

The “spirit of a place linked to bones”

Zenkoji temple, where the men’s spirits come back to their ex-bodies after death

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Abstract. There are two types in the “spirit of place”, one “linked to bones” and the other “not linked to bones”. “Places not linked to bones” relate to the gods' spirits and their intangible bodies, while “places linked to bones” relate to the spirits of the dead and their tangible ex-bodies. Although flesh disappears after death, bones and spirit remain eternally. The spirit with its intangible body comes back to its bones after death. In Japan, “places not linked to bones” are associated to the Shinto religion, while “places linked to bones” are associated to Buddhism. Zenkoji, one of the country’s largest Buddhist temples, relating both to intangible spirits and to tangible remains, is also the most typical of “places linked to bones”. Dating from ancient times, Zenkoji has changed much like Proteus. Such a dynamic transformation reflects how this place has accepted deaths over centuries in tolerance and without discrimination.

1. Introduction; two types of a place

The paper introduces the two types to the "spirits of place", one "linked to bones" and the other "not linked to bones".

Firstly the "places not linked to bones" relate to the gods' spirits and their intangible bodies. The gods have plural figures with no bones and their feet are not on the ground. Built environments in these places are temporary and mobile. The places have the "deepest" to which the way goes ahead by pure degrees. In the case of Japan such sorts of images have been transmitted in Shinto religion through centuries at latest from the ancient, and have been objectified particularly in Ise shrine in Mie prefecture. The images can be seen at present in the ritual held in the shrine. The ritual is now called Shikinen-Sengu, and has been held there every twenty years through centuries from the ancient to the present only with one stop for about

one hundred twenty years by the internal war during the late medieval.

Secondly the "places linked to bones" relate to the "spirits" of the dead and their tangible ex-bodies. Men/women have various figures with bones and their feet are on the ground before their deaths. Their bones are laid in the places after death and their spirits remain in the other world. Built environments in these places are permanent and immobile. In the case of Japan such sorts of images have been transmitted in the Buddhism religion through centuries from the sixth century, and have been objectified in precincts of Buddhism temples. Horyuji temple and Zenkoji temple are typical, but the two is much different from each other.

Although the Shinto and the Buddhism have completely different roots, the places mixed with the two appeared slowly after the introduction of the Buddhism in the sixth century from the continent to Japan. Zenkoji was one of the mixed places in Japan. It started as a Buddhism temple, but changed gradually to the place not only with the Buddhism but with the Shinto. It was during the Meiji Restoration when the new authority divided the mixed figures into the different two over Japan. Yet, the impact on Zenkoji during the Meiji Restoration were less by the new authority than the other places in Japan.

Lastly there are the places mixed with the "places not linked to bones" and "places linked to bones". In the case of Japan typical examples are Kitano palace in Kyoto and Nikko palace in Tochigi prefecture. Both of them hold a servie for the dead men's spirits as gods. The "spirit" in Kitano palace came from Michizane Sugawara (845-903). He became the God there after his death. The "spirit" in Nikko came from Ieyasu Tokugawa (1543-1616), the first shogun during the Tokugara period. He also became the God called Gongen after his death. The two spirits in those places came from these persons and changed to be gods after their deaths. It was before their deaths when they were tangible perosons who had their spirits with bodies comprised their flesh and bones. It was after their deaths when they were intangible Gods who had their spirits without bodies.

2. Spirit, flesh and bone in Japan

The contrast of "spirit" and "body" can be seen over the world. In the case of Japan, as Shuichi Kato wrote in the book of "The six lives, the six deaths", the contrast of the two is more ambiguous in Japan than in

the other Western countries. In addition, as Robert Lifton mentioned in the book that the typical images of lives in Japan are recognised by the term of something "protean" from the Greek God of Proteus who is famous as his varying his figures one after another. "Protean" style indicates that the eternity of lives are guaranteed by the successive transformation (Lifton, Kato and Reich, 1977 and 1979).

In addition, Tetsuo Yamaori (2002) wrote that it was much useful for lives and deaths in Japan to add the term of "bones" to the terms of "spirit" and "body". "Bones" are, according to his statement, not only material but spiritual.

3. The tangible and the intangible

The poem titled "bones" by the great poet Chuya Nakahara is referred in the writings by Tetsuo Yamaori (2002). It is still much important to introduce the concept of "bones" in terms of the images of lives and deaths in Japan. Nakahara described in his poem as below;

This is my bone,
that were loaded with much sufferings through my life,
and broke my filthy flesh,
then was washed purely by rain.
The tip of the bone appeared at length from the earth,

(some lines omitted.)

There! These are my bones.
Is is I who see them now? It seems to be strange.
The spirit remains after death,
and comes back to the place of its bones.
Is the spirit who is seeing its bones?

(some lines omitted.)

(from Nakahara edited by Ohoka in 1981)

The poem titled "bones" by Chuya Nakahara is not only contrasting the gap between the "spirit" and the "filthy flesh", but is bridging the two by using the term of "bones". The "spirit" remained after death comes along to the "place of its bones" from the other world and "is seeing its bones" in the world. The poem shows the relation between

the "spirit" and the "bones" both in the world and in the other world.

As the poem of "bones" indicates, both the "spirit" and the "bones" remain after death, but the "spirit" is intangible in the world while the "bones" are tangible in the world. The "flesh" is also tangible before death, but it disappears after death in the world.

4. The ritual that people lay person's bones in Zenkoji temple

The poem of "bones" by Chuya Nakahara helps us understand the meaning of the ritual that people lay person's bones in precincts of the Buddhism temples. The ritual has been outstanding in Zenkoji temple.

The ritual linked to "bones" is traditional in Japan. Particularly Zenkoji has links to the "spirits" that remain after death and come along to the "place of bones". It can be said that Zenkoji temple has been the "place of bones", to which the "spirits" living their lives after deaths come along from the other world.

Zenkoji temple is the "place of bones" and the built environment of Zenkoji's precincts has both the immobile and the permanent.

The ritual that people laid "bones" in Zenkoji temple date back to the initial stage of the medieval. Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199), the first shogun in Kamakura period, was said to visit Zenkoji temple from Kamakura in 1197. Since then, a lots of warriors in Kamakura began to visit there. They were supposed to pray for their next lives after deaths in the other world. In fact a lots of small stupas made from stones were unearthed in 1994 behind the main hall of Zenkoji temple (Koyama, 1995). These small stupas had contained a part of "bones".

The ritual still remains there. People lay a part of "bones" or all of "bones" of their relatives in Zenkoji temple.

5. Horyuji temple and Zenkoji temple

The built environment of Zenkoji is now different from the that of Horyuji temple, but both of them have some same landscapes. They have rivers running through the southern part of their environments and have slightly elevated hills at the back of their environments. The two temples had contact with each other in the ancient.

Ryuji Kuroda (2006) newly pointed out the similarities of the two and wrote that the original form of the main halls of Zenkoji and Horyuji were completely same but the transformation after their foundations were completely different.

The main hall of Horyuji has been keeping its original form while that of Zenkoji has been transforming from its original form. The main hall in Horyuji was called Kondou, that meant a golden hall, in the ancient and is still called Kondou with no change. On the other hand the main hall in Zenkoji was also called Kondou in the ancient but is now called Hondou, that means a main hall.

The Horyuji has kept not only its size but its name of the main hall while the Zenkoji has changed both its size and its name of the main hall. At present the main hall of Zenkoji has some spacious halls arranged in line to the entrance at present in front of the ex-main-hall in the ancient. These spacious halls have been added to the original to accept innumerable numbers of people who have been visiting the temple (Tsuchimoto, October 2007).

The gap between the original and the present is small in the main hall of Horyuji while the gap between them is large in that of Zenkoji. The transformation keeping its original with no change can be defined as the "Horyuji-type's transformation", while the transformation leaving from the original with much change can be defined as "Zenkoji-type's transformation" (Tsuchimoto, March 2007) .

6. “Horyuji-type” and “Zenkoji-type” on transformation

Why the two temples have completely different types of transformation though they had the same forms of the main halls and their landscapes at their initial stages?

The fourth volume of "Towazu gatari", narrating with no inquire, contains the article that the author spent her time in Zenkoji temple in 1290.

Although there were no good views, the Buddha here was said to be with alive body. So I feel trustworthy and then spent my time to pray to the Buddha one million times. After a while I met a lay priest called Iwami in Takaoka. He was much cultivated and always read poems and played instruments. He lived an austere life in the country. I was just invited by a nun to visit here, but there were much desirable residences that were too good a place in such a remote country. All things considered and some relaxing news delivered, I stayed here till autumn.

(from Kubota revised in 1999)

It was particular at that time that "The Buddha here was said to be with alive body" in Zenkoji temple. The imagined figure, that is the alive Buddha with alive body, is similar to figures of alive priests with alive bodies (Shigeru Gorai, 1988). Such sorts of traditional ideas dated back before the introduction of the Buddhism to Japan and have been changing the Buddhism itself though centuries in Japan. The ideas have vivid imageability of the existence of the Buddha both with "spirit" and with "alive body".

In particular the existence with "alive body" would help people image the existence of "bones". The ideas of the alive Buddha with "alive body", that is to say, does introduce the ideas of "bones" to Zenkoji temple because "alive body" has not only flesh but "bones".

The ritual of people laying person's bones in Zenkoji has been relating the ideas of "spirits" that comes along to the "places of bones" after death. Zenkoji as the "places of bones" depend upon the reason why the ideas of the Buddha with "alive body" not only spread over Japan but dated back to the times before the introduction of the Buddhism.

Shotoku Taishi (574-622), one of top members of the Royal family, was said to correspond from Horyuji temple with the alive Buddha in Zenkoji temple. Some letters between them remain at present in Horyuji. Shotoku Taishi, similar to the alive Buddha, would help people image the existence not only of "spirit" but of "alive body". Yet, Shotoku Taishi in Horyuji was a person, while the alive Buddha in Zenkoji was not a person. The diversity of the two temples is the reason why the worship of "bones" has been outstanding not in Horyuji but in Zenkoji.

7. Activities prior to completed architecture

Religious persons with "alive body" were prior to the foundation of Zenkoji temple. The religious activities were also prior to the built architecture. Such sorts of activities prior to the foundation were energies to change the temple drastically through centuries. The "spirits" in Zenkoji relate the "spirits" remained after deaths. The place of Zenkoji is the "place of bones" that has been indicating the place to which intangible "spirits" come along from the other world.

The "spirits" and "bones" do not keep the initial numbers in Zenkoji temple as well as the other temples. That is to say, the number of the dead Buddha and its "bones" does not increase, while the number of dead common persons and their "bones" does increase. Particularly in

Zenkoji the number of the dead and "bones" are much more than the other temples because the temple has never excluded any persons after deaths.

The "Zenkoji-type's transformation" is quite contrast to the "Horyuji-type's transformation". The contrast between them depends upon the traditional activities that were seen in Zenkoji to which "spirits" and "bones" have been added.

8. Conclusion; the place and its “spirits” in Zenkoji

They are "bones" that has been imaged by people to be able to objectify places for "spirits" that remain in the other world and come along to in the world. "Bones" are materials that are between in the world and in the other world, are between "spirits" and "bodies", and bridge the gap between the eternal "spirits" and limited "bodies". The "spirits" that come along to Zenkoji are everlasting, plural, and increasing. The place was objectified and indicated by "bones" that exist beyond the limited "bodies".

Particularly in the case of Zenkoji the place has not been confined to the specific persons but open to all ones. Dating from the ancient times, Zenkoji has changed much like Proteus. Such a dynamic transformation reflects how this place has accepted deaths over centuries in tolerance and without discrimination.

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