ON THE CONCEPT OF HIJIRI (HOLY-MAN)

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(continued)

III. EMERGENCE OF THE HIJIRI-GROUP AND ITS CHARACTER

Emergence of the Hijiri-Group

The original meanings of Hijiri have been clarified to some extent by the descriptions in the opening section. Hijiri as a specifically religious concept came into existence in the middle of the Heian Period, succeeding the formed ubasoku(upásaka)zenji group of the Nara Period65), as represented by Gyôgi-bosatsu66) and En-no-ubasoku67). It was gradually formed on the basis of feelings which were common to both the special religious ascetics who had firm faith and strict practices, including the observance of the Buddhist discipline of forbearance and mercifulness, and the religious hermits who had endeavored to achieve a higher form of religious experience and consciousness in the isolated and secluded mountains or hermitages.

Buddhism in the Nara Period made a sharp discrimination between state Buddhism and private or popular Buddhism, because it had developed under the patronage and control of the state. The attitude of the government toward private beliefs and practices was negative

65) In the Nara Period, the so-called ubasoku-zenji (upásaka-ascetic) was an unauthorized and private Buddhist ascetic or practitioner who did not receive the Buddhist initiation ceremony or undergo the state examination for license.

66) Shoku Nihongi, chap. XVII; Gyôgi Nenpu (Biography of Gyôgi); Hori, Ichiro: op. cit. See Note 18.

67) En-no-Shôkaku was a famous magician who lived in the middle of the seventh century. His family was believed to have had a priestly function serving the god of Mount Katsuragi in Nara Prefecture. It is said that the Shugen-dô Sect was founded by him, but this is not yet an established historical fact. However, there is some reliable evidence to show that many shamans and magicians practiced and trained in the mountains, accepting the new-styled form of Buddhist Mantrayâna in that period.
and rather suppressive. Many Buddhist priests had tried to become official priests by taking the state examination for licensure, or to be priests of up-to-date information after studying abroad. The Biku (Bhiksu), an officially authorized Buddhist priest, was treated on the same footing with the government officers. Many state-temples donated by the government or by the Imperial Family had their own lands and people as their economic foundation, organized and controlled separately. There was a bureau for religious affairs in the government, the headquarters of which was called Sō-gō ⁶⁸. The headquarters for the state-temples and the big clan-temples were also called San-gō ⁶⁹).

The official Buddhist priests belonged to the religious and social status of their own temple. Their status could be promoted by length of service from their initiation ceremony as well as by their study and practical merits. Among the official Buddhist priests, the so-called Gaku-sō (literally, scholarly monk), there were many lower-class private priests who engaged in the practical affairs of managing the temples, Buddha halls and serving the high-class official priests. One class, called the Dai-shu or Shū-to (literally, masses), sprang up in rivalry with the Gaku-sō group. Afterwards, this Dai-shu or Shū-to group seized power in their temples and formed a great political and economic bloc against other politically powerful families.

Many state and clan temples were built for the sole benefit and purpose of their own aims and functions, and gained and held political and economic independenc, so that their religious functions were never opened to the masses or the public. The character of the priests in the state or clan temples, as well as those of the Gaku-sō and Dai-shu groups, equally became more and more political and secularistic than religious. Moreover, the nobles of the Heian Period were strongly superstitious; they feared the revenge of the spirit of the dead enemy; they believed in the necromancy and telepathy performed by female shamans; they believed in divinations based on astrology and the calendar according to the professors of the Yin-yang philosophy.

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⁶⁸ The Sō-gō consists of a Sō-jō (bishop or archbishop), a Sō-zu (sub-bishop) and a Ri(tsu)-shi (head controller of disciplinary affairs). Afterwards, these titles became only honorary ones given by the government to scholarly and outstanding Buddhist priests.

⁶⁹ The San-gō consists of three classes. The head of San-gō was called Ji-shu (head of the temple).