overseas travel safety (*kaigai anzen*) is developing as a new variation on the travel safety theme as a result.

Many temples and shrines that have become active in air traffic safety had already acquired a reputation for travel safety in general. Given their roles as protectors of travelers, it was quite natural for temples such as Kawasaki Daishi and Shinshōji to extend their services to this newly popular form of travel. Other institutions not necessarily associated with travel safety also began to develop a reputation in this area for reasons connected with the deity they enshrined. The temple Shōbōin in Tokyo, for instance, was established in 1530 as a prayer temple (*kitōdera*) connected to the Tendai lineage of the ascetic mountain religious sect Shugendō. This temple is popularly known as Tobi Fudō (Flying Fudō) because of its main image of worship. According to temple legend, the image acquired this epithet in the Tokugawa era when the head priest took it with him to the Mount Omine region, where he intended to participate in Shugendō austerities. The statue, however, flew miraculously back to the temple in Edo (Tokyo), clearly indicating its wish to remain there and serve local petitioners (thereby, one might comment, displaying its loyalty to its regional following and the social locale) and subsequently provided numerous benefits for them.[42]

While the main benefits provided by this Fudō were family safety, business prosperity, and the prevention of danger and the opening of good fortune, travel safety had not been considered one of its specific capabilities. But given the analogy between its name and image—a temple related to flying—it began to receive petitioners seeking Fudō's grace in connection with air travel safety as the era of mass air transport evolved. Many such travelers wanted a talisman or amulet specifically related to air travel. As a result the temple responded to popular demand and developed its own prayers, rituals, and benefits connected to air safety and created an *omamori* focused on the benefit of *ochinai* (not falling) in this respect.[43] The temple's courtyard is filled with votive tablets (*ema*), on the back of which are prayers for safety complete with itineraries and flight numbers. The front of the *ema* depicts a traditional-looking Fudō holding his sword of wisdom. Across his chest flies, level and steady, a Boeing 747.

The generic benefit of travel safety has diversified further still in recent years. Today there are amulets for overseas safety and, more

Tobi Fudō *ema*

recently, an advance into the final frontier of space. The Kotohira Shrine in Shikoku and its main deity Konpira are famed as the guardians of sailors and ships: to petition the gods for their protection, shipbuilders and shipping firms regularly place large votive tablets at the shrine depicting the vessels they have built or commissioned. In February 1991 a new votive tablet appeared there, put up by one of the country's broadcasting corporations, Tōkyō Hōsō (Tokyo Broadcasting Company), to give thanks to the gods in connection with the flight of Japan's first spaceman, Akiyama Toyokiro. Akiyama was a journalist working for Tōkyō Hōsō, which paid for a place on a Russian spacecraft in December 1990 in order to boost its ratings by having Akiyama broadcast from space. The votive tablet placed at the shrine after his safe return depicts him in a spacesuit; to the side is a space rocket blasting off. Not only does this demonstrate the flexibility of the deity of seafaring ships to extend its influence to spacecraft. It also exemplifies the underlying recognition—even among modern media organizations and in relation to the most advanced technological enterprises—that the gods have a role to play and even a tightly controlled scientific enterprise may have a religious angle necessitating the observation of religious proprieties.[44]

Such examples of new benefits connected to travel safety demonstrate the ability of Japanese religious institutions to retain a contemporary relevance and keep abreast of the prevailing needs and trends in society. Sometimes the responses of shrines and temples can be

Astronaut *ema* of Akiyama Toyokiro

extremely rapid and extremely topical. On September 26, 1996, the Japanese government announced that both houses of the Diet would be dissolved and a joint general election held on October 20. Less than a week later, the Tamō Hachiman Shrine in Ehime prefecture began to advertise on the Internet prayers for the victory (*hisshō kigan*) of one's preferred candidate or party. Emphasizing that its

main deity Hachiman is a god of victory—and that this election would be crucial in the effort to resolve the uncertainties that had afflicted Japan's political system in the 1990s—it enjoined people to express their aspirations relating to the election through prayers at the shrine.[45] That this new benefit was announced on the Internet is just an example of the ways in which new technologies continue to shape the world in which religious institutions operate. Later we shall return to this point and the availability of benefits via the Internet.

This benefit is perhaps remarkable in its speed of appearance, but it reflects the close and direct relationship between contemporary social issues and the manifestation of new forms of benefits. Often there is only a brief lapse of time between an event and the appearance of religious responses to it. Indeed, one can often get an idea of what issues are troubling people at large by observing what kind of this-worldly benefits are being offered. Although AIDS, for example, first manifested itself in Japan in the latter 1980s, the response of public and health authorities was not always immediate, and it was not until the early 1990s that it came to be regarded as a disease to which ordinary Japanese (rather than foreigners and homosexuals) might succumb. Yet some realization of the dangers and potential transferability of AIDS was to be found at religious institutions earlier than this. By 1987, for example, at least one shrine had begun to take up the issue by producing amulets relating to AIDS and harnessing its deities to confront the disease. This was the case with the Kanamara Shrine in Kawasaki (located within a short walk of Kawasaki Daishi Temple), an institution that has long been associated with fertility and helping those suffering from sexual diseases. As the shrine's own literature puts it: "What could be more natural, then, that the shrine should embrace those who are concerned with the spread of the acquired immune-deficiency syndrome—AIDS?"[46]

The shrine began to note the spread of AIDS in Japan from 1987 onward, and commissioned a well-known artist to design a votive tablet that would draw attention to the importance of safe-sex practices. The votive tablet utilizes the popular "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" (*mizaru, kikazaru, iwazaru*) three-monkey motif found in Japanese folklore—but adds two more monkeys, the monkey that transmits no evil (*sezaru*) and the one that receives no evil (*sasezaru*). The former is covering its genitals, the latter its backside, and the message is clear: the importance of the moral commitment to safe sex, specifically in the form of abstinence. The votive tablet also bears the inscriptions "*kanai enman*" (fulfillment in the home) and "*shison han'ei*" (prosperity for one's children). The mention of these benefits—the latter is related in particular to heterosexual activity—demonstrates an underlying recognition that AIDS is a disease that

Monkey *ema* with moral advice for prevention of AIDS at Kanamara Shrine

affects not just one form of sexual orientation or one segment of the population but everyone. The accompanying leaflet instructs people to place the votive tablet with a prayer on it at the shrine or to hang it in one's home: either way the tablet should "serve as a demonstration of your commitment to safe sex and a manifestation of your prayers for the protection from the scourge of AIDS."[47] Such benefits are not only related to contemporary issues but assume an ethical and indeed educational nature, a theme that we take up in Chapter 3 dealing with the moral meanings of prayers for this-worldly benefits. The example of Kanamara Shrine's rapid response to AIDS illustrates the ways in which new forms of benefits—and, indeed, of talismans and amulets—may be manufactured in line with new personal and social concerns.

Another benefit that has developed in response to a contemporary social problem is that for the prevention of, or protection against, senility (*boke fūji*), a function commonly carried out by the bodhisattva Kannon. Although the prevention of senility is closely linked to prayers for a swift and painless death (*pokkuri*), which has a long history in Japan,[48] *boke fūji* has especially grown since the latter 1980s as public awareness of the problems of aging has spread. This benefit is not the product of the religious world alone, nor indeed just of anxious petitioners asking their priests for something to relieve this growing worry. Part of the stimulus has come from the world of commerce—in particular from a Buddhist statue manufacturer in Kyoto

whose creation of the original *boke fūji Kannon* statue has been welcomed enthusiastically by a number of Buddhist priests around the country, aware of the concerns of elderly people and eager to ease their anxieties. Many of these priests recognize too that as a focus of current concern it is likely to bring people to temples and therefore provide a new means of activity, custom, and support for their institutions.[49]

All these cases, whether of election victory, air travel safety, AIDS, or the prevention of senility, demonstrate that the appearance of new benefits appropriate to new needs and situations is a recurrent feature of Japanese religion and, moreover, inform us of its reflexive and pragmatic nature. To return to the comments made by the priest at Saidaiji cited earlier, new situations create new forms of unease and hence new needs in the field of practical benefits. Modernity, rather than eradicating unease, has simply shifted its locus. People may be less worried now, for example, about the dangers of diseases such as smallpox that have more or less been eliminated by modern science; hence the deities that once coped with this disease are no longer needed and can be pensioned off. But new diseases such as AIDS provoke new fears, while changing patterns of life can present new dangers—whether on aircraft, in the streets of foreign cities, or in terms of the perils of aging. There are times, of course, when these fears may be manipulated by religious specialists who, in so doing, increase the prospects of people coming to their temples and shrines seeking protection and help.

Concerns about dangerous activities do not, of course, prevent their development. Although the various traffic safety amulets appear to have evolved in response to people's growing awareness of the potential dangers of travel, such forms of travel (whether by car or more recently by air) have continued to spread. People do not as a rule refuse to travel by car because they fear an accident or, like the woman cited in the Introduction, cease to drive because they have had accidents in the past. Rather, the religious response allows people to express their fears, reassure themselves about a proposed activity or course of action, and do what they wish to do: travel. The provision of overseas and air travel safety amulets enables people to go beyond the confines of Japan in the company of the gods, under their protection, and thus plays a part in the legitimation of such travel.

Although the expansive lists given in popular guidebooks indicate the general scope covered by the practice of seeking this-worldly benefits, they do not and perhaps cannot manifest the entirety of the practice, which has the potential to cover any and every human need, desire, and situation. The reflexive nature manifested at Tobi Fudō—where the temple responded to requests from petitioners and pro-

duced a service and charm that addressed their needs—is complemented by an inventiveness and occasionally an opportunism, the impetus for which frequently comes from priests and religious specialists who are adept at discerning trends, recognizing new areas of need, and creating new benefits in line with them. This is an important dimension of practical benefits because it pertains to the ways in which the promises of benefits are made and how they—and hence the religious institutions and figures—are proselytized, disseminated, and even manipulated. In Chapter 6 we discuss the marketing and promotion of benefits and return to the creation of new benefits in response to changing needs.

Practical Benefits, Religious Institutions, and Ritual Processes: The Case of Kawasaki Daishi

Religious institutions need not cater only to one category of worldly benefits but may provide an extensive year-round service dealing with all manner of needs, ritual services, and religious objects that relate to benefits. Earlier we gained some insights into this theme in our discussion of Hōzanji. Here we examine in some depth a temple we have already mentioned: Kawasaki Daishi. What underpins the sacred nature and reputations of religious centers? What is the calendrical cycle of praying for benefits? In what ways can benefits be sought? What ritual processes and religious objects are associated with them? While these topics are discussed in later chapters, it is important to offer some introductory remarks here.

Kawasaki Daishi is the name by which the temple Heikenji is known throughout Japan. Like many other religious centers, it has become famed under its popular rather than official name: "Daishi" refers to its main figure of worship, Kōbō Daishi, the posthumous name of Kūkai, the Buddhist monk active in Japan at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries. The founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan as well as important religious centers such as the temple Tōji in Kyoto and Kōyasan south of Osaka, Kūkai has a huge reputation as a religious teacher, practitioner, and Japanese cultural hero. After his death—or, as his later followers would have it, after his entry into eternal meditation in his mausoleum at Kōyasan—he was eventually granted the posthumous title Kōbō Daishi by the imperial court in the year 921. By then legends affirming that he was still alive and capable of performing miracles, interceding to help the faithful and punish the wicked, had begun to develop, promoted in great part by priests and wandering ascetics connected with the Shingon Buddhist sect and with Kōyasan.

Kōbō Daishi is one of the most important and frequently petitioned providers of benefits in Japanese religion: prominent as a

figure of worship in numerous pilgrimages, he is also venerated at numerous temples such as Kawasaki Daishi in Japan, and many other temples have acquired special sanctity by claiming him (usually with a degree of poetic license) as their founder.[50] Although Kūkai, as the founder of a particular sect of Buddhism in Japan (Shingon), has specific sectarian associations, in his subsequent guise as Kōbō Daishi he has transcended these boundaries and, through his reputation as a provider of benefits and performer of miraculous intercessions, has become venerated not only at Shingon temples but across the spectrum and is prayed to by people regardless of their sectarian affiliation or orientation.[51]

Kawasaki Daishi is one of the most visited religious institutions in Japan: it is the most frequently visited Buddhist temple at *hatsumōde;* the only shrine in Japan that receives more visitors at this time of year is Meiji Shrine in the heart of Tokyo. Although it is of the Shingon sect, those who visit come from all walks of Japanese religious life and their main concerns are in the powers of the temple and of Kōbō Daishi to grant benefits to them.[52] The temple's fame comes from the reputation of Kōbō Daishi and its foundation story (*engi*), which sacralizes the temple and allots immense sacred power to its main image of worship, a statue of Kōbō Daishi.

Foundation legends (*engi*) affirm the sacrality of a location and play an important role in constructing an image of power. In the Introduction we encountered the foundation legend of Ichibata Yakushi, in which a pious fisherman found a miraculous statue of Yakushi, who restored his blind mother's sight; as a result of this miracle and his faith, a temple centered on this statue was founded and became known for healing eye problems. Such legends may well have been invented by priests in order to provide religious institutions or sacred images with a reputation for efficacy (or indeed as a post hoc legitimation for the existence of a religious institution and as an affirmation of its power) and are widely publicized as a means of creating faith and encouraging the faithful to visit religious institutions. Although they often have no historical veracity, *engi* represent a living religious tradition—an exposition of what has in other contexts been described as "mythistory,"[53] the mythic construction of a tradition that speaks of religious truth and validity and provides a form of historical origin. As such, *engi* are potent tools in the proselytization of religion and religious efficacy, and their use in affirming the powers of specific locations and images has been seminal in the formation of Japanese religious culture and the development of networks of popular religious centers and pilgrimage routes.[54]

In the case of Kawasaki Daishi its *engi* connects the temple to its main figure of worship, Kōbō Daishi, who although he never visited the site is nonetheless considered to be present and active there. Ac-

cording to various versions of the *engi*, Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi) carved a statue of himself in his forty-second year. In common Japanese religious belief (derived from Taoist influences) the forty-second year is the *yakudoshi,* or dangerous year, for men—a year when they are especially open to misfortune and should take steps to protect themselves by calling on the gods and buddhas. Praying for the eradication of dangers—*yakuyoke*—is a major category of benefit seeking, and *yakudoshi*-related prayers and actions are one of the most prevalent occasions when this occurs.

Kōbō Daishi is a prominent source of protection in Japanese religion with regard to the *yakudoshi*. Because Kūkai was a historical figure, it has been possible to attribute to him numerous actions that (so legend avers) he performed in order to avoid the spiritual dangers of his age and possible, too, to construct various legends that relate to actual things linked to Kōbō Daishi, such as pilgrimages he is said to have created or statues he is said to have carved. In 815 (Kūkai's forty-second year), for example, legends state that he walked around Shikoku, the island of his birth, founding the island's eighty-eight-stage pilgrimage route, which is focused on Kōbō Daishi.[55] Although this pilgrimage story is historically inaccurate (the pilgrimage did not come into existence until centuries later, and as far as is historically known Kūkai was not in Shikoku in 815), it provides a legendary impetus and foundation myth to the pilgrimage by associating it with the sacred figure at its heart. It also affirms the value of the pilgrimage as a religious action designed to safeguard one against dangers such as the *yakudoshi*. Many pilgrims do indeed perform it in their dangerous years.[56]

Among the other activities attributed to Kūkai/Kōbō Daishi in connection with his own forty-second year was the carving of various statues and images of worship. The statue at Heikenji (Kawasaki Daishi) is one of these and, according to the temple's *engi*, after carving a statue of himself he cast it into the sea. The subsequent whereabouts of the statue were revealed in the twelfth century to Hirama Akinori, a retainer of the powerful Minamoto clan, to whom Kōbō Daishi appeared in a dream. Using the services of a priest from Kōyasan, Hirama founded a temple enshrining this statue: the temple took its official name from the *on*, or Chinese readings, of the two ideograms of his name (*hei* and *ken*). Since Hirama had founded the temple in his forty-second year, there are strong associations with various forms of *yakuyoke* and the temple has become, in the words of one of its priests, a center for *yakuyoke shinkō* (faith in preventing danger).[57] The temple's fame derives from its dual associations with Kōbō Daishi—both as carver and original sacralizer of the main image and as the main image itself. Thus the statue is a spiritual manifestation of

Kōbō Daishi and the intercessionary and protective powers he is believed to possess. This sanctity is further reinforced by the miraculous founding legend that brought the statue to Kawasaki (and implies it was Kōbō Daishi's specific will and intention that his protective aura should be manifested there) and is closely linked to the questions of *yakudoshi* and *yakuyoke*.

The legends of founding and the image of power and sanctity so constructed have fueled numerous other legends, stories, and reports of benefits received at the temple throughout subsequent centuries, and these too have contributed to its fame and increased the numbers of people who have come to the temple to seek help. In the modern era perhaps the most widely circulated of such stories relates to the air raids that devastated Kawasaki on April 15, 1945, in the closing months of World War II. The area around the temple was severely damaged and many of its buildings were razed to the ground. A few days earlier, however, the head priest had had a premonition that the statue was in danger and moved it away from the temple. Thus the statue was saved—miraculously, as temple officiants put it. Given that the statue is the key to the temple's power as a religious site, the priest's premonition saved the temple, while the story of the premonition itself (which may be read as suggesting that the statue's miraculous powers were behind this warning) added to the temple's fame and the numbers of people who subsequently came to seek its assistance.[58]

Kawasaki Daishi has had a major impact on the geography of its region. Located in the industrial city of Kawasaki just south of Tokyo, the temple is surrounded by public utilities that bear its name and indicate how important a local landmark it is: by car one reaches the temple by coming off the capital's expressway Route One at the Daishi exit; by bus by alighting at Kawasaki Daishi bus stop; by train by alighting at the Keihin Railway's Kawasaki Daishi station. Between the station and temple one passes through an arcade of shops and stalls similar to those found before other temples and shrines: besides shops selling ordinary goods, there is a preponderance of stores selling souvenirs connected to the temple and other lucky objects (*engimono*) such as *maneki neko* (the beckoning cat, a traditional Japanese symbol of good luck) and Daruma dolls (also signs of good fortune), shops specializing in incense and other articles associated with religious practices and institutions, restaurants catering to the visitors, and the like. Even inside the temple precincts one finds stalls selling lucky objects and foodstuffs during festival times such as New Year.

The stations and shops are highly profitable for those that run them, for the temple receives millions of visitors every year. Kawasaki Daishi's visitors regularly top 3 million during the first three days of

the year—in 1993 it received 3.15 million visitors in this period and even a week after New Year's day the temple was crowded and bustling.[59] Besides New Year, the temple has a whole series of yearly events (*nenjū gyōji*) that are occasions of special rituals and can draw people. The temple's cycle of calendrical rituals and festive events form a temporal framework that organizes its year: in all, Kawasaki Daishi's list of *nenjū gyōji* details forty-one separate events throughout the year—commencing with the opening fire ritual on New Year's morning (*ganchō daigomaku*) to summon good fortune in the coming year and ending with a ritual on the evening of December 31 to sweep away the old year and the ills that went with it (*joya hōraku*). This ritual calendar encompasses the two major forms of benefits we discussed earlier: from the summoning of good fortune at the beginning of the new year to the banishing of bad fortune in the last rite of the year. Its most recurrent feature is a ritual celebration of Kōbō Daishi's holy day (*ennichi*) on the twenty-first day of each month.

Not all the calendrical events relate directly to *genze riyaku*. Some relate to caring for the ancestors—as do the *higan* festivals of spring and autumn in which families pray for the safety of their ancestors—or to commemorations of important events in the (legendary) life of the Buddha (such as *hana matsuri*, the Japanese commemoration of the birth of Buddha (held on April 8) and *nehan-e*, the commemoration of his passing from this life into paranirvana (February 15). This does not mean that those who attend these services cannot say their own private prayers for benefits, purchase amulets, or offer votive tablets. The system is, as noted earlier, open and accessible at all times. Particularly auspicious, however, are the numerous special occasions and festive times when praying for this-worldly benefits is especially efficacious and encouraged, such as the monthly festive *ennichi* when there is a market held at the temple.

Visitors need not limit their prayers to these special occasions in the ritual calendar, however, or to their own private supplications whenever they happen to be at the temple. They can seek special prayer rituals from the priests in accordance with their own wishes and needs. To cater to their needs, for example, there are regular performances of the *goma* (fire) ritual—one of the most important rituals conducted in the Shingon sect of Buddhism and the primary ritual held at the temple connected to petitions for this-worldly benefits. On normal weekdays, such *goma* rituals are held usually eight times per day, the first at 6:00 A.M., the last at 7:00 P.M., while there are normally nine performances on Sunday, which as elsewhere tends to be the busiest day of the week for the temple. In the *goma* ritual sacred sticks of wood (*gomagi*) bearing religious inscriptions and petitioners' specific requests are immolated in a sacred fire. The *goma*

ritual is found in a variety of forms in Japan—from the rituals of Esoteric Buddhist sects such as Shingon and Tendai, to new religious movements such as Bentenshū and Agonshū, to Shinto shrines.[60] Kawasaki Daishi is by affiliation a Shingon Buddhist temple and hence uses the special objects, incantations, gestures, and ritual actions laid down in the Esoteric Buddhist manuals and texts of the Shingon sect.

The list of benefits that may be petitioned for at Kawasaki Daishi through the *goma* ritual is extensive and impressive: according to temple literature, such benefits include:

saiyaku shōjo (eradication of calamities)
kanai anzen (family safety)
kōtsū anzen (traffic safety)
shōbai hanjō (business prosperity)
shinjō anzen (physical safety)
byōki heiyu (recovery from illness)
shingan jōju (accomplishment of all one's heart's wishes)
kaiun manzoku (successful opening of fortune)
nyūgaku jōju (successful entry into school or college)
ryōen jōju (making a good marriage)
anzan manzoku (safe childbirth)
kaijō anzen (safety at sea)
kaigai ryokō anzen (safe overseas travel)
jigyō hanei (business success)
kōji anzen (safety when undertaking building and construction work)
hōjo (protection from unlucky directions)
mushi fūji (protection against roundworm)
sono ta: shogan jōju, o-fuda (also: fulfillment of all vows, talismans)

The final category represents a catchall that in effect means the ritual can be utilized for whatever purpose the petitioner wants.

In outlining the meanings and processes of the *goma* ritual, the temple affirms both its deep connection to Esoteric Buddhist thought and practice and its efficacy as a means of providing the petitioner with this-worldly benefits—which are, it is affirmed, produced through the grace of Kōbō Daishi allied to the spiritual purity and endeavor of the priests acting as the ritual officiants mediating and relaying the requests of the ordinary visitors to the figure of worship. While petitioners may approach the holy figure directly in prayer, it is generally considered more efficacious and ritually correct, in matters of great concern, to do this through the services of a trained religious officiant who is versed in the temple's specific practices and occupies a powerful position as priest and guardian of the sacred statue. The ritual itself involves the burning of *goma* sticks to immo-

late symbolically the evil passions that hinder happiness. By removing bad luck and danger, the ritual opens the way for good fortune and happiness.

The temple describes the "beneficial merits of the *goma* ritual" (*o-goma no kudoku*) as follows:

> The religious practice of the *goma* is a powerful rite that is underpinned by profound and highly significant philosophical meanings and by the true doctrinal principles of Esoteric Buddhism as followed in the Shingon sect. The word "*goma*" comes from the Sanskrit *homa*, which means "to burn" or "set fire to," and expresses the meaning of immolating the evil passions (*bonnō*—the root of all suffering) through the fire of Buddhist wisdom.
>
> The *goma* ritual is a strictly Esoteric rite in which a priest (an ascetic practitioner) who has cleared his body and spirit of impediments through ritual purification makes offerings of various things such as five varieties of grains, incense, and flowers at the *goma* altar situated before the main image of worship. In burning the *goma* sticks in the central hearth of the altar the priest begins the service of offering to the main image of worship: the Danger-Preventing Daishi (Yakuyoke Daishi).
>
> The beneficial merits of the Daishi, as well as the prayers of the spiritually pure priest, unite completely with the meritorious faith of all the worshipers. At the end of the rite, a *goma* talisman (*o-goma fuda*), which is the crystallization of the spiritual power produced by the performance of this austere ritual, is given to all who participate.
>
> Please make a sign of prayer and recite the sacred mantra of Kōbō Daishi (*namu Daishi henjō kongō*). Through this *goma* ritual all one's evil passions are burnt and purified, and all dangers are eradicated. Thus all one's wishes concerning gaining good fortune—family safety, business prosperity, healing of illness, the achievement of all wishes, and so on—begin to be realized.[61]

This text thus affirms the point made in the Introduction about the role and indeed the efficacy of Buddhism in providing good fortune and protecting against misfortune. It is a high Buddhist ritual expressing core Buddhist values (such as the destruction of evil passions), underpinned by Buddhist thought and conducted by Buddhist priests, which is able to produce this-worldly benefits. The text also makes clear that *yakuyoke* is closely associated with—and, in terms of the ritual process, is an integral part of—the acquisition of good fortune. Thus the unity of different forms of benefit is affirmed: at bottom *yakuyoke* and *kaiun* signify two sides of the same coin. *Genze riyaku*, as manifested through the ritual, is produced as a result of the

interaction of the priest fortified through observations of ritual purity, the ritual texts, ritual formulas, true faith, doctrinal correctness in the performance of the ritual, and the commitment of the petitioner. Practice and the acquisition of benefits are thus inextricably tied together.

As a result of participating in the ritual, the petitioner receives a talisman (*fuda*) that, as the temple states, represents the spiritual power created by the ritual and may be taken home to provide protection. *Fuda* are similar to *omamori* in that they too are regarded as manifestations (*bunshin, kesshin*) of the sacred entity enshrined at the temple or shrine. Usually made of flat strips of shaped wood or paper with religious inscriptions (at Buddhist temples these are generally Buddhist prayers or mantras) as well as the name of the shrine, temple, and deity, these *fuda* are given to petitioners as a result of their participation in the ritual services. They can also be purchased, however, without the necessity of participating in such rituals. The terms "*fuda*" and "*omamori*" are normally translated as "talismans" or "amulets," but each of them can span the theoretical functions differentiated with these English words (the amulet as protective device, the talisman as beckoner of good fortune): one can have protective and fortune-beckoning *fuda* and similarly *omamori*. The prime difference between the two objects is that *fuda* are generally considered to protect or bring fortune to an area (such as a house or building and its occupants) or social group (a family, a company), while *omamori* are normally considered to relate to a particular individual who wears or carries it on his or her person. Such objects, as the description of Kawasaki Daishi's *goma*-related *fuda* illustrates, are usually considered to represent the spiritual powers of a specific religious institution, deity, and ritual performance and, as in the example of the *migawari* Jizō amulet mentioned earlier, manifests the spiritual force of a particular deity or figure of worship.

Besides *fuda* and *omamori,* petitioners at Kawasaki Daishi, as at other religious institutions, whether Shinto, Buddhist, or some of the new religions, can also avail themselves of numerous other protective objects and amulets as well as lucky charms and talismans and other "fortune-beckoning" objects (*engimono*). Petitioners can write their requests on the *gomagi,* the wooden sticks that are immolated in the *goma* ritual, to convey their messages to the buddhas and deities. At virtually all religious institutions, whether Shinto or Buddhist, they can also avail themselves of such devices as votive tablets (*ema*) on which they write their prayers and wishes and address themselves directly to the gods. Such votive tablets are thus "letters to the gods" through which people can externalize, publicly express, and put into concrete form an inner desire.[62]

Many other such objects are available at shrines and temples. Like the Kawasaki Daishi *goma fuda,* they represent the idea of *genze riyaku* and constitute a means of expressing one's desire for good fortune and spiritual protection from bad luck. Such religious paraphernalia, the most tangible aspect of the ritual process of seeking this-worldly benefits, are virtually inseparable from the wider theme of the practices relating to *genze riyaku*—and to commercial issues, as well, since they are sold at religious institutions and thus represent the economically profitable side of the pursuit of this-worldly benefits. Although we discuss them in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6, we mention them here to show that institutions like Kawasaki Daishi provide their petitioners with a variety of services related to this-worldly benefits, not just in terms of formally organized prayer rituals such as the regular *goma* services, but also in more privatized ways.[63]

The extensive list of benefits offered, combined with the temple's reputation, draws large numbers of petitioners. Their ranks have been augmented in the past two decades by those who visit the temple seeking the protective benefit of traffic safety, which has become, since the 1960s, one of the temple's specialties. Such is the popularity of this function that Kawasaki Daishi has had to establish a prayer hall just for this purpose, complete with parking lot to accommodate cars, motorbikes, and even wheelchairs. Prayer services occur in the parking lot on a regular basis, almost hourly, and the lot is often full. The temple's services are sought out not just by individuals but by organizations as well: in 1993 a number of taxis belonging to taxi firms in the area were seen being blessed in the lot, as well as buses and other commercial vehicles. Temple records show that services have been held from the 1960s onward for major commercial organizations such as the Seibu Department Store in Ikebukuro—which had services for traffic safety for its automobiles—as well as regular services for traffic safety on behalf of the Kanagawa prefectural police force, which has its police cars and motorbikes blessed at the temple.[64]

Individual Wishes and Social Requests

As we have seen in this chapter, the occasions when people seek benefits touch on every form of potential need: from calendrical events related to the seasons to life-cycle events related to growing up and developing into an adult. They deal not only with issues related to individual success and prosperity but with matters for social groups (such as family safety) or organizations (such as company prosperity). Shrines and temples provide a comprehensive range of practices, rituals, and sacred objects that can be utilized to express wishes and ac-

Kawasaki Daishi car blessing lot

quire benefits. And where existing services or forms of benefits are unable to cater to particular needs, there is always the possibility of creating new ones. We can see, then, that this-worldly benefits are widely sought and comprehensively available for total life care, and the institutions that deal with them, such as Kawasaki Daishi and Hōzanji, frame the religious map of Japan and structure its religious environment.

That the seeking of benefits is not specifically or even primarily a personal affair is demonstrated by the fact that organizations ranging from commercial companies to the police force take part in group prayers and petition for benefits at temples such as Kawasaki Daishi. We shall return to this topic in Chapter 5 where, besides looking at individual behavior associated with this-worldly benefits, we touch on some of the social religious organizations (*kō*) whose raison d'être is linked with the pursuit of this-worldly benefits, as well as some of the commercial enterprises that invoke the gods and patronize shrines and temples in the pursuit of practical benefits.

Our discussion of Kawasaki Daishi shows also that benefits are closely related to actions and ideas formally prescribed in texts and maintained by tradition. That pursuit of this-worldly benefits finds its validation in textual sources, most notably Buddhist texts, has raised interesting questions for Japanese Buddhist scholars, many of whom would prefer to see the pursuit of benefits as an expedient or folk

practice that is not fully in accord with Buddhism proper. What do the scriptures say, and how do Japanese Buddhist scholars, particularly when looking through the prisms of their own sectarian perspectives, deal with the topic of *genze riyaku*? It is to such questions that we turn next.