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ROADS, STATE, AND
RELIGION IN JAPANESE
ANTIQUITY

This is a story of the possibilities created by connection but also of the inherent fragility of movement within a network. It uses a case study of roads in ancient Japan (defined as late seventh through early ninth centuries) to show how networks amplify not only interaction but also isolation. Throughout the premodern world, massive highway construction allowed individuals to reach faraway places and fostered the spread of ideas, including religious ones. But in setting out, a potential wayfarer risked never returning, forever separating from his or her homeland. This was particularly true in premodern contexts, in which many travelers were reduced to rotting by the roadside. The fates of these individuals, who died distanced from their communities, spawned ritual problems. Who would perform mortuary services for the forsaken dead, especially if no one back home was even aware that they had passed on? This article explores the religious implications of road construction, both how a newly connected society enabled the rapid diffusion of a religious tradition and how increased mobility necessitated new practices. In short, I will take up “connectivity and its discontents,” a phrase borrowed from Sherry Turkle, a psychologist and scholar of technology.¹ In doing

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¹ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 14.

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so, I will make a historical contribution by demonstrating how roads brought Buddhism to a wide population in Japan much earlier than previously supposed and a theoretical one to uncover the religious implication of the dually connective and separative nature of networks.

Ancient rulers around the globe constructed empires by building roads. They did so for good reason. Any expansive kingdom relied upon connections and movement across space. As many have asserted, highways enabled tax collection, trade, and military movement. In other words, for rulers, roads provided money and enhanced might. Intangible benefits for the state abounded as well. Broad highways held symbolic value by displaying the central government's capabilities for construction. Rulers enacted royal progressions, peacocking their pomp and power to the populace. Highways facilitated information exchange and the spread of common knowledge. This in turn contributed to communal identity and social integration. Roads connected capital and countryside into a recognizable whole.² Perhaps for these reasons and surely others, highway construction and state building have often gone hand in hand in antiquity. This was true for the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Roman, Qin, and Incan cases.³

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the widespread construction of highways beginning in seventh-century Japan accompanied the emergence of a centralized state, as rulers expanded their authority into new territories and tried to impose an imperial imaginary over the people. As I will demonstrate, court chroniclers envisioned the early Japanese polity not through the classification of a system of penal and administrative codes (*ritsuryō kokka* 律令国家), a description favored by modern scholars, but rather through a metaphor of roads.

The relationship between roads and state, however, is only part of the tale that I want to tell. Religion is the other item in my title and a key component

² Useful comparative and theoretical studies of roads include: Susan E. Alcock, John Bodel, and Richard J. A. Talbert, eds., *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems in the Pre-modern World* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); James E. Snead, Clark L. Erickson, and J. Andrew Darling, eds., *Landscapes of Movement: Trails, Paths, and Roads in Anthropological Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009); and Charles D. Trombold, ed., *Ancient Road Networks and Settlement Hierarchies in the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³ David F. Graf, "The Persian Royal Road System," in *Achaemenid History VIII: Continuity and Change*, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Amélie Kuhrt, and Margaret Cool Root (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 167–89; Paul J. Kosmin, *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. 142–80; Raymond Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, trans. N. H. Field (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Ray Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy* (London: Routledge, 1999); Charles Sanft, *Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publicizing the Qin Dynasty* (Albany, NY: State University Press, 2014); and John Hyslop, *The Inka Road System* (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984).

of highway construction. Road networks have expedited religious expansion around the world. They have served as the literal grounds on which itinerant preachers, traders, and pilgrims walked and rode as they introduced religious ideas, rituals, and objects to new places. It is no coincidence that the rapid dissemination of Buddhism to the provinces in ancient Japan was concurrent with the creation of a highway system. This article will be the first in English to explore the role of roadways in the expansion of Buddhism in Japan at this time. Whereas popularization is often seen as a hallmark of Kamakura-period (1185–1333) Buddhism, I will highlight how the tradition reached the populace centuries earlier as evidenced by rapid provincial temple construction, especially along roadways, and the activities of itinerant monks who preached and performed rituals for rural villagers in the ancient period.

While a consideration of networks enables a new view of early Japanese religions, my case study also develops a more nuanced theory of roads relative to state and religion that will refine our thinking of networks and connectivity more generally.⁴ The construction of roads, according to common narratives of premodern history, functioned to forge connections. It increased what scholars of the Mediterranean region have termed “connectivity,” a term that most simply refers to the degree to which nodes of a spatial graph are linked.⁵ Although the sea played an obvious role in the Mediterranean case, roads too were famously central to the Roman project. This article will demonstrate how connectivity emerged in ancient Japan, but I will also shed light upon a darker side of a networked society. In particular, I will build upon the archaeologist Ian Morris’s critique of a scholarly overemphasis on connectivity, which effaces what he terms “social dislocation.”⁶ The links in nodes of a network, I will argue, have the ironic role of not only tying parts together but also creating in-between spaces of risk, which are separate from familiar environs and

⁴ For a general discussion of networks in religious studies, see Manuel A. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 291–319. For a helpful discussion of social network analysis in premodern societies including chapters on religion, see Irad Malkin, Christy Constantakopoulou, and Katerina Panagopoulou, eds., *Greek and Roman Networks in the Mediterranean* (London: Routledge, 2009). For networks and the spread of Roman religion, see Anna Collar’s outstanding *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: The Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For networks and Japanese Buddhism, see Kuranaka Shinobu 蔵中のぶ, ed., *Kodai no bunkaken to nettowāku* 古代の文化圏とネットワーク (Tokyo: Chikurinsha, 2017), 331–434.

⁵ For a useful summary of connectivity, see David K. Pettegrew, “Connectivity,” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 4:1708–11. For the classic study, see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), esp. 123–72. Their use of the concept originated in William L. Garrison’s studies of the United States highway system; see Horden and Purcell, “Four Years of Corruption: A Response to Critics,” in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. W. V. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 356 n. 18.

⁶ Ian Morris, “Mediterraneanization,” in *Mediterranean Paradigms and Classical Antiquity*, ed. Irad Malkin (London: Routledge, 2005), 42.

traditional bonds. An evocative statement about roads by James E. Snead, an archaeologist of North America's southwest, hints at the dual goals of this article:

Roads, paths, and trails imply not simply communication but *connection*, which is not the same thing. It may seem simplistic to say that the essential function of these features is to connect, but how they establish such connections makes them particularly complex and interesting. Instead of discussing what paths, trails, and roads did, we must examine what they were—*places* with particular characteristics associated with movement. And movement is not a “neutral” or value-free process. It engages links and boundaries, opportunities and barriers, belonging and exclusion. To the inhabitants of the Yorkshire Dales, the track passing the village brought “opportunities and also trouble” (Fleming 1998, 110). This was true even for those most dedicated of road builders, the Romans: “Pliny the Elder was clearly aware of the moral effects of roads, when he gave vent to his feelings, old Roman that he was: ‘Which way was vice introduced if it was not by the public road?’” (Chevallier 1966 [*sic*], 204).⁷

In short, I will join Snead, inhabitants of Yorkshire Dales, and Pliny the Elder to consider the exclusions, troubles, and vices that are part and parcel of road construction. My argument accords with the more general observation of Turkle, that “with constant connection comes new anxieties of disconnection.”⁸ Mobility means that people leave their known contexts and existing social relations behind.⁹

This disconnection had tragic consequences. In many religious contexts, including East Asian traditions, death required human connection. The isolated dead, those who lacked proper mourning by kin or country, were thought to fall into hellish realms or return as ghosts set upon bringing vengeance to those responsible for their untimely passing. A good death needed social support through familial or state rituals. Travel along roads, however, inevitably caused fragmentation; it separated people from their hometowns. In the worst cases, journeys were one-way trips. Typical prayers and rituals could not be offered for lost corpses. The crux of the challenge, therefore, was that roads enabled new forms of connection to emerge while also undermining some of the most personal, intimate, and traditional relationships, ones vital for sustenance in both life and death.

⁷ James E. Snead, “Obliterated Itineraries: Pueblo Trails, Chaco Roads, and Archaeological Knowledge,” in Alcock, Bodel, and Talbert, *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems*, 109 (emphasis in original). The studies Snead is referring to here are: Andrew Flemming, *Swaledale: Valley of the Wild River* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Chevallier, *Roman Roads*.

⁸ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 16.

⁹ Anna Collar, “A Long Way from Home: Meshworks of Migration, Memory and Emotion in the Roman Empire,” in *Migration and Migrant Identities in the Near East from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Justin Yoo, Andrea Zerbin, and Caroline Barron (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 176–77. Also, see Laurence, *Roads of Roman Italy*, 178.

In ancient Japan, these threats of spatial and social severance raised questions of moral conduct and ritual action for travelers, family members, roadside residents, rulers, and clergy. Dead travelers risked a bad rebirth. Those waiting at home worried over the fates of their loved ones and lacked rituals that could be conducted without a corpse or known death date. Roadside villagers voiced concerns about death pollution from the bodies left to rot near their homes. Rulers feared this pollution as well as attacks by vengeful spirits of deceased travelers. Moreover, the visibility of roadside corpses threatened the idealized vision of compassionate governance by bringing to light the lethal consequences of *corvée* and tax collection. Itinerant Buddhist preachers observed these problems tied to increased transit and proposed innovative ritual practices. As such, the emergence of new transportation networks prompted changes in religious ideas and actions stemming from separation from traditional social ties.

Whether highways appear as systems of connectivity or as sources of isolation depends in part on the perspective adopted by the researcher. When we soar to the skies and gaze upon highways from a bird's-eye view, connections stand out. And rightly so. From this vantage point, it is easy to see how Japanese roads created a center and connected that center to a periphery. The net outcome of increased connectivity expanded trade, facilitated tax collection, allowed troops to march with newfound speed, and introduced notions of community far more expansive than those in the days before infrastructural expansion. In accord with the writings of the sociologist Edward Shils, it is easy to imagine how roadways integrated the periphery into a shared value system with the capital,¹⁰ or how, in the view of Paul Wheatley and Thomas See, highways may have helped “bind the provinces and districts of the kingdom” to a “ceremonial and administrative center.”¹¹

But the effects of network construction did not readily accord with those intended by the architect. It appeared quite differently to those shouldering loads and risking their lives. Seeing the road from their eyes requires a grounded approach. To that end, I will utilize a range of sources including preaching notes, excavated objects, and poems that provide a vantage from below. Attention to these perspectives evokes Michel de Certeau's famous essay, “Walking in the City,” which contrasts “the imaginary totalizations” of the view from the top of the World Trade Center, where one engages in “seeing the whole,” “looking down like a god” with that of a walker of Manhattan

¹⁰ Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 3–16.

¹¹ Paul Wheatley and Thomas See, *From Court to Capital: A Tentative Interpretation of the Origins of the Japanese Urban Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 164–65. See also Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origin and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971).

streets “down below” who encounters the “certain strangeness” of the “every-day.”¹² As Anna Collar has argued, there is a need to humanize networks and to recognize that they “do not exist independently of the people within them.”¹³ By considering highways from perspectives of not only monastic and lay walkers of roads but also family members waiting in the provinces and roadside residents, we will see that there is a great deal more than connectivity at stake in the creation of a network. From these individuals’ perspectives, roads were dangerous places, which birthed corpses disconnected from their home locales.

In attending to these vantage points, I should stress that it is not necessarily to give those “down below” greater agency, to see them wielding “weapons of the weak” to resist hegemonic or any other form of domination.¹⁴ Surely some did resist, and I have elsewhere tried to address problems of agency in studies of Japanese Buddhism.¹⁵ In this article, however, my goal is to shed light on the tragic aspects of life on the margins. Many were unable to thrive or even survive in the new world order of ancient Japan. As Saba Mahmood has pointed out, agency should not be equated to resistance.¹⁶ To go one step further, we should remember that even more modest Mahmoodian proposals to treat agency as inhabiting norms ask for too much—sometimes political and ecological powers prevented survival. I aim to expose not how individuals on the periphery rewired the network to meet their needs but instead how they sometimes fell through the cracks.

Before turning to the case study, two short caveats are in order. First, it is necessary to say a few words comparing the work in this article with Michael Como’s ground-breaking research on roads, disease, and ritual in ancient Japan, work that I see as kindred with my own. Como and I are both intrigued by “unforeseen political and cultic consequences” and the fact that the “road networks that made possible the expansion of Yamato power had also set in motion a host of demons, gods, and ancestors across the land.”¹⁷ As Como

¹² Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–93.

¹³ Collar, *Religious Networks*, 35.

¹⁴ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ See my *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017), esp. 19 and 150.

¹⁶ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 5–10 and 34–35.

¹⁷ Michael Como, “Horses, Dragons, and Disease in Nara Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 410–11. Also see Michael Como, *Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 29–33; and Yamachika Kumiko 山近久美子, “Kōtsū ni kakawaru saishi” 交通に関わる祭祀, in *Nihon kodai no kōtsū, kōryū, jōhō* 日本古代の交通・交流・情報, ed. Tateno Kazumi 館野和己 and Ideta Kazuhisa 出田和久, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbukan, 2016), 3:247–70.

has shown, roadways carried not only cargo and military might but also disease and deities in ways that threatened the court and required ritual responses. I share Como's interests in unforeseen consequences and demonic attacks, but my emphasis differs. For one, I will consider roads not only for their role in enabling movement but also as spaces where one can be stuck, abandoned, and isolated. Second, I am interested in the fates of the marginalized themselves and of those left waiting in provincial villages for loved ones to return. Finally, while Como mainly studies court rituals and legends, especially those tied to immigrant lineages, I am concerned with how traveling Buddhist monks, particularly those moving between temples in Nara and the provinces, crafted rituals aimed at saving the dissociated dead, as well as how Buddhism spread along roadways. This article offers a complementary perspective by taking up texts, people, and practices that Como has not addressed.

Second, it is necessary to point out an elephant in the room: waterways. Japan, as an archipelago, has long used rivers and seas for transportation. I will make occasional reference to these routes, and there are some similarities in issues of overland and water travel, but I will not address waterways systematically for both practical and argumentative reasons.¹⁸ On the practical level, space simply prohibits me from giving seas and rivers the attention they deserve. Moreover, this article's centerpiece, a manuscript known *Tōdaiji fujumon kō* 東大寺諷誦文稿 (Draft of Tōdaiji liturgical texts), records the activities of a monk who explicitly described his travel along roadways, while only making passing reference to the seaside dead. But these practical notions aside, there is at least one key difference between roads and waterways that has a substantial implication for my argument: that is, the constructed nature of roads. While waterways required humans to build ports and other supporting infrastructure, they relied more on non-human-made resources than did roads. As we will see in the next section, the construction of highways was a massive and decidedly human undertaking. The human-made quality of roads better served the purposes of displaying power than waterways ever could. In addition, the fact that roads were made by people meant that the rulers who commissioned highways were also morally and ritually responsible for those who died upon them; this feature haunted the court and animated the religious discourse of the day.

THE JAPANESE STATE AND/AS A HIGHWAY NETWORK

Before becoming walkers of Japanese roads, let us first look at the network as a whole, both to provide orientation of the basic infrastructure and because the

¹⁸ The relationship between the sea and Japanese religions has received recent attention; see Fabio Rambelli, ed., *The Sea and the Sacred in Japan: Aspects of Maritime Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

image of a highway network held powerful symbolic value in ancient Japanese politics. The Japanese road system emerged alongside the nascent Yamato state. The earliest land routes were likely paths that followed natural terrain connecting small chiefdoms.¹⁹ These represent what some have termed “informal roads,” in contrast to those constructed, engineered, and maintained by an organization or institution.²⁰ For the remainder of this article, I will reserve the word “road” for planned infrastructure. Texts such as the eighth-century *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki* 日本書紀) and archaeological excavations reveal early constructed roads exemplified by one likely built by the powerful Katsuragi 葛城 lineage in the Yamato region and a small-scale network from roughly the time of the sovereign Suiko 推古 (r. 593–628). These, however, did not extend into the periphery and were instead limited to what would later be called the interior provinces (*kinai* 畿内) around the capital.

With the increased centralization of power in the Yamato region over the seventh century, rulers initiated more ambitious and expansive projects tied to the burgeoning state. By the end of the century, an effort to create a nationwide overland transportation network had begun. It took the form of seven highways, with six radiating outward from the central region around the ancient capitals (the seventh was in the southwestern island of Kyūshū). The precise starting points changed slightly with moving capitals, but in the Heian period (794–1185), the roads met at points just south and east of Heian-kyō 平安京 (present-day Kyōto).²¹ The eighth-century highways were straight, often traversing ten kilometers without a single turn, and broad, measuring twelve meters wide for the provincial roads. Government workers often had to dig out existing wet soil and replace it with a stronger base of firmer dirt, stones, and even tree branches before finishing with a dirt or clay layer on top, sometimes mixed with stones. In the early ninth century, highways shrank to around six meters wide and became less straight, meandering more to connect district offices. While some scholars

¹⁹ The following discussion of the history of roads draws from these surveys: Kimoto Masayasu 木本雅康, *Kodai no dōro jijō* 古代の道路事情 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2000); Nakamura Taichi 中村太一, *Nihon no kodai dōro wo sagasu: ritsuryō kokka no audobān* 日本の古代道路を探す—律令国家のアウトバーン (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2000), and *Nihon kodai kokka to keikaku dōro* 日本古代国家と計画道路 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1996); Ōmi Toshihide 近江俊秀, *Kodai dōro no nazo: Nara jidai no kyodai kokka purojekuto* 古代道路の謎—奈良時代の巨大国家プロジェクト (Tokyo: Shōdensha, 2013), and *Michi ga kataru Nihon kodai shi* 道が語る日本古代史 (Tokyo: Asahi shinbun shuppan, 2012); Takebe Ken'ichi 武部健一 and Kinoshita Ryō 木下良, *Kanzen tōsa: kodai no michi* 完全踏査古代の道, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004–5); Tateno and Ideta, *Nihon kodai no kōtsū, kōryū, jōhō*. In English, see Takeda Sachiko, “Roads in the Tennō-Centered Polity,” in *Capital and Countryside in Japan, 300–1180: Japanese Historians Interpreted in English*, ed. Joan R. Piggott (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2005), 147–65; and Hotate Michihisa, “Traffic between Capital and Countryside in *Ritsuryō* Japan,” in Piggott, *Capital and Countryside*, 166–208.

²⁰ For this distinction, see Charles D. Trombold, “An Introduction to the Study of Ancient New World Road Networks,” in *Ancient Road Networks*, 3.

²¹ Takebe and Kinoshita, *Kanzen tōsa*, 1:21–23.

have treated this as a decline in state authority, Nakamura Taichi has argued that roads were adapted for practical reasons; the smaller roads were less costly to maintain, and the state no longer relied so heavily on the symbolic strategies it previously advanced.²² The roads totaled 6,300 kilometers in length, a number similar to Japan's postwar (what is known in English as World War II) highway system, excluding Hokkaidō.²³ In addition to the official system, there were other smaller and more informal road networks as well as trails, paths, and waterways linking districts offices and villages to the highways. As I will discuss below, this highway network also provided a model for conceiving of the state.

Several types of nodes populated the network. The most significant administrative ones were the provincial offices (*kokufu* 国府) that facilitated the central government's oversight of the periphery. These were managed by individuals dispatched from the capital and were located along highways. Secondary roads branched from the highways and further connected district offices to the network. The district offices functioned as smaller nodes responsible for handling local matters and were staffed by members of prominent provincial families.

Stations represent another type of node. The official roads had stations regularly placed along the route, roughly thirty *ri* 里 (about sixteen kilometers) apart, though there was significant variance in practice. These first appeared in the seventh century, were codified into law from the eighth, and remained active through at least the mid-Heian period. Stations were walled-off clusters of buildings on the roadside including stables, offices, and other structures. They provided places for official travelers to change horses, but they also offered lodging for messengers, individuals fifth rank or higher in the court-sanctioned hierarchy, or any ranked individual who found himself far away from an inhabited village.²⁴ Stations also hosted banquets for distinguished guests. Station management was supervised by station masters (*ekichō* 駅長), who typically served a lifetime appointment, and were supported by grooms (*ekishi* 駅子), who helped care for the horses official travelers could use for transportation. The central government designated rice fields to fund stations. A tenth-century petition by locals complained that the governor had usurped these financial resources for his own purposes. But the same text also reveals that the station system continued to operate in some way into the mid-Heian period, and the petitioners themselves stressed the need for a smoothly functioning system for local administration.²⁵

²² See Nakamura, *Nihon no kodai dōro wo sagasu*, 194–214.

²³ Ōmi, *Kodai dōro no nazo*, 17.

²⁴ Matsubara Hironobu 松原弘宣, *Nihon kodai no kōtsū to jōhō dentatsu* 日本古代の交通と情報伝達 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2009), 188–89.

²⁵ Charlotte von Verschuer, "Life of Commoners in the Provinces: The Owari No Gebumi of 988," in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*, ed. Mikael Adolphson, Edward Kamens, and Stacie Matsumoto (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 307–9.

Beyond the practical and material benefits of tax collection, official roads had symbolic value for statecraft.²⁶ Highways defined the local landscape. Barriers on borders communicated the state's power over transit, as written permission was necessary to pass through them. Stations featured distinctive and highly visible architecture such as roof tiles and white walls; some even had multistory station watchtowers (*ekirō* 駅楼), which are praised in ninth-century poetry.²⁷ These would have often been the only structures other than pagodas to reach beyond a single story in the provinces. Moreover, stations were frequently the sole provincial buildings other than government offices and temples with roof tiles. These features displayed and enacted the power and culture of the court to travelers, both foreign and domestic.

The system of roads made the realm, in the words of Robert Cioffi, legible. As he has argued, infrastructure must not only exist, it must also be “comprehensible to travelers.”²⁸ Put more forcefully, in the Japanese case, roads formed the very conception of the state. Contemporary historians most commonly characterize early Japan as the *ritsuryō kokka*, a state of administrative and penal codes. This classification misses the fact that the term *ritsuryō kokka* is absent from contemporaneous sources. It was not the way people at the time imagined the realm. Instead, eighth- and ninth-century sources typically described the state through a metaphor of roads. Perhaps the most common designation was “the provinces of the five capital interior regions and seven circuits” ([*go*]*ki*[*nai*] *shichidō shokoku* [五]畿[内]七道諸国). The seven circuits, or more literally, seven roads, refer to the highways and the larger administrative units through which they ran. But the metaphor is clear: the provinces and the political realm as a whole were conceived of as a system of highways.²⁹ While *ritsuryō kokka* does not appear in the six national histories, which were completed between 720 and 901, the term “seven circuits” claims over two hundred appearances in these sources. Variations on the phrase “the provinces of the five capital interior regions and seven circuits” were recorded in over one hundred instances.³⁰ This suggests that we should reconceptualize our

²⁶ For the symbolic significance, see Takeda, “Roads in the Tennō-Centered Polity”; and Kimoto, *Kodai no dōro jijō*, 187–94.

²⁷ Nakamura, *Nihon no kodai dōro wo sagasu*, 26.

²⁸ Robert L. Cioffi, “Travel in the Roman World,” in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, March 10, 2020, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.110>.

²⁹ A similar concept is at work with the term “Tawantinsuyu,” “Four Regions,” used to conceptualize the Inca empire, as each region was both a polity and a road; see Catherine Julien, “The Chinchaysuyu Road and the Definition of an Inca Imperial Landscape,” in *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems*, 147.

³⁰ I based my data on EBSCO searches of the *Shintei zōho Kokushi taikai* 新訂増補国史大系 editions of the six national histories using terms 七道, 畿内七道諸国, 五畿七道諸国. Kuroita Katsumi 黒板勝美, *Kokushi Taikai Henshūkai* 国史大系編修會, ed. *Shintei zōho Kokushi taikai* 新訂増補国史大系 (hereafter *KT*), 62 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1998–2000).

definitions of the ancient period to that of state of roads as much as one of codes. Roads were both a model of and a model for the networked state.

It is difficult to assess whether these notions of roads and statehood were grasped by the populace at large. We do know, however, that many individuals traveled along these highways in the ancient period.³¹ While some were able to venture for private pursuits such as trade, marriage, and even pleasure journeys to hot springs, a large volume of travel served the interests of the court and was required by law. Official responsibilities imposed upon commoner adult males that necessitated long-distance travel included delivering tax goods, toiling as corvée laborers, and working as guards in the frontiers and in the capital region. Tax policy in ancient Japan is complex, but legal codes outline three types of taxes: a land tax of rice, which typically stayed within the province; local products levies; and corvée exemptions, usually given in cloth. The latter two were expected to be sent to the capital along roads with the loads shouldered on the backs of horses or humans.³²

The individuals carrying tax goods, not official messengers or armies, were the most common travelers of roads in ancient Japan, and we will return to them repeatedly below.³³ The number of individuals setting out from the provinces for these ancient capitals is astounding. Using sources from the eighth through tenth centuries, Matsubara Hironobu, a leading historian of transportation, estimated that a minimum of 110,000 people trekked from the provinces to the Nara capital every year. Sometimes the number may have topped 400,000 in a single year.³⁴ Since the population of Nara was likely no more than 100,000 at this time, more people were in transit annually to and from the capital than those who resided there.

Individuals shouldering goods and serving the throne on these long and trying journeys witnessed the power of the state with their eyes and felt it in their aching muscles. Travel to the capital from the provinces could often take a month or more, and another two to three weeks to return.³⁵ The commoners who bore tax goods would often carry around forty kilograms on their backs for their journey to the capital, although they also sometimes used pack horses.³⁶

³¹ For travel by non-elite, see Matsubara, *Nihon kodai no kōtsū to jōhō dentatsu*, 42–62. For two useful overviews of tax goods and corvée, see Bruce L. Batten, “Provincial Administration in Early Japan: From Ritsuryō kokka to Ōchō kokka,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53, no. 1 (1993): 117–24; and William Wayne Farris, *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures: Issues in the Historical Archaeology of Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998), 191–94 and 216–21.

³² Takeda, “Roads in the Tennō-Centered Polity,” 161–62.

³³ Ōmi, *Kodai dōro no nazo*, 93.

³⁴ Matsubara, *Nihon kodai no kōtsū to jōhō dentatsu*, 44–47.

³⁵ Sasaki Ken’ichi 佐々木虔一, “Kodai no yusō to kōtsū hito to daba no katsudō” 古代の輸送と交通—人と駄馬の活動, in *Nihon kodai no yusō to dōro* 日本古代の輸送と道路, ed. Sasaki Ken’ichi 佐々木虔一, Takehiro Ryōhei 武廣亮平, and Morita Kikuo 森田喜久男 (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 2019), 12.

³⁶ Sasaki, “Kodai no yusō to kōtsū,” 14.

In the words of Takeda Sachiko, who has argued that the road system created a new worldview centered on the sovereign, all adult males were in theory required to deliver tax goods and in doing so “bore the weight of the goods while actually experiencing the trip to the *tennō*’s capital. That experience, engraved in commoners’ minds, would have strengthened their self-consciousness as subjects who owed tribute to the *tennō*’s government. Such self-consciousness evoked awareness of the government itself.”³⁷ We will return to the hardships experienced by these commoners below, but for now we can see how their journeys may have inscribed the very notion of a network with the sovereign at its center onto the bodies and minds of travelers literally burdened with the weight of the capital. Being subjected to this duty turned them into subjects.

TEMPLE NODES AND MASS CONSTRUCTION

Roads did not only connect administrative offices and enable the flow of tax goods. They also hastened the proliferation of Buddhism. Temple construction ballooned concurrent to the rise of roads. An inspection in 624 recorded in the eighth-century *Chronicles of Japan* found forty-six temples on the archipelago.³⁸ Most of these were likely in the general vicinity of the early capitals. An eleventh-century annal reports the existence of 545 temples by 692, an increase of more than tenfold in less than seventy years, a period that overlaps with the beginning of highway construction.³⁹ Although we should ordinarily be suspicious of the reliability of an eleventh-century text to document seventh-century developments, archaeological data confirms this rapid growth. There are at least 600 temples that have been excavated that date to the late seventh and early eighth centuries.⁴⁰ Temples also spread geographically at this time; by the end of the seventh century, they existed in almost every province in Japan, including the easternmost one of Mutsu 陸奥国.⁴¹

³⁷ Takeda, “Roads in the Tennō-Centered Polity,” 162.

³⁸ *Nihon shoki*, 9/3/Suiko 32, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系 (hereafter *NKBT*), ed. Takagi Ichinosuke 高木市之助, Nishio Minoru 西尾実, Hisamatsu Sen’ichi 久松潜一, Asō Isoji 麻生磯次, and Tokieda Motoki 時枝誠記, 102 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 68:210–11. For a translation, see W. G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697: Translated from the Original Chinese and Japanese* (1896; repr., Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1972), 153–54.

³⁹ *Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略記, *Jitō* 持統 6, in *KT*, 12:67.

⁴⁰ For a landmark study on seventh-century provincial temple construction, see Aritomi Yukiko 有富由紀子, “Nihon kodai no shoki chihō jin no kenkyū: Hakuhō jidai wo chūshin to shite” 日本古代の初期地方寺院の研究—白鳳時代を中心として, *Shiron* 史論 42 (1989): 23–48. Hishida Tetsuo 菱田哲郎 calculated over six-hundred temples; see *Kodai Nihon: Kokka keisei no kōkogaku* 古代日本—国家形成の考古学 (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku gakujutsu shuppan, 2007), 216. Yoshida Kazuhiko gives a number of more than seven-hundred excavated temples; see “Revisioning Religion in Ancient Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (2003): 6.

⁴¹ Perhaps surprisingly, there are no records of Buddhist temples in Kyūshū’s southwesternmost provinces of Ōsumi and Satsuma until the official Provincial Monastery and Nunnery from

Local elites drove this rapid expansion in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. They performed memorial rites for their ancestors at the temples they constructed.⁴² Many of these seventh-century temples were also built near district offices, which were typically administered by members of these same powerful families and also located near roads and waterways.⁴³ As such, the temples reinforced these families' authority by demonstrating their power to the local population while simultaneously connecting them to capital culture. At the same time, the provincial elites did not go at it alone. The local gentry often formed regional alliances of "wholesome friends" (*zenchishiki* 善知識) to help raise funds for these endeavors. These fellowships were what political scientists have called "straddlers" in that they at once maintained links to the state and had a grassroots presence. In many cases, diverse individuals from multiple districts, including those of lesser material means, contributed what they could. As such, temple construction created new connections across geographic regions and social classes.⁴⁴

While this boom in the late seventh and early eighth centuries has been seen as a key turning point in the history of Japanese Buddhism, expansion continued in the eighth and early ninth centuries at a similarly impressive pace. In the mid-eighth century, the Heavenly Sovereign Shōmu 聖武天皇 (r. 724–49) and Queen Consort Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701–60) initiated an ambitious project to construct a monastery and nunnery in every province.⁴⁵ These temples

the mid-eighth century; see Ikehata Kōichi 池畑耕一, "Kagoshima ken ni okeru jiin konryū no kaishi to hirogari" 鹿児島県における寺院建立の開始と広がり, *Reimeikan chōsa kenkyū hōkoku* 黎明館調査研究報告 5 (1991): 1–20.

⁴² Here, I have mostly followed Mifune Takayuki 三舟隆之, *Nihon kodai no ōken to jiin* 日本古代の王権と寺院 (Tokyo: Meichokan kōkai, 2013), esp. 308–50. Also see Takeuchi Ryō 竹内亮, *Nihon kodai no jiin to shakai* 日本古代の寺院と社会 (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 2016), 185–315.

⁴³ For temples near district offices, see Satō Makoto 佐藤信, ed., *Kodai Tōgoku no chihō kanga to jiin* 古代東国の地方官衙と寺院 (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppan, 2017); Nara bunkazai kenkyūjo 奈良文化財研究所, ed., *Gunga shūhen jiin no kenkyū: Inaba no kuni Keta gunga to shūhen jiin no bunseki wo chūshin ni* 郡衙周辺寺院の研究 —因幡国気多郡衙と周辺寺院の分析を中心に (Nara: Bunkazai kenkyūjo, 2006); Nara bunkazai kenkyūjo, ed., *Chihō kanga to jiin: Gunga shūhen jiin wo chūshin to shite* 地方官衙と寺院—郡衙周辺寺院を中心として (Nara: Bunkazai kenkyūjo, 2005). Also, see Sakai Hideya 坂井秀弥, "Kokufu to gunke: Chihō kanga iseki kara mita jitsuzō" 国府と郡家—地方官衙遺跡からみた実像, in *Rettō no kodai shi: Hito, mono, koto* 列島の古代史—ひと・もの・こと, vol. 3, *Shakai shūdan to seiji soshiki* 社会集団と政治組織, ed. Uehara Mahito 上原真人 et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2005), 95–97; Kawajiri Akio 川尻秋生, "Jiin to chishiki" 寺院と知識, in *Rettō no kodai shi*, 3:207–8. For a helpful overview of district offices in English, see Batten, "Provincial Administration," 107–10.

⁴⁴ For the notion of fellowships as straddlers and the way that new connections were forged by the creation of these groups, see my *Ritualized Writing*, 83–105.

⁴⁵ For helpful overviews of the Provincial Monasteries and Nunneries, see Mikoshiba Daisuke, "Empress Kōmyō's Buddhist Faith: Her Role in the Founding of the State Temple and Convent System," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003), 21–40; Suda Tsutomu 須田勉 and Satō Makoto 佐藤信, eds., *Kokubunji no sōken* 国分寺の創建, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2011–13); and Tsunoda Bun'ei 角田文衛, *Shinshū kokubunji no kenkyū*

with their towering pagodas would have been impressive spectacles to behold in the countryside. Each Provincial Monastery (*kokubunji* 国分寺) was staffed with twenty monks, and each Provincial Nunnery (*kokubun niji* 国分尼寺) with ten nuns, although the numbers are significantly higher when counting novices and other practitioners who also resided at these temples.⁴⁶ The clergy officiated a variety of rites aimed at protecting the state, including monthly recitations of scripture. They were the largest Buddhist institution in most if not all provinces.

These temples represented an officially sanctioned Buddhist network that in many ways mirrored those of the central government's provincial offices. Just as the network of provincial governance was centered on the ministries of the capitals, these Provincial Monasteries and Nunneries were overseen by two large temples in Nara: Tōdaiji 東大寺 and Hokkeji 法華寺, respectively. The Provincial Monasteries and Nunneries utilized a consistent ritual calendar, providing a mark of unity across the land. They also collaborated with local government officials and transferred personnel to and from the capital, much like the non-Buddhist bureaucracy. The temples were generally constructed near provincial offices, often around one and a half kilometers, and were in close proximity to roadways. They received financial support from taxes collected by provincial offices.

In addition to this network of large-scale monasteries and nunneries, the number of small-scale temples in villages also rapidly increased in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. The monk Ennin 円仁 (794–864) recorded an estimate of around 3,700 monasteries as of 11/18/838, with an additional unspecified number of nunneries.⁴⁷ According to Yoshikawa Shinji, this number may be based on an estimate that each and every village had a temple.⁴⁸ Once again, the archaeological record supports the general textual data of a rapid increase in village temple construction. Over the last three decades, archaeologists have uncovered a previously unknown structure: village temples (*sonraku[nai] jiin* 村落[内]寺院).⁴⁹ These first emerged in the late eighth and

新修国分寺の研究, 7 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1986–1997). I will capitalize “Provincial Monastery” and “Provincial Nunnery” when referring to these institutions to distinguish them from provincial temples that existed outside of the system.

⁴⁶ Tsunoda Bun'ei, *Kokubunji to kodai jiin* 国分寺と古代寺院 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1985), 221–53.

⁴⁷ *Nittō guhō junrei kōki* 入唐求法巡礼行記, 11/18/Kaicheng 開成 3, in *Nittō guhō junrei kōki no kenkyū* 入唐求法巡礼行記の研究, ed. Ono Katsutoshi 小野勝年, 4 vols. (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1989), 1:274–75; Edwin O. Reishauer, trans., *Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrim to China in Search of the Law* (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), 52–53.

⁴⁸ Yoshikawa Shinji 吉川真司, “Kodai jiin no sūteki hensen” 古代寺院の数的変遷, in *Kodai jiinshi no kenkyū* 古代寺院史の研究, ed. Hishida Testuo and Yoshikawa Shinji (Kyoto: Shibunkyo shuppan, 2019), 73–76. Matsubara has also speculated that every village had a temple in early Japan. See *Nihon kodai no kōtsū to jōhō dentatsu*, 200–201.

⁴⁹ For representative studies of “village temples,” see Suda Tsutomu 須田勉, “Heian shoki ni okeru sonraku nai jiin no sonzai keitai” 平安初期における村落内寺院の存在形態, in *Kodai tansō*

early ninth centuries, following the construction of Provincial Monasteries and Nunneries. Village temples were typically small scale, sometimes just a single building with larger ones containing a few additional humble structures of post and pit construction. Even the central hall, which was often the only structure, commonly lacked roof tiles, a feature that highlights these institutions' simplicity. Despite these limitations of scale, objects associated with these sites speak to an active devotional life in the provinces. These include fragments of Buddha images, bowls used for ritual lamps (*tōmyōzara* 灯明皿) and offerings, and miniature pagodas (*gatō* 瓦塔) and miniature Buddha halls (*gadō* 瓦堂) that served as objects of worship. These village temples have been most frequently excavated in eastern Japan (especially modern-day Chiba and surrounding prefectures), but recent scholarship has also identified examples in western Japan.⁵⁰ Whether or not every village in fact had a temple or not, as Ennin's estimate implies, is subject to debate, but at the very least the archaeological and textual records suggest that many villagers throughout Japan became connected to Buddhism for the first time in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.⁵¹ The fact that temple growth occurred despite general population stagnation and even some decline shows that the number of temples per capita surged.⁵² Villagers, therefore, likely had far more contact with Buddhism by the start of the ninth century than they would have at the beginning of the eighth. This expansion resulted in a revolution of religious life in Japan.

MONASTIC MOVEMENT AND TEMPLE NETWORKS

These eclectic provincial temples—late seventh-century and early eighth-century structures constructed by provincial elites and fellowships, Provincial Monasteries and Nunneries sponsored by Shōmu and Kōmyō, and small

古代探叢 II, ed. Takiguchi Hiroshi 滝口宏 (Tokyo: Waseda daigaku shuppan, 1985), 555–78; Suda, “Kodai sonraku jiin to sono shinkō” 古代村落寺院とその信仰, in *Kodai no shinkō to shakai* 古代の信仰と社会, ed. Kokushikan daigaku kōko gakkai 国史館大学考古学会 (Tokyo: Rokuichi shobō, 2006), 35–77; and Sasō Mamoru 笹生衛, *Shinbutsu to mura keikan no kōkogaku: Chiiki kankyō no henka to shinkō no shiten kara* 神仏と村景観の考古学—地域環境の変化と信仰の視点から (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 2005), 120–213. Although small-scale and often lacking an independent temple compound (*garan* 伽藍), I choose to call them “temples,” because many excavated pottery shards from these sites use the word “temple” (*tera* 寺).

⁵⁰ For an example in Western Japan, see Horiuchi Kazuhiro 堀内和宏 and Hamamura Kazunari 濱村一成, “Takematsu iseki to nishi Nihon no sonraku jiin” 竹松遺跡と西日本の村落寺院, *Minshūshi kenkyū* 民衆史研究 93 (2017): 17–30.

⁵¹ For a skeptical perspective on the idea that every village had a temple, see Tominaga Shigeyuki 富永樹之, “Tōgōku no ‘sonraku nai jiin’ no sho mondai: Chiba ken igai wo shutai to shite” 東国の村落内寺院の諸問題—千葉県以外を主体として, in *Zaichi shakai to Bukkyō* 在地社会と仏教, ed. Nara bunkazai kenkyūjo 奈良文化財研究所 (Nara: Bukazai kenkyūjo, 2006), 76.

⁵² For a succinct and recent study of population stagnation and decline in this period, see William Wayne Farris, *Daily Life and Demographics in Ancient Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2009).

village halls dating to the late eighth and ninth centuries—formed an interconnected network. Monks moved between sites both through intra- and interprovincial travel, often maintaining connections with local communities and in some cases journeying from the capital to the provinces.

A vivid example of how monks traversed these networks by roads can be found in a manuscript known as the *Tōdaiji fujumon kō* 東大寺諷誦文稿 (Draft of Tōdaiji liturgical texts).⁵³ Since this relatively obscure work will occupy much of our attention in the remainder of this article, a few words of introduction are in order. The original manuscript was untitled, though Japanese scholars typically refer to it as *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, a designation likely given by one of its nineteenth-century owners, Ugai Tetsujō 養鷗徹定 (1814–91). It was written on the verso of a manuscript of the eighth-century Silla monk Pyowon's 表員 commentary on the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, a fact that perhaps reflects the well-known influence of Korean Buddhism on Japan at this time. Based on linguistic and philological evidence, scholars have dated the text roughly to the Tenchō 天長 period (824–34). The manuscript, however, is no longer extant, as it was destroyed by firebombing in an air raid in mid-April of 1945. Scholars today rely on collotype editions created in 1939, as well as modern print editions.⁵⁴

⁵³ For monastic movement, see Amamiya Ryūtarō 兩宮龍太郎, “Kodai sonraku to Bukkyō: Jibachi wo meguru hitobito” 古代村落と仏教—磁鉢をめぐる人々, *Kenkyū renrakushi* 研究連絡誌 2 (1983): 9–15; Suzuki Keiji 鈴木景二, “Tohikan kōtsū to zaichi chitsujo: Nara, Heian shoki no Bukkyō wo sozai to shite” 都鄙間交通と在地秩序—奈良・平安初期の仏教を素材として, *Nihon shi kenkyū* 日本史研究 379 (1994): 34–59; Suzuki, “Chihō shihai ni okeru Bukkyō to tohi ōkan” 地方支配における仏教と都鄙往還, in *Zaichi shakai to Bukkyō*, 145–63; Mihara Yasuyuki 三原康之, “Tera, dō wo ba to shite idō suru sō, kyōshi, busshi” 寺・堂を場として移動する僧・経師・仏師, *Rekishi hyōron* 歴史評論 668 (2005): 83–90; Kawajiri, “Nihon kodai ni okeru zaichi Bukkyō no tokushitsu: Sōryō no shutsuji to jin kinō” 日本古代における在地仏教の特質—僧侶の出自と寺院機能, in *Kodai Tōgoku no kōkogaku: Ōgane Nobuaki-shi tsuitō ronbunshū* 古代東国の考古学—大金宣亮氏追悼論文集, ed. Ōgane Nobuaki-shi tsuitō ronbunshū kankōkai 大金宣亮氏追悼論文集刊行会 (Tokyo: Keiyūsha, 2005); Katata Sadamu 堅田理, *Nihon no kodai shakai to sōni* 日本の古代社会と僧尼 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007), esp. 42–68. In English, see Samuel C. Morse, “The Buddhist Transformation of Japan in the Ninth Century: The Case of Eleven-Headed Kannon,” in *Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries*, 153–76, and “The Hossō School and Image-Making in Ninth Century Japan,” in *Nara Bukkyō no chihōteki tenkai* 奈良仏教の地方的展開, ed. Nemoto Seiji 根本誠二 and Miyagi Yōchirō 宮城洋一郎 (Tokyo: Iwata shoin, 2002), 1–29.

⁵⁴ I have relied on my copy of the collotype, as well as two published transcriptions and one partially published annotated edition. For these see Nakada Norio 中田祝夫, *Tōdaiji fujumon kō no kokugogakuteki kenkyū* 東大寺諷誦文稿の国語学的研究 (Tokyo: Kazama shobō, 1969); Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕, *Tōdaiji fujumon kō sōsakuin* 東大寺諷誦文稿總索引 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2001); and Kobayashi Mayumi 小林真由美, “Tōdaiji fujumon kō chūshaku [1–6]” 東大寺諷誦文稿注釈(一～六), *Seijō kokubungaku ronshū* 成城国文学論集 36–41 (2014–19). All references to this text refer to the line number in the Tsukishima edition. My thinking about its nature has been influenced by Suzuki, “Tohikan kōtsū to zaichi chitsujo”; Kobayashi, “Tōdaiji fujumon kō no seiritsu nendai ni suite” 東大寺諷誦文稿の成立年代について, *Kokugo kokubun* 国語国文 60 (1991): 34–48; and Fujimoto Makoto 藤本誠, *Kodai kokka Bukkyō to zaichi shakai*:

Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts compiled homiletic and liturgical notes written for use in the provinces. The notes are filled with cross outs, arrows, and large blank spaces, which give the text a lively and unpolished feel. Based on the nature of the manuscript and its content, scholars have speculated that it functioned as a crib of usable passages from which the author (if one can use that word for the writer of notes) would copy out a fresh manuscript to be performed at each site. Its form as notes on the verso of another manuscript that would have been difficult for anyone but its author to use suggests that it recorded passages that were intended to be preached. It was not a normative or idealized text but rather quite close to a record of an actual sermon or liturgy. As such, it preserved a unique window into the performative content of rituals at this time in ways not possible to recover from other sources.

One passage from this text, purposed as an opening address dedicating a new hall, sheds light on the author's activities in villages and his travel along roads:

Now, this hall (village name, such and such town here) is called such and such. For what reason is it called such and such town? (origin story of the reason for this.) For what reason is it called such and such hall (origin story of the reason for this). This hall was erected by the master of *dān[a]* [based on] the original vow of his ancestors. And the hall is splendidly ornamented and the Buddha image beautifully constructed. And the town is pleasant. And the place of the temple is good. And the well is pure. And the water is pure. And the shade of the trees (in summer) is pleasant. Going out to sit is good. The surroundings for strolls are good. The distant views are pleasant. *By the station routes and large roads, there are conveniences of every manner.* . . . (If in the vicinity of mountains, groves, and streams, stick to mountains, groves, and streams. . . If in the vicinity of forts, stick to forts . . .)⁵⁵

This passage evidences that the preacher was a monk on the move. For one, the fill-in-the-blank style expression “village name, such and such town” allowed him to adopt the name of the village he found himself in on a given day and implies that he ventured to more than one site. “This hall” (*dō* 堂), a term that often refers to small-scale structures without resident clergy, evokes the village temples described in the previous section. The notes about adapting the content of praise to the surroundings, be they mountains, groves, streams, or forts, again reveal the expectation of travel to diverse locations and the need to alter the content accordingly. Moreover, the monk voiced praise for station routes (*ekiro* 駅路) and large roads (*daidō* 大道), likely referring to the main highways and their capillaries. This type of language as well as other references

Nihon ryoiki to Tōdaiji fujumon kō no kenkyū 古代国家仏教と在地社会 —日本霊異記と東大寺諷誦文稿の研究 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2016), esp. 68–174.

⁵⁵ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, lines 278–80; emphasis mine. The term 城, which I have tentatively rendered “fort,” likely refers to forts 城柵 in eastern Japan. See Fujimoto, *Kodai kokka Bukkyō to zaichi shakai*, 317. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

in the text that assume a perspective from the center has led scholars such as Suzuki Keiji to argue that the author was from a temple in Nara, most likely Tōdaiji.⁵⁶

Members of provincial communities commonly invited monks such as the author of these notes to perform rituals. *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* mentions such an invitation.⁵⁷ Given the fact that the hall dedication is connected to the ancestors of the patron, a feature that suggests a prominent family of means, it seems reasonable to speculate that the request may have come from the local gentry. Tales similarly describe invitations. *Records of the Numinous and Strange from Japan* (*Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記), a compilation of stories compiled around 822, right around the same time *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* was written, contains two tales of monks from large temples in the center being invited to the provinces.⁵⁸ In one, a monk from Gangōji 元興寺 in the capital was asked to travel to a temple in Harima Province 播磨国 to lecture on the *Lotus Sutra*. Archaeologists have identified the likely site as a temple less than five kilometers from the excavated grounds of Satsuchi Post Station 佐突駅 on the San'yōdō 山陽道, the largest highway in ancient Japan.⁵⁹ In another story, a monk from Yakushi-ji 薬師寺 in Nara was invited to Kii Province 紀伊国 by nuns to perform a penance rite.⁶⁰ Some monks may have been called to the provinces because of their reputations, but many maintained connections with the locales they were raised in and traveled back and forth between their hometowns and the ancient capitals, as demonstrated by Kawajiri Akio.⁶¹ This type of regular movement between center and periphery helped strengthen networks between temples in the capital and those in the provinces.

⁵⁶ Suzuki, "Tohikan kōtsū to zaichi chitsujo," 47–49.

⁵⁷ For the invitation, see *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, line 285.

⁵⁸ The full title is *Records of the Numinous and Strange from the Realm of Japan* [Demonstrating] Retribution in This Life for Wholesome and Evil [Acts] (*Nihon koku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* 日本國現報善惡靈異記). I will use the abbreviated title *Records of the Numinous and Strange from Japan* throughout this article. I primarily relied on the edition *Nihon ryōiki* in *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 新日本古典文学大系 (hereafter *SNKBT*), ed. Satake Akihiro 佐竹昭広, Ōsone Shōsuke 大曾根章介, Kubota Jun 久保田淳, and Nakano Mitsutoshi 中野三敏, 105 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996). I have also utilized Hongō Masatsugu 本郷真紹 and Yamamoto Takashi 山本崇, ed., *Kōshō Nihon ryōiki* 考証日本靈異記, 3 vols. (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2015–). In addition to these editions, I have also consulted the two English translations: Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura, trans., *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); Burton Watson, trans., *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan: the Nihon Ryōiki* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). I will only cite the widely available *SNKBT* below.

⁵⁹ *Nihon ryōiki*, 1:11, in *SNKBT*, 30:24. For identifying the location, see Hongō and Yamamoto, *Kōshō Nihon ryōiki*, 1:180–81.

⁶⁰ *Nihon ryōiki* 2:11, in *SNKBT*, 30:78.

⁶¹ See Kawajiri, "Nihon kodai ni okeru zaichi Bukkyō no tokushitsu," 367. Also see Fujimoto, "Kandaiji sō no kōtsū, kōryū, nettowāku to zaichi shakai no Bukkyō" 官大寺僧の交通・交流ネットワークと在地社会の仏教, in Kuranaka, *Kodai no bunkaken*, 383–86.

In using tales for social historical research, I will follow what Jan Nattier termed “the principle of irrelevance,” which maintains that aspects of stories incidental to the main narrative are more likely to correspond to historical practices.⁶² Descriptions of monastic movement in the aforementioned tales as well as those that follow are incidental to the main wondrous occurrence described in the text. If Nattier is correct, this suggests that these references to invitations may speak to actual practice. Beyond employing Nattier’s method, however, I also pair stories with archaeological and manuscript data to reinforce claims made in tales; my supposition is that cases in which the narrative sources are supported by archaeological and manuscript data are more likely to reflect historical practices. Invitations by local communities are one example of a case in which the narrative and manuscript evidence agree.

In other stories, movement occurred within and between temples in the provinces. In one representative tale of interprovincial travel from the *Records of the Numinous and Strange from Japan*, Dharma Master Jakurin 寂林法師 left his home in a village in Kii and passed through other provinces while engaging in Buddhist practice before settling in the village of Uneda 畝田村 in the Kaga District 加賀郡 of Echizen Province 越前国.⁶³ This type of interprovincial travel is supported by archaeological evidence as well. For example, Kawajiri has cited an earthenware alms bowl from Kai Province 甲斐国 discovered in Shinano Province 信濃国 belonging to a single monk. In other cases, the name of a monk has been excavated on objects from neighboring villages, which suggests one individual may have served multiple communities within a single province.⁶⁴

These three types of networks, those connecting capital and countryside and inter- and intraprovincial ones, were themselves interconnected. Provincial Monasteries may have been key hubs in these regional networks. The case of the monk Kaimyō 戒明 as recorded in *Records of the Numinous and Strange from Japan* bolsters this claim. Kaimyō’s home monastery was Daian-ji 大安寺 in the Nara capital. But he was appointed the Great Provincial Teacher (*dai kokushi* 大國師) at the Tsukushi provincial headquarters 竺紫国府 in Kyūshū in the 770s. While employed there, he presumably made contacts with local gentry in other neighboring regions, as a governor invited him to the Saga district 佐賀郡 of Hizen Province 肥前国 to perform a lecture, which the local

⁶² See Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), 66–67. Also, Robert F. Campany, “Abstinence Halls (*zhaitang* 齋堂) in Lay Households in Early Medieval China,” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 4 (2015): 326; and Shayne Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 16, 31–32.

⁶³ *Nihon ryōiki* 3:16, in *SNKBT*, 30:151.

⁶⁴ Kawajiri, “Kodai Tōgoku no zaichi shakai to Bukkyō: Sonraku jiin, kaihatsu, narabidō” 古代東国の在地社会と仏教—村落寺院・開発・双堂, *Minshūshi kenkyū* 民衆史研究 93 (2017): 42.

FIG. 1.—Monastic Movement (translated from Sasō)

clergy attended.⁶⁵ Sasō Mamoru has also proposed networks tying provincial temples together with village ones based on his reading of archaeological data, as outlined in figure 1.⁶⁶ These cases indicate that villages may have often relied on hubs or other larger nodes for religious resources. These networks—linking smaller local temples with Provincial Monasteries, which were themselves tied to Nara—also resembled the political structure of district and provincial offices. In both cases, larger centralized provincial hubs facilitated interactions with local elites. While more research is needed, it is possible to view both temple and administrative networks as simultaneously serving the state and provincial communities.

ROADS, STATIONS, AND TEMPLE NETWORKS

These temple nodes were tied together by roads. The aforementioned passage from *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* referenced roads and stations, demonstrating that the author utilized these facilities. Roads, in fact, were a common way for monks to journey. Reconstructed legal codes outlined etiquette for

⁶⁵ *Nihon ryōiki* 3:19, in *SNKBT*, 30:156.

⁶⁶ Sasō, “Kodai Tōgoku shūroku to Bukkyō shinkō: Chiba kennai no jirei wo chūshin ni” 古代東国集落と仏教信仰—千葉県内の事例を中心に, in *Zaichi shakai to Bukkyō*, 99–104.

monks traveling who met mid- and high-level aristocrats on roads.⁶⁷ The fact that officials felt the need to write laws about traveling monks implies that they were by no means an unexpected phenomenon. According to an edict, monks were even permitted to ride station horses if they needed to attend court.⁶⁸

Stations along the road functioned as sites for fundraising and charity by Buddhist priests. Fascinating wooden tablets with writing known as *mokkan* 木簡 unearthed at the Fukae Kitamachi site 深江北町遺跡 in present-day Kōbe hint at these activities.⁶⁹ The site neighbors the Ashiya 芦屋 station on the San'yōdō.⁷⁰ The *mokkan* are currently in two pieces, but they were most likely originally a single piece of wood, as the size and appearance match. They refer to a Buddhist fellowship (*chishiki* 智識), led by a “master of intoning prayers” (*juganshi* 呪願師), a somewhat vague term that likely points to an individual with ritual responsibilities at dedication ceremonies. The text contains a partial date of 8/1/Tenpyō 19?(747). The *mokkan* is heavily damaged and illegible in many parts, but it appears to record names alongside cash donations. The quantities are quite small: one *mon* 文, two *mon*, six *mon*. At this time, these quantities had very little purchasing power; five *mon* could buy about a liter (*shō* 升) of soybeans.⁷¹ Those donating such small quantities were likely non-elites.⁷² Given the timing of the *mokkan* and the widespread call for donations of all sizes in the edict ordering Tōdaiji's construction, scholars have reasoned that it may record fundraising activities for this massive project initiated by Shōmu. If so, this suggests that monks pursued fundraising for the construction of temples in the capital at provincial stations. Since a temple site known as Ashiya Haiji 芦屋廃寺 is only about one kilometer away from the station, these fundraisers may have interacted with local clergy too, further

⁶⁷ “Sōniryō” 僧尼令, in *Ritsuryō* 律令, in *Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系 (NST), ed. Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎, Ishimoda Shō 石母田正, Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞, Sagara Tōru 相良亨, Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦, Bitō Masahide 尾藤正英, Maruyama Masao 丸山真男, and Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎, 67 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1970–82), 3:221.

⁶⁸ *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 5/4/Hōki 宝龜1, in *SNKBT*, 15:280–81. For this text, I have also referred to Ross Bender's partial translation: *Nara Japan: A Translation from Shoku Nihongi*, 4 vols. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015–16).

⁶⁹ For images of these *mokkan*, see *Mokkan kenkyū* 木簡研究 36 (2014): 43–44. These are also viewable through the wooden tablet database: <http://mokkanko.nabunken.go.jp/>.

⁷⁰ A variety of evidence related to the station has been unearthed, but archaeological features for the station buildings themselves remain unknown at the time of this writing. For the most recent archaeological report, which discusses some of these issues, see *Fukae Kitamachi iseki dai 12, 14 ji chōsa maizō bunkazai hakutsu chōsa hōkokusho* 深江北町遺跡第12・14次調査埋蔵文化財発掘調査報告書 (Kobe: Kōbe shi kyōikuinkai bunkazaika, 2014).

⁷¹ For examining the purchasing power at this time, I relied on the helpful database by the National Museum of Japanese History; “Kodai, chūsei toshi seikatsu shi (bukka)” 古代・中世都市生活史(物価), <https://www.rekihaku.ac.jp/doc/t-db-index.html>.

⁷² For more examples of small-scale donations by non-elites to central temples, see Bryan Lowe (ブライアン・ロウ), “Nettowāku to shite no Tōdaiji” ネットワークとしての東大寺, in *Za Gureito Buddha Shinpojiumu* (hereafter *GBS*) *ronshū 14 gō* ザ・グレイトブッダ・シンポジウム論集14号 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2017), 87–104.

TABLE 1
LIST OF HARIMA STATIONS AND PROXIMATE TEMPLES

Station Name	Temple Name	Distance from Station
Akashi 明石	Taidera Haiji 太寺麿寺	unclear
Ōmi 邑美	Henshōji 遍照寺	~700 meters
Kako 賀古	Noguchi Haiji 野口麿寺	~500 meters
Satsuchi 佐突	n/a	n/a
	Tsujii Haiji 辻井麿寺	~700 meters
Kusakami 草上	Imajuku Haiji 今宿麿寺	~1,000 meters
Ōchi 邑智 (大市)	Nishiwaki Haiji 西脇麿寺	~300 meters
Fuse 布施	Koinumarunakatani	~700 meters
	Haiji 小犬丸中谷麿寺	
Takada 高田	Jinmyō Haiji 神明麿寺	~1,200 meters
Yama 野間	n/a	n/a

strengthening the networks between temples in the capital and the provinces. Various textual evidence also demonstrates that ninth-century monks and nuns built rest houses (*fuseya* 布施屋) to serve weary travelers near stations as well.⁷³

The close proximity between Ashiya Station and a temple is not surprising. Recent excavations show that this was a common phenomenon.⁷⁴ The San'yōdō in Harima offers one well-documented example, as illustrated in a table I have compiled based on the excellent archaeological research of Kishimoto Michiaki (see table 1).⁷⁵

Other than Satsuchi, a station that soon fell out of use, and Yama, all of the others have a confirmed temple site within just over a kilometer of the station.⁷⁶ The San'yōdō stations in Harima have been particularly well excavated, so the data is better here, but the pattern is not limited to this region. Matsubara has combined various textual and archaeological evidence to argue that these temples near stations as well as village temples could have housed travelers, including those journeying to the capital with tax goods or as *corvée*.⁷⁷ They

⁷³ Kinoshita Ryō 木下良, "Nihon no kodai dōro" 日本の古代道路, in *Nihon kodai dōro jiten* 日本古代道路事典, ed. Kodai kōtsū kenkyūkai 古代交通研究会 (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 2004), 6, 10.

⁷⁴ For the proximity of temples to roads, see Aritomi, "Nihon kodai no shoki chihō jūin," 37–43. Ōmi has pointed out the proximity of Provincial Monasteries to roads; see Ōmi, *Kodai dōro no nazo*, 150–52.

⁷⁵ Kishimoto Michiaki 岸本道昭, "San'yōdō no umaya to kanren isekigun" 山陽道の駅家と関連遺跡群, in *Nihon kodai no dōro to keikan: umaya, kanga, tera* 日本古代の道路と景観—駅家・官衙・寺, ed. Suzuki Yasutami 鈴木靖民, Araki Toshio 荒木敏夫, and Kawajiri Akio 川尻秋生 (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 2017), 465.

⁷⁶ An 839 record calls for Satsuchi to be rebuilt, which implies that it fell out of use sometime between its initial construction and the early ninth century. See *Shoku Nihon kōki* 続日本後紀, 2/26/Jōwa 承和 6, in *KT*, 3:85. It does not appear in a list of stations in the *Engi shiki* 延喜式, which suggests it again ceased functioning by the early tenth century, if it was ever rebuilt at all. See *Engi shiki*, in *KT*, 26:715.

⁷⁷ Matsubara, *Nihon kodai no kōtsū to jōhō dentatsu*, 192–210.

also likely provided a space for provincial residents to perform memorial rituals and devotional acts. As with provincial and district offices, archaeological data suggests that many temples just slightly postdate roads.⁷⁸ The construction of a road network, therefore, enabled the formation of a temple network and monastic travel.

We have so far examined the network composed of nodes of stations, government offices, and temples. The links of these networks were roads, including the formal highway system and more informal roadways, which facilitated the rapid spread of Buddhism through the activity of traveling preachers. But our vantage point has largely remained a bird's-eye view with some brief exceptions. What happens when we look through the eyes of travelers? Did roads function primarily as a network to increase connectivity?

FALLING BY THE WAYSIDE

Fortunately, *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* offers intimate glimpses into life on the road. These challenge the rosy view of connectivity depicted so far by revealing the frequent presence of beggars and corpses. Instead of just connection and movement, this source and others described isolation and stagnation. Take the following passage from *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts*: “Lying down beside the road, a beggar scratches scabies, swelling up so his eyes disappear, and he urinates and defecates, stinking and defiling where he sits, as passersby cover their faces, block their noses, and flee.”⁷⁹ Notably, this beggar (*katai* 乞丐) was found by the roadside (道 glossed here as *michi no be* ミチノヘ), a locale frequently referred to in this manuscript by a monk familiar with travel along highways. In this account, the beggar, a subject of disgust, was not in transit but immobilized. His primary problem stemmed from his location. He was stuck on the road between the allure of the capital and the comfort of home. He was isolated in a place without connections, an ironic quality of a road system intended to create links. This example already offers a different view of the world than those encountered so far.

To be stuck on the road was often a path to death, as one was severed from any traditional relations of support.⁸⁰ *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* frequently mentioned these dead travelers; at one point, the text notes how “many perish in the road” and turn to “bones bleached in the sun by the roadside.”⁸¹ Beggars and corpses were common on highways. Tax policy, which required goods to be shouldered from the provinces to the capital, gave rise

⁷⁸ Kimoto, *Kodai no dōro jijō*, 42–44.

⁷⁹ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, lines 169–70.

⁸⁰ For a helpful overview of these issues, see Imazu Katsunori 今津勝紀, “Kyakufu, kojiki, shie” 脚夫、乞食、死穢, in Sasaki, Takehiro, and Morita, *Nihon kodai no yusō to dōro*, 86–97.

⁸¹ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, lines 240.

to many of these individuals. Those carrying taxes struggled to return due to the expectation that they finance their own trip home. As a result, the numbers of roadside beggars and corpses surged in conjunction with the construction of the highway system. An edict from 712 articulated the problem: “When the corvée laborers from the provinces return to their hometowns, with their provisions exhausted, they frequently starve on the roads and pile up in the ditches. Cases like this are not uncommon.”⁸² Similar edicts appeared throughout the eighth and ninth centuries.⁸³ One from 805 described those delivering tax goods and tributes as “stuck [*ryūtai* 留滞] in the road,” again gesturing to the problem of immobility in a system designed to promote movement and connection.⁸⁴ By separating individuals from their traditional support networks, roads created the possibility for mobility but also increased the likelihood of isolation.

A genre of eighth-century poetry now known as “songs of deceased travelers of the road” [*kōro shinin no uta* 行路死人歌] vividly captures this concern with separation from home. In short, this genre portrays an encounter with a corpse of a traveler by the roadside or in the water. A common claim in the expansive secondary literature on this genre is that the recitation of these poems functioned to pacify the dead.⁸⁵ Caution is needed, however, as Torquil Duthie and others have pointed out more generally; scholars have created a category of so-called ritual poems for eighth-century songs, but there is no solid evidence that these types of works were actually used in ritual contexts.⁸⁶ For our purposes, these poems are significant from the perspective of religion not because of their intrinsic ritual function but rather because they point to broader problems that required ritual responses.

In short, these poems show how the nameless dead lacked the ability to be properly memorialized, because their families could not be notified of their death. The poet Tsuki no Omi no Obito 調使首 (n.d.) expressed this in the following representative excerpts addressed to a corpse:

⁸² *Shoku Nihongi* 1/16/Wadō 和銅 5, in *SNKBT*, 12:176–77.

⁸³ For more on these edicts and the problems plaguing travelers, see Kevin K. Collins, “Seizing Spirits: The Chinkon Ritual and Early Japanese Literature” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1997), 110–12; Jonathan Augustine, *Buddhist Hagiography in Early Japan: Images of Compassion in the Gyōki Tradition* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 66–68.

⁸⁴ *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀, 4/4/Enryaku 延暦 24, in *KT*, 3:41.

⁸⁵ For representative studies, see Kōnoshi Takamitsu 神野志隆光, *Kakinomoto no Hitomaro kenkyū: kodai waka bungaku no seiritsu* 柿本人麻呂研究—古代和歌文学の成立 (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1992), 370–88; Collins, “Seizing Spirits,” 94–158.

⁸⁶ For an excellent analysis of the songs of deceased travelers that rejects the standard pacification narratives, see Kadokura Hiroshi 門倉浩, “Hitomaro no kōro shinin no uta: sono ritsuryōteki sokumen ni tsuite” 人麻呂の行路死人歌—その律令的側面について, *Kokubungaku kenkyū* 国文学研究 98 (1989): 1–11. For a more general critique of the category of “ritual poems,” see Torquil Duthie, *Man’yōshū and the Imperial Imagination in Early Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 412–13.

Perhaps you are the doted child
 of a mother and father.
 Perhaps you have
 a budding wife.
 Though I ask of your home,
 you do not tell me the road to your house.
 Though I ask your name, you will not even tell me that . . .

Perhaps mother and father,
 Wife and child too,
 On tiptoes
 Wait for you to return.
 Such is the sorrow of humans.

Though those from your house
 Might be waiting,
 You lie
 With the wayward
 Rough rocky shore as your pillow!

For you who lie
 In the bay,
 “Could it be today, could it be today
 That he will come,” she wonders.
 The sorrow of a waiting wife!

The bay waves
 Pounding the beach on which
 Impassively
 You lie.
 I still do not know the road to your house.⁸⁷

This haunting poem speaks of the corpse of a traveler of waterways rather than roads, but the problems were identical. Namely, these bodies were nameless and unidentified. The poet did not know the road to the corpse’s residence (*ieji* 家道). Without a name and a location, families could not be notified. Without notification, the proper rituals of mourning and pacification could not be performed. Those at home were left wondering. And the dead remained unmourned and, as we will see, unmoored.

⁸⁷ *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 13:3339–43, in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集, 88 vols. (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1995), 8:448–50. Also translated in Collins, “Seizing Spirits,” 121–22.

BAD BIRTHS, DEATH POLLUTION, AND GHOSTS

These corpses created a host of problems for diverse parties. The need for memorial ritual would have been a pressing concern for the families back home and in the Buddhist worldview had a direct bearing on the deceased's future rebirth. The author of *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* preached about how these corpses were “left without anyone to depend or rely on” and how their “drifting spirits” required merit-making ritual to save them from hell.⁸⁸ Much of this language is echoed and expanded in the following prayer:

I beseechingly vow for the deceased spirits of the eastern and western provinces: “The cloth lengths that blanket bodies are products made in the eastern provinces. The floss silk lengths pulled to cover in cold times are those produced in the western provinces. However, in accord with the words of officials and the words of the court, [those bringing these goods] leave behind their own hometowns, wives and children, and kin to bitterly suffer on the road of travel. Unaccustomed⁸⁹ to the cold winds, frost, and snow, they starve and freeze on distant roads. In the event of an unfortunate person becoming sick on the road, they cannot acquire even a single ladleful of herbal medicine (*yu* 湯) or one handful of rice. Without meeting their dearly beloved wife and child or elderly mother and father, they pass away on the road of travel. Those people from the eastern provinces become the souls of the roots of brambles on the roadways. Those people from the western provinces become the descended spirits of the windblown waves (whitened corpses on the seashore).⁹⁰ The relatives who stayed in the province waiting for them cannot calculate or know the death anniversaries [to perform rituals on] at all. Those wives and children that stayed at home longing for them do not know where the grave is where [the deceased] is interred. These types of things are extremely common in this country. Who can save them from the three [inferior] paths?”⁹¹

The preacher lamented the fates of those delivering tax goods, as evoked in the references to items such as cloth and silk. His concerns centered on fear over the postmortem fates of the roadside dead, who lacked anyone to perform rituals on their behalf. Those discussed in this passage “leave behind their own hometowns, wives and children, and kin” and “without meeting their dearly beloved wife and child or elderly mother and father, they pass away on the road of travel,” lines that echo the songs of deceased travelers

⁸⁸ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, lines 239–41.

⁸⁹ Published editions render this as 不悽, but the character usually treated as 悽 appears closer to a variant for 慣 in the collotype.

⁹⁰ An ink line appearing at the start of the phrase “descended spirits of the windblown waves” connects to the phrase “whitened corpses on the seashore.” It is unlikely the preacher would have said both five-character phrases given the rough parallelisms elsewhere, so I take this as a possible alternative he added to have multiple choices when delivering the actual sermon. For this reason, I have rendered it parenthetically.

⁹¹ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, lines 325–31.

of the road. The preacher reminded his audience of the problems posed by ignorance of death anniversaries and grave sites. If these memorial rituals could not be performed and the dead remained unclaimed, they were destined to “the three [inferior] paths,” namely rebirth in hells, as beasts, or as hungry ghosts. In other words, for the families back home, the failure to perform memorial ritual meant the deceased would suffer in the next life. Notably, the metaphor for Buddhist transmigration here was that of a path or a road, a standard Buddhist trope. Those who fell on the earthly roads of Japan were marginalized in death to unfortunate postmortem paths by the very highway institutions aimed at forging connections. This naturally caused anguish for family members and, if we accept the Buddhist worldview, for the deceased in their next life.

But these roadside dead also created problems for the state tied to legitimacy, death pollution, and angry spirits. For one, the mass presence of corpses threatened any image of the state as benevolent. It risked undermining the tax system by discouraging the transport of goods from the provinces. The ritual concerns, however, may have been even greater. A seventh-century edict reveals fears of death pollution from roadside corpses, as it described how those living by the road tried to compel relatives to perform purification (*harae* 祓除) for the laborers who died on their return journeys.⁹² This reflects a long-standing terror over death defilement and the need for purification rituals to assuage the dangers of pollution, as discussed by Herman Ooms and others.⁹³ Also beginning in the eighth and ninth centuries, rulers became increasingly concerned with vengeful spirits who could wreak havoc on the capital in response to past injustices. As Yui Suzuki has noted, several penance rituals were conducted in the provinces to pacify these spirits, including rites to combat Prince Sawara’s vengeful ghost in the province of Awaji in the late eighth and early ninth centuries and one throughout all of the provinces in 833 in response to a pestilence that had caused many young people to die.⁹⁴ This latter case dates from right around the same time as *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts*, which was likely composed between 824 and 834. Margaret Atwood could have been speaking of ancient Japan when she wrote, “Nothing is more difficult to understand than the dead . . . but nothing is more dangerous than to ignore them.”⁹⁵ The roadside dead required attention; otherwise, pollution and ghosts could haunt the capital and harm the court.

⁹² *Nihon shoki* 3/22/Taika 大化 2, in *NKBT*, 68:296–97; Aston, *Nihongi*, 221–22. Also see, Imazu, “Kyakufu, kojiki, shie,” 91–97. The reading of the characters as *harae* follows the gloss provided in *NKBT*.

⁹³ See, e.g., Herman Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 253–66.

⁹⁴ Yui Suzuki, *Medicine Master Buddha: The Iconic Worship of Yakushi in Heian Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 30–32.

⁹⁵ Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (New York: Random House, 2000), 508.

These fears may lurk behind the numerous law codes about care for the roadside dead from this time. One detailed description appeared in the tax codes: “Conscripted craftsmen (*teishō* 丁匠) traveling to their assigned service who die should be given a coffin. For those who die on the road, the local provincial offices should use public goods to make it. They should then be buried by the roadside. A plaque should be erected and [their death] should be reported to their home. If no family members come to collect [the body], it should be cremated.”⁹⁶ As in the poems, this citation expressed a strong concern with reporting the death of a traveler to his relatives. The need to notify families and encourage them to recover the remains is repeated in a number of other sources.⁹⁷ The plaque, which was likely wooden, also served this function of alerting those in the home villages; travelers could see it and ideally communicate the information to family members. This suggests that the court desired proper mourning by relatives. If the families could not be informed, the state took matters into their own hands, recommending cremation.⁹⁸ Some commentaries state that the plaque not be removed even after cremation so that the family could find the remains.⁹⁹ Despite all of these efforts, it seems that few corpses were collected; an 803 edict attests to the continued presence of unburied bodies and the need to inter them.¹⁰⁰ In short, legal efforts were not successful.

LITURGIES OF EQUALITY

It was within a few decades of this 803 edict on the persistent problem of roadside corpses that the author of *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* described these roadside dead in the prayer cited above. In addition to speaking to the problem, however, he also proposed a ritual solution. The next lines after “Who can save them from the three [inferior] paths” answer the question by introducing a variety of chants. The primary one was rendered in full-size script as “liturgies of equality” (*byōdō no fūjū* 平等之諷誦). A variety of others follow in a smaller script such as intoning the *Heart Sutra* (*Shingyō* 心經), a short but powerful text; the name of the *Lotus* (*Hokkemyō* 法華名),

⁹⁶ “Buyakuryō” 賦役令, in *Ritsuryō*, in *NST* 3:259.

⁹⁷ An edict from 712 encourages notifying families; see *Shoku Nihongi* 1/16/Wadō 5, in *SNKBT*, 12:176–77. The need to notify family members and erect a plaque appear in the reconstructed legal codes “Homōryō” 捕亡令, and “Gokuryō” 獄令, in *Ritsuryō*, in *NST*, 3:448 and 456–57, as well as in *Ryō no gige* 令義解, in *KT*, 22:305.

⁹⁸ Burial and cremation occurred for campaigning soldiers and border guards as well. See “Gunbōryō 軍防令,” in *Ritsuryō*, in *NST*, 3:330, 337. The temporary status of the burial is confirmed in ninth-century legal commentaries. See *Ryō no gige*, in *KT*, 22:125. Other parts of the legal codes prohibit roadside burial, which may explain the need to cremate: “Sōsōryō 喪葬令,” in *Ritsuryō*, in *NST*, 3:437.

⁹⁹ *Ryō no shūge* 令集解, in *KT*, 23:432.

¹⁰⁰ *Ruiju kokushi* 類聚国史, 2/4/Daidō 大同 3, in *KT*, 6:194.

a reference that may represent remarkably early evidence to chanting the title of the *Lotus Sutra*; and the names of Amitābha (Amida 阿弥陀) and Kṣitigarbha (Jizō 地藏), two deities associated with saving the dead.¹⁰¹ The term *fūju* 諷誦, which I have translated as liturgies, refers most basically to ritual chanting, and “liturgies of equality,” likely involved some form of communal chanting led by the monk, although this is somewhat speculative.

Byōdō 平等, often rendered as equality, nondiscrimination, or universality, has particular relevance for those of lower classes. The term appears several times in *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts*. One quotation is explicit in connecting the notion of *byōdō* with transcending class distinctions: “broadly equal great compassion does not discriminate between exalted and base.”¹⁰² As Fujimoto Makoto has demonstrated through an exhaustive examination of all occurrences in this manuscript, *byōdō* has resonance with “a principle of protecting the socially weak,” a meaning that also appears in Chinese sources.¹⁰³ The second character of the term *byōdō* 等 is also used in the manuscript to describe how the Buddha “sees sentient beings equally” (*hitoshiku shu wo miru* 等く衆を視る).¹⁰⁴ This praise immediately follows the beggar passage discussed earlier, so it likely referred to the Buddha’s compassion toward the lower classes. The “liturgies of equality” were invoked for deceased travelers carrying tax goods, so the more general notion of compassion toward the less fortunate accorded to the specific context of this ritual. This supports Nakabayashi Takayuki’s position that, in general, official monks took responsibility for the postmortem care of the non-elite dead.¹⁰⁵

An additional benefit of a liturgy that saves equally was that it did not require a name. It could aid the dead en masse. This is reminiscent of the widely practiced Ghost Festival, which was performed throughout East Asia, including in Japan. Regarding this rite in China, Stephen F. Teiser has described how “seventh-month offerings to both Buddhist and Taoist monks at officially sanctioned temples in the capital cities and in the provinces were supplied out of state coffers, with the benefits dedicated to everyone’s ancestors.”¹⁰⁶ Notably, commoners also participated, received merit, and sometimes made offerings themselves in these nationwide rites.¹⁰⁷ The dual state and grassroots nature

¹⁰¹ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, line 331.

¹⁰² *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, line 40.

¹⁰³ Fujimoto, “Nihon kodai no zaichi shakai no hōe: ‘Tōdaiji fujumon kō’ ‘hige no gen’ wo chūshin to shite” 日本古代の在地社会の法会 — 『東大寺諷誦文稿』 「卑下言」を中心として, *Bukkyō shigaku kenkyū* 仏教史学研究 58, no. 1 (2015): 39–42. For China, see Michihata Ryōshū 道端良秀, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi no kenkyū* 中国仏教史の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1970), 59–83.

¹⁰⁴ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, line 173.

¹⁰⁵ Nakabayashi Takayuki 中林隆之, “Kodai no shūkyō to chinkon (tsuitō)” 古代の宗教と鎮魂(追悼), *Atarashii rekishigaku no tame ni* 新しい歴史学のために 269 (2008): 21–22.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 5.

¹⁰⁷ Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, esp. 44–47 and 66–69.

of the ritual fits the pattern of official monks traveling to the Japanese provinces to preach to villagers, which was likely the case for the author of *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts*.

Another potentially relevant rite is one known as “Great Assembly of Non-Obstruction” (*Musha daie* 無遮大会), which Fujimoto takes as a possible precedent for the “liturgies of equality.”¹⁰⁸ In this ritual, the ruler made offerings to all regardless of social class or monastic status. In China, the word “non-obstruction” was sometimes replaced with “equality” (平等) in the name of the rite, and *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts* records the phrase “Great Assembly of Equality” (*Byōdō daie* 平等大会) just prior to the passage on the roadside dead containing the liturgies of equality.¹⁰⁹ In seventh- and eighth-century Japan, the Great Assembly of Non-Obstruction was held at challenging times such as after the death of the sovereign or in response to a drought.¹¹⁰ Perhaps the problem of roadside dead stimulated the need for the provincial rite preserved in *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts*.

Final possible continental precedents are the “Water and Land” (Ch. *shui lu* 水陸) rites that became ubiquitous in medieval China, particularly from the eleventh century. This often seven-day practice is complex, but Phillip Bloom has recently summarized it as “an elaborate affair that involves summoning all beings in the cosmos, both Buddhist and non-, to be fêted and to hear the Buddha’s dharma; having been purified in a bathing chamber and having been awakened to the Buddha’s teachings, the non-Buddhist beings, especially the ghosts of the unburied dead, are then sent off to be reborn into a higher path of existence.”¹¹¹ According to Bloom, the earliest reliable documentation likely dates to the late Tang dynasty (618–907), particularly the ninth century, an era that he claims is characterized by the rise of “masses of unburied dead.”¹¹² As with “liturgies of equality,” the emergence of large numbers of uncared-for

¹⁰⁸ See Fujimoto Makoto, “Kodai no kōtsū wo sasaeta Bukkyō shisetsu to fukden shisō: Hasseiki kōhan kara kyūseiki zenhan no kōchō unkyakufu no kōtsū to kyūsai wo megutte” 古代の交通を支えた仏教施設と福田思想—八世紀後半～九世紀前半の貢調運脚夫の交通と救済をめぐって, in *Nihon kodai no yusō to dōro*, 221–23. For more on this ritual in China, see Max Deeg, “Origins and Development of the Buddhist Pañcavārṣika, Part 2: China” *Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism: Saṃbhāṣā* 18 (1997): 63–96; Michihata Ryōshū, *Chūgoku Bukkyō to shakai fukushi jigyo* 中国仏教と社会福祉事業 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1976), 94–102; and Zhanru 湛如, *Dunhuang fojiao liyi zhidu yanjiu* 敦煌佛教律儀制度研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 341–47.

¹⁰⁹ *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, line 321.

¹¹⁰ Marinus Willem De Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1935), 196–97.

¹¹¹ Phillip E. Bloom, “Descent of the Deities: The Water-Land Retreat and the Transformation of the Visual Culture of Song-Dynasty (960–1279) Buddhism” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013), 35–36. Also see Daniel B. Stevenson, “Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu Fahui*, the Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land,” in *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 30–70.

¹¹² Bloom, “Descent of the Deities,” 125–26.

corpses may have stimulated the need for new rituals. While there are clear differences such as those in structure and iconography, the Water and Land rites, as well as the other possible precedents, all point to a broad interest in practices for universal salvation that emerged on the continent at a time roughly contemporaneous to *Draft of Tōdaiji Liturgical Texts*.

The preacher behind the “liturgies of equality” may have built upon these ideas that originated on the continent and at court, but he seems to have done so in original ways by combining a discourse on equality with en masse death rituals and enacting them not in official provincial temples but in village halls on behalf of the roadside dead. In putting the pieces together this way, the preacher could respond to the interests of both the court, who desired means to pacify and purify the dead, and the villagers, who worried about the postmortem fate of their loved ones lost in transit. The monk, who likely hailed from the capital region, solved the problems of disconnection caused by the creation of a system of roads with a rite that served multiple interests. Road construction created a new class of the dead while also enabling a monk to travel to the provinces, observe these problems, and propose solutions. Given the nature of the source—handwritten notes on the verso of a commentary that appear to record memos used by a monk in preparing provincial sermons—there is little reason to doubt that this practice was actually carried out in villages.

CONCLUSION

Roads then have a complex legacy for Japanese history and religion. The highway network enabled a more connected world to emerge. In it, tax goods flowed to the capital, and religious ideas and practices circulated between the court and the provinces. Roads created new forms of connectivity that facilitated Buddhism’s growth in the countryside, as evidenced by the explosion in temple construction, especially along highways and near stations. Roads helped establish a common religious culture across the Japanese archipelago, one that complemented the new tax-collecting capacities of the state. They also provided a metaphor for the nascent polity, not as the *ritsuryō kokka*, as modern scholars would have it, but as a network of highways. In these ways, this article has offered new ways of understanding the history of Japanese Buddhism and the early state by arguing for the rapid transmission of Buddhism into the villages in the eighth and ninth centuries and by proposing an emic model for conceiving of the polity as a network of roads rather than the etic classification of a system of laws.

But I hope this article also encourages scholars of religion to remember that networks do more than simply connect. This case study demonstrates that the creation of a highway network linking capital and countryside spawned the potential for falling by the wayside. More generally, because networks enable

mobility, they create the possibility of getting stuck in between nodes, in places where one is ironically isolated from traditional social connections vital for sustenance in life and death. As models of networks become increasingly visible in religious studies and across the humanities and social sciences, it is perhaps worth pausing and reflecting on the darker sides of connectivity. Connectivity is not without a cost. Networks are inherently dangerous. Movement along them risks severance from one's most intimate ties. Roads are not only sites to express agency, they are also tragic places where individuals could lose all means to survive.

Precisely because of these tragic qualities, roads generated religious ritual and discourse. In ancient Japan, highways facilitated religious innovation not simply because they provided the grounds for preachers and merchants to transport traditions across geographic regions but also because roads represented the final resting place of many travelers, abandoned as forsaken corpses unable to be properly mourned. The displaced dead presented a religious problem, one that often required a ritual response. Networks, therefore, engender religious practice in part because they engender displacement. It is not only the connective qualities of networks that expand religious possibilities. It is also the fragility of these connections.

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