Defining and Classifying Pilgrimages

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Defining and Classifying Pilgrimages

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Abstract

To make comparisons among the many forms of religious journeys, scholars need both an acceptable definition of the phenomenon called pilgrimages and a workable classification scheme that reveals significant differences. Following a discussion about the elements that should be incorporated into a definition of pilgrimages, a formal statement is presented. This provides a basis for separating those traveling activities that should be studied as pilgrimages from all other forms of human movement.

Further differentiation among pilgrimages can be achieved by categorizing them into a few distinct classes. Several criteria that logically could be utilized for dividing pilgrimages into various types are examined, but the final classification scheme depends on three factors. Each criterion is subdivided three ways, which produces a set of twenty-seven potential types of pilgrimages.

Key words: pilgrimage, pilgrimage defined, pilgrimage classified.

• Shortly before taking an examination, a college student travels by bus from Colombo to worship at the Kataragama shrine.
• During the Hajj period, Muslims from numerous countries assemble at Mecca to participate in prescribed rituals.
• Hundreds of Americans drive to Atlanta to attend a rally conducted by a famous evangelist.

Do these three events have any common characteristics? If so, can the term pilgrimage be applied meaningfully to all three events? Even if all three can be subsumed conceptually under the definitional category of "pilgrimage," are there significant differences that could be indicated logically by subdividing the entire pilgrimage set? The purpose of this paper is to provide a basis for answering these questions by presenting a definition of pilgrimages and a scheme for classifying them.

The Role of Definitions and Classifications

A standardized definition and accompanying classification scheme can benefit pilgrimage studies in two major ways. They can promote clarity in communication and they can provide the means for establishing relationships among phenomena.

Definitions are essential for linguistic communication because the very basis of language involves the grouping of individual elements into semantic categories. Classification can also aid communication because greater linguistic precision can be achieved by dividing broad definitions into smaller groups. For example, travelers have been defined as "pilgrims," "tourists," or "religious wanderers" (Cohen 1981; Smith 1981; Graham 1981). Likewise, the group defined as "pilgrims" can be divided into subgroups, such as "Buddhist" pilgrims, "Christian" pilgrims, or "Sikh" pilgrims.

Another benefit resulting from a classification scheme is its potential role in establishing relationships among phenomena. To detect geographic relationships between pilgrimages and other human and environmental features, it is necessary to observe and measure variations. Although a few characteristics of pilgrimages, such as distance traveled and number of pilgrims, can be measured quantitatively, most aspects of pilgrimages cannot be differentiated by applying numbers. Qualitative differentiation requires classification.

Only by discovering associations among variations in pilgrimages and other related phenomena can generalizations be accomplished. In other words, classification is a prerequisite for moving pilgrimage studies from being only a collection of descriptive accounts about unique events to a body of knowledge that facilitates making comparisons, finding relationships, and producing principles of geographic behavior.

Defining the Pilgrimage Phenomenon

Some Definitions of Pilgrimages

It is not surprising that a human activity as complex and varied as a pilgrimage has no universally accepted definition. Lack of unanimity not only complicates separating pilgrimages from non-pilgrimages but also implies differing criteria for classification. These difficulties become apparent by examining some definitions that have been published elsewhere.

Consider the following three definitions:

Definition #1: A journey to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion (Sykes 1982, 776).
Definition #2: Pilgrimage involves three factors: a holy place; attraction of individuals or crowds to this place; a specific aim, i.e., to obtain some spiritual or material benefit (Brandon 1970, 501).

Definition #3: The term pilgrimage is used in at least three senses. (1) There is first the "interior pilgrimage," the "journey of the soul" in a lifetime of growth from spiritual infancy to maturity. (2) There is, second, the literal pilgrimage to some sacred place as a paradigm of the intent of religion itself. This literal journey may be called "extroverted mysticism" (Turner 1973). (3) Finally, every trek to one's local sanctuary is a pilgrimage in miniature insofar as it acts out on a small scale some transition or growth and experience of the sacred and new community which pilgrimage in general affords (Crim 1981, 569).

Although these definitions possess common elements, there are differences that should be examined. Also, of great importance to the emphasis in this paper is the fact that they cannot be operationalized without further clarification. Even though adequately conveying conceptual meaning, they lack the precision needed to measure the differences between a pilgrimage and other kinds of journeys. Before examining the individual elements of these definitions, however, it should be noted that the first sense of the third definition — the "journey of the soul" — will be excluded here because such is not the phenomenon of physical travel that is manifested geographically.

Distance of Movement

One of the most basic elements in a definition of pilgrimage is movement. Most of the conceptual ambiguity of this element has been removed here by excluding the mystical or spiritual thoughts of a person who does not actually travel. For geographic purposes, at least, pilgrimages must involve the physical movement of persons from one place to another.

The primary definitional problem, however, concerns the minimum distance required for movement to be termed a pilgrimage. The issue is exposed in the third definition cited above, which suggests in the third sense that a stroll to a local sanctuary is also a kind of pilgrimage. Indeed, some pilgrimage scholars do regard every shrine as a center of pilgrimage (Bharati 1970). Does this mean that all movements to sacred places, irrespective of how short they are, are properly called pilgrimages? If so, this is an easy solution to the scale problem because we do not need to worry about the distance element. All travel which satisfies the other criteria for being a pilgrimage (see below) meets the movement requirement.

The third definition, however, does not really remove all uncertainty about the question of minimum distance because, since this "third sense" is presented as a distinct category, it evidently must differ from the preceding sense of the term. How is such a difference recognized? Is it based
only on length of travel? If so, what distance separates the "miniature pilgrimages" from regular ones?

These questions about distance partly reflect the dilemma of scale inherent in all geographic study. Generalizations about spatial behavior are always influenced by scale — both the size of the total area in which the phenomena are observed and the size of the minimum unit for measuring variations. As an illustration, consider the following two situations. One is a map of the Anuradhapura area of Sri Lanka. It includes Sri Mahabodhi, Ruvanveli Dagaba, and the six other sacred spots within an area of approximately 15 square kilometers. The detail is such that the mapped paths of pilgrimage movements show the circumambulations around the dagabas (stupas) and the approach to the Bodhi-Tree. The second map, at a different scale, covers all of Sri Lanka. A single symbol represents Anuradhapura, and pilgrimage paths converge on the city along highways and rail routes. It is very apparent that many relationships, such as that between distance traveled and number of pilgrims, will be quite different in these two situations.

The contrast between these two situations typifies the basic definitional issue of minimum distance. Virtually everyone would affirm that traveling from Colombo to Anuradhapura for the purpose of worship constitutes a pilgrimage. In contrast, most scholars would not regard the movement from Sri Mahabodhi to Ruvanveli Dagaba as a separate pilgrimage event.

In fact, common usage in the English language does not include such movements as weekly trips to a neighborhood church or daily strolls to a nearby shrine. Certainly the popular conceptualization of pilgrimage regards the movement as being longer than local travel. Furthermore, most pilgrimage scholars, including the Turners, have insisted that going on a pilgrimage involves movement away from the "local" environment (Turner and Turner 1978).

The exclusion of local movements from the definition of pilgrimage introduces questions about exceptional cases, such as persons who live near famous pilgrimage sites. For example, according to Neame (1968), most inhabitants of Lourdes attend the parish church and have little to do with the famous Marian shrine. When a resident of Lourdes does visit the shrine, however, the question arises about whether such a short trip should be regarded as a true pilgrimage. For consistency, that movement cannot be called a pilgrimage because the term applies only to "farther than local" journeys.

Excluding local journeys from the definition of pilgrimage is consistent with the general meanings of "procession" and "circumambulation." These terms usually imply a journey longer than just ritualistic movements inside a very confined space, but yet they still pertain to local move-
ments. Conceptually, however, long processions and circumambulations seem to merge into short pilgrimages. Under some circumstances, a lengthy "procession," consisting of a group moving along a prescribed route for religious purposes, might be considered a short "pilgrimage." For example, should the movements from Mecca to Mina and Arafat and back to Mecca be called processions or short pilgrimages?

Similarly, even though "circumambulation" refers to movement around a sacred object or area, there is no definitional limit on the length of the circular journey. When the circumference of the route is several kilometers long, such as the 80-kilometer Pancha Kroshi Parikrama around the sacred area of Varanasi (Singh, this volume), movement certainly approximates the distance conventionally associated with that of a pilgrimage. Is it only the absence of a central focus that makes the famous circular movement around Shikoku a pilgrimage rather than a gigantic circumambulation? Or, does its greater distance of 1,385 kilometers shift it from one definitional category to the other?

The goals of definitional standardization can be achieved best by not expressing the "minimum distance" of a pilgrimage in quantitative terms. This is already demonstrated by the discussion about long circumambulations. The term "local" cannot be quantified meaningfully for all circumstances because of the variability in sizes of communities (or culture regions), the availability of transportation networks, and modes of travel. Therefore, rather than stating that the minimum distance must exceed, for example, 30 kilometers, here the term "pilgrimage" is defined as movement that is "longer than local."

**Motivation**

A second element in the definition of pilgrimage concerns the motive for the movement. As seen in the definitions quoted above, the motive is usually religious. It is true that if a portion of the second definition, which includes the phrase "to obtain some ... material benefit," is taken literally, it does not exclude vendors and pickpockets. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the motivation of the traveler must be religious for the event to qualify as a pilgrimage.

Such agreement soon dissipates, however, when a definition of the term "religious" is attempted. The term "religion" is as vague and lacking standardization as the phenomenon being defined here. However, to avoid deviating into another discussion about the boundaries of terms, the word "religious" will be accepted as a definitional primitive.

Even with an assumed working definition of "religious," the actual separation of motives is virtually impossible. Neither observers nor travelers themselves can differentiate motives that are primarily religious from a multitude of other reasons for making a journey to a place where
pilgrims congregate. At a popular pilgrimage site where fairs, festivals, sporting events, and markets concurrently attract pilgrims, tourists, vacationers, excursion groups, traders, and hustlers, the true religious pilgrims cannot always be identified.

It is true that some scholars have attempted to determine the motives of persons at pilgrimage sites by asking them to declare their reasons in an interview or on a questionnaire (Jindel 1976; Vidyarthi, Jha and Saraswati 1979; Naidu 1985). Although some clues about motivations may be obtained by this technique, it is questionable whether data are entirely representative and valid.

Furthermore, even if the "true motives" of travelers to pilgrimage sites were known, some definitional problems remain. One is the fact that motives change. If a person decides to visit a pilgrimage place because of curiosity but experiences a religious conversion while at the site, has the journey become a personal pilgrimage?

Another definitional problem results from the fact that trips are taken for multiple reasons. If a person travels to a foreign area as a tourist but while in that vicinity also makes a religious journey to a sacred site, is that person a pilgrim? The issue is well illustrated by the uncertainty about whether the large number of participants in commercial tours to religious sites should be counted as pilgrims (Nolan and Nolan 1989).

The operational solution to this definitional problem generally has been to count all who come to a pilgrimage site as pilgrims. Even though all who have made the journey probably have not done so for primarily religious motives, an inclusive count is accepted because of the virtual impossibility of operationalizing the term "religious."

In some respects, counting all who travel to a "pilgrimage site" as religious pilgrims shifts the definitional burden to that of differentiating among various types of destinations. That is, if Mecca is accepted as a sacred site, then there is some justification for regarding travelers to Mecca as pilgrims. If, on the other hand, Canterbury is no longer revered as a sacred place, then to be consistent, visitors to that place should not be defined as religious pilgrims. In any case, the nature of the destination is an important element in the definition of pilgrimage.

The Destination

To be called pilgrimage, the movement normally must be to a destination that is regarded as sacred. Conceptually this condition is clear; but operationally it requires the ability to measure sanctity. Because there are no inherent characteristics at a site that reveal its holy attributes, it is difficult to objectively identify places that are sacred and thus attract pilgrims.

Even conceptually there is not a sharp delineation between "sacred" and "nonsacred" places. Researchers are confronted with the task of decid-
ing whether a family gravesite, a tree containing the spirits of a tribal community, or an altar in an urban mission should be included or not. In some cases, a childhood home or a national shrine have been termed sacred. It is necessary, therefore, to rate places that may or may not be considered sacred for the purpose of identifying those that exceed a minimum level of sanctity.

Several methods have been employed in attempts to rate places according to sanctity (Stoddard 1966, 1994; Bhardwaj 1973; Preston 1981). One method bases sanctity on statements in holy texts (Salomon 1979). Places enumerated in the indigenous literature as being sacred are accepted as equivalent to places of pilgrimages. This is generally an unsatisfactory method for identifying contemporary sacred sites, however, because of tremendous changes (Bhattacharya 1953; Sopher 1987; Tanaka Shimazaki 1988). The locations of some places cited in ancient texts are unknown today, while other places (e.g., La Salette, Lourdes, Knock, Fatima, and Medugorje) have become popular pilgrimage destinations only recently.

Another method relies upon empirical data that pertain either to number of pilgrims or to distance traveled. When using count data, it is assumed that a large number of persons traveling to a specific site indicates a high level of sanctity. Equating total number of pilgrims to sanctity is somewhat inappropriate for definitional purposes here because it involves cyclical reasoning, namely, that "pilgrimages" are movements to places that are defined as "sacred" because those places are where pilgrims go.

Reliance on travel data associates sanctity of a place with the distance worshippers have journeyed; that is, longer average distances (or greater variances in distances) indicate higher-order pilgrimage places (Bhardwaj 1973). As a definitional element, however, this method does not contribute additional support because it duplicates the "distance of movement" component.

A third method of measuring the sanctity of places is by obtaining the opinions of a group. When the group consists of the general population, sanctity of places is operationally defined on the basis of the collective responses of a sampled group (Bhardwaj 1973; Stoddard 1980; Jackson and Henrie 1983). In many ways, this comes closest to measuring the concept of sacred places, but it is costly to acquire the data through the necessarily large survey.

Alternately, a survey of experts can produce an index of sanctity. Admittedly, this method lacks the objectivity desired in an operational definition because it essentially states that a place is sacred if the experts affirm that such is the case. Nevertheless, most places that are regarded as sacred by larger populations are those that have been observed, identified, and reported as such by pilgrimage scholars (Stoddard 1994).
Defining and Classifying Pilgrimages

Besides the difficulty of measuring the sanctity of places, another type of definitional issue occurs when the destination of worshippers is not a fixed site, but rather a person who wanders. In India, where pilgrims are frequently attracted to the temporary residences of highly revered traveling monks (Bhardwaj, this volume; Eck 1985; McCormick, this volume), this might complicate the specification of sacred places. In general, these circumstances present no major problem because they can be subsumed under the comprehensive definition of pilgrimages to sacred places. If the immediate space around a revered person is regarded as holy, irrespective of how short the duration, then mass attraction to this place should be considered as a pilgrimage event. Presenting greater definitional difficulty, though, are the religious journeys of "flexible pilgrimages" of the Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad (Glazier 1983).

Magnitude

A fourth definitional issue concerns the magnitude of movement to a sacred place. Here a very important distinction is made between the concept of pilgrimage and an operational definition of this phenomenon of mass movement. Conceptually, the definition of pilgrimage should include any religious journey, including that of a single individual, to a sacred place. Consistently, then, an individual pilgrimage unit would be the travels of one person. The goal here, however, is to operationally define an event that involves the flow of a large collection of pilgrims. The aspect that presents uncertainty is the size or magnitude of the collection constituting a pilgrimage event.

A single pilgrimage event is defined here as the movement of numerous worshippers traveling to a sacred destination, usually during a special occasion. Many pilgrimages occur at the time of a religious holiday and/or a specially announced occasion and, therefore, the question about whether a pilgrimage occasion has occurred does not arise. But, theoretically, the issue of magnitude is pertinent if very few pilgrims actually came at the same time of an announced ceremony or, conversely, if a large number of pilgrims spontaneously converged at a holy site at a time unassociated with a religious holiday.

The definition of "numerous" can be operationalized by attaching the condition of "significance." That is, if at a particular time, the number of visitors to a sacred site is significantly greater than the norm, that qualifies as a "pilgrimage event." It is not essential that "significance" be given a formal statistical meaning; a qualitative definition of the term is also satisfactory. Basing the definition on significant deviations from the normal number of pilgrims traveling to a place, of course, means that no absolute value determines a pilgrimage event. At places visited by several hundred pilgrims daily, a special occasion is marked by thousands of pilgrims;
whereas at other places that rarely have visitors, a pilgrimage event could be indicated by a few hundred pilgrims.

**An Operational Definition of a Pilgrimage Event**

Converting the concept of pilgrimage into an operational definition that will apply equally well to all cultural settings is difficult. This is partly because of differences in linguistic usage. In India, for example, people who undertake a journey for the purpose of being in the presence of a famous traveling monk are usually called pilgrims. In contrast, Americans who travel to national religious rallies and conferences to listen to famous spiritual leaders are seldom referred to as pilgrims. Thus, even though many characteristics of these two situations are similar, popular terminology does not equate them.

Nevertheless, certain key elements do need to be recognized as basic to an operational definition of pilgrimage. Thus, the following definition is suggested for the meaning of pilgrimage: *an event consisting of longer than local journeys by numerous persons to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion.*

**Criteria for Classification**

Within the set of all events defined as pilgrimages are innumerable variations, which, for analytical purposes, should be further characterized by dividing them into classes. The utility of a classification scheme, of course, is highly dependent on the criteria used to differentiate individuals (or events) because the selected criteria affect the way variations among the total population are observed and the way relationships may be detected. Therefore, several potential criteria are examined here for their merits and limitations before selecting three that probably possess the greatest discriminatory power for a geographic classification.

**Length of Journey**

A fundamental element in the definition of pilgrimage concerns the distance of movement, which means that it is a critical variable in understanding this phenomenon. The incorporation of this variable into a classification scheme, therefore, is essential for geographic understanding.

Pilgrimage scholars from a variety of disciplines have found merit in differentiating pilgrimage places on the basis of travel distance. Often discussions concern variations in the size and characteristics of the inherent nodal regions because, in effect, they are delineated by lengths of journey. Although other terminology, such as "catchment area" and "pilgrimage field," is sometimes utilized (Turner 1973; Preston 1981; Messerschmidt
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and Sharma 1989), it still taps into the abundance of studies dealing with nodal regions. Because distance can be easily measured quantitatively, it is tempting to delineate classes of pilgrims on the basis of linear units. The disadvantages of a numerical differentiation of journey distances are essentially the same as those advanced against quantitatively defining the upper limit of "local." That is, the travel implications of, say, 20 kilometers, varies greatly with conditions. It varies with mode of travel, as illustrated by the greater friction, or deterrence, of distance resulting from walking over mountainous terrain than from riding in a car on a superhighway. It varies with size of communities, especially if a 20-kilometer journey does, or does not, take the pilgrims outside their home territory into a region of foreign inhabitants and unfamiliar environments.

An alternative way of classifying distances traveled by pilgrims is by utilizing ordinal categories such as regional, national, and international. (Of course, a category of "local" could be included also, if such were not excluded from an operational definition.) This means of classifying distance traveled has been the strategy of several scholars of pilgrimages (table 1).

The main limitation of an ordinal scheme for differentiating the travel distance of pilgrims is its imprecision in measurements, especially as it concerns national units. Because countries vary tremendously in size, the distinction between "national" and "international" does not correlate well with distance. For example, an "international" trip from Spain to France may be shorter and easier than a "national" one the length of India. Also, the size of a country influences the concept of "regional." That is, a regional pilgrimage in Brazil may encompass a much larger area than a regional one in Sri Lanka.

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In spite of these limitations, this three-fold division is feasible. It is partially justified by the fact that we do live in a world in which international boundaries have a tremendous effect on human movement and related activities. The division between "national" and "international" recognizes this condition. Furthermore, the concept of regions and regionalism is well established in geography, so the term "regional" carries much more meaning than the expression "a shorter distance than national."

If desired, the conversion of these distance categories to a classification of a pilgrimage, as an event attended by a large number of pilgrims, can be accomplished by quantitative guidelines. As an illustration, if more than 30 percent of the pilgrims to a particular site are categorized as international, the event they are attending could be considered an "international" pilgrimage. If fewer than 30 percent of the pilgrims are international but more than 50 percent are national, then the occasion might be classified as "national." According to this proposed scheme, all other pilgrimages would be classed as "regional" (fig. 1). Thus, an event in which the percentage of pilgrims identified as international, national, and regional are respectively 10, 20, and 70 is categorized as a regional pilgrimage. With the accumulation of more empirical data, these limiting percentages could be adjusted to better fit world variations in pilgrimage distances.²

Fig. 1. Three types of pilgrimages — Regional, National, and International — are defined on the basis of the percentage of pilgrims who have traveled specified distances. The triangular graph illustrates how various percentages are combined to define each of the three pilgrimage types.
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Pilgrimage Route

A second criterion that spatially distinguishes pilgrimages is the kind of route followed by pilgrims. One kind, which here is called "converging," is merely the collection of all direct-line paths taken by pilgrims going from their homes to a sacred site. In most respects, these resemble those converging on any other type of nodal center and are associated with least-effort connections, as expressed in time, ease, and cost of travel, and with perceptions and knowledge of route choices.

When a pilgrim makes a journey to more than one pilgrimage site, we would expect the entire connecting route to approximate a type of least-effort connectivity. Although it may not match the optimal pattern of the traveling-salesman type, the route is chosen by personal preferences of each pilgrim on the basis of time, costs, and similar factors.

Labeling this kind of pilgrimage travel as just another example of convergence to a nodal center, however, is not intended to deny the factor of sacrifice. For many pilgrims, greater merit can be obtained at the destination if the trip has been arduous. Unfortunately, the importance of this negative factor has not been studied in depth. It is known that the path of least effort is shunned by some pilgrims, but its cumulative effect on the selection of specific routes is unknown. In some cases, sacrifice is probably achieved through the mode of travel rather than by the route (Turner 1973; Stoddard 1988).

A second class of pilgrimage routes consists of paths prescribed by religious texts, teachings, and/or practice. A pilgrimage along a route that is prescribed essentially extends the religious domain far beyond a single holy site because the entire pilgrimage way is usually regarded as a sacred path. Often the total journey is an act of devotion, especially if it involves worshipping at numerous sites along the route. In fact, in some situations, there is no dominant holy spot, but rather, a series of places visited by pilgrims as they follow the pilgrimage route (Tanaka Shimazaki 1977; Hoshino 1981; Shimazaki, this volume).

Prescribed routes can be divided into two subcategories: circular and non-circular ("processional"). Circular routes do not necessarily form a shape that matches a circle, but they consist of a closed traverse. All pilgrims, irrespective of whether they commence and terminate at the same place or join the path at numerous entry points, complete the prescribed route. For example, when pilgrims in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal make the 60-kilometer journey around to the four Ganesh shrines, they may join the circular route at the position closest to their home (Stoddard 1980). Consequently, a journey along a prescribed circular pilgrimage route has some of the characteristics of a large circumambulation, except that a sacred object or area may not necessarily be encircled.
A prescribed non-circular route invariably focuses on a pilgrimage site. The prescribed route functions as the sacred approach which prepares the pilgrim for the encounter at the holiest place. At the farthest distance, it may be that no route is prescribed so pilgrims join one of several branches only after they get closer to their destination. As they approach the goal, they are channeled into a single pathway, which may be lined with sacred way stations (Turner and Turner 1978; Miller 1981). When the pilgrimage site is located in a rather inaccessible place, the route restriction may be reinforced by physical constraints (Messerschmidt and Sharma 1989).

It is recognized that operationalizing the extent to which a pilgrimage route is prescribed involves the question of scale. When the scale is confined to the spatial movements within the immediate environs of the sacred area, ritualistic movement will often be partly or wholly prescribed (Shimazaki, this volume). Consistent with the rest of the classification scheme proposed here, such large-scale movements are disregarded.

In summary, it is recommended that pilgrimage routes be grouped into three classes: convergence, prescribed circular, and prescribed processional (non-circular).

**Frequency of Pilgrimage**

A third criterion that is helpful in observing variations in pilgrimages is their frequency of occurrence. Although this aspect is not as spatial as the other two criteria, time is certainly related to space in geographic analyses. This temporal component is not the view of time divided into historic periods; instead, it may refer either to the number of events that occur within a designated unit of time or the amount of time between pilgrimages. The latter is adopted here.

Frequency of pilgrimages occurs as a continuous variable, ranging from very rare events to almost continual religious journeys, which means the positions and number of class boundaries are not universally recognized as "natural." Because numerous religious celebrations occur annually, the classification proposed here is based on a year. If annual pilgrimages are separated from those taken less frequently and from others occurring more often, three classes result. To avoid having the middle class being restricted to exactly one year and to include annual cycles that do not match the Gregorian calendar, its boundaries are quantitatively expanded from merely 12 months to a period of 10 to 14 months. Here these three classes are termed "frequent" (for those occurring more often than every 10 months), "annual" (once every 10 to 14 months), and "rare" (more than 14 months between pilgrimages).3
Pilgrimages can be classified according to their locations by site or situation. The former pertains primarily to the characteristics at a particular location while the latter refers to the relative location of the place.

**Site characteristics** Site characteristics may be an integral part of a sacred place and, thus, serve as an appropriate classificatory criterion. Environmental characteristics that might be observed are high places, springs or wells, streams, coastal protuberances, caves, or a combination of several physical features (Nolan 1987; Sopher 1987).

Unfortunately for classification purposes, the environmental condition of many sites is not regarded as the reason for the site's sacredness. The Nolans, for example, found that more than half of the Christian pilgrimage sites they examined in western Europe were not meaningfully associated with a site feature (Nolan and Nolan, this volume). Sites where divine events were manifested and/or revered persons were born or martyred may be quite unrelated to the natural setting, yet be important destinations for pilgrims. Another limitation to classifying natural sites is created by pilgrimage goals that are mobile, that is, those associated with traveling monks. These factors do not exclude using site features as a criterion for classifying pilgrimage destinations, but they do reduce the potential for explanatory relationships.

**Relative location** Pilgrimage places can be classified also by the relative location, i.e., their geographic situation. The related phenomena may be the distributions of total or selected populations (Stoddard 1966; Sopher 1968; Bharati 1970; Bhardwaj 1973), transportation networks, or the origins of attending pilgrims. The latter has been expressed in terms of the core or periphery of the nodal region (Turner 1973; Sopher 1987; Tanaka Shimazaki 1988).

One argument against the inclusion of relative locations as a classificatory criterion is its potential for use as an explanatory variable. That is, the designation of a classification scheme always involves the question about the optimum number of criteria. Increasing the number of criteria concurrently does increase the precision of differentiating among individuals, but this achievement usually sacrifices opportunities for measuring relationships with variables that could otherwise be used as explanatory phenomena.

In this case, logic favors the exclusion of this variable — the relative location of the pilgrimage destination — from the classification scheme. It is more logical to have the option of correlating pilgrimage types with the geographic positions of their destinations than to incorporate this locational factor in the classification scheme.
Importance of Pilgrimage Places

Places may range from the holiest of holy places to sites that differ little from the surrounding profane space (Eliade 1959); therefore, another way pilgrimages might be categorized is by their degree of sanctity or, as emphasized by Preston (1981), their "spiritual magnetism." Any one of the methods used for measuring sanctity for definitional purposes (see above) can be utilized for classifying places.

Measuring the sanctity of a place by the number of pilgrims attracted to it is consistent with geographic studies of other phenomena drawn to a nodal center. The nature of religious motivations and behavior, however, complicates using this in, at least, three ways. One is that attendance is partly a function of the size of each religious group. For example, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem may be regarded by Jews as very sacred, but the world population of Jews is comparatively small, especially in contrast to the Hindu population. Consequently, more Hindu pilgrims may attend a place perceived as having lesser sanctity than the number of Jewish pilgrims going to the Wailing Wall. Applying a measurement based on number of pilgrims would greatly limit cross-religious studies of pilgrimage.

A second complication results from uncertainty about the most appropriate time unit. To illustrate, compare (1) the 100 daily pilgrims to place X with (2) the 36,500 pilgrims that go to place Y at the time of annual festival with (3) the 438,000 that attend the one-in-12-years' holy occasion at place Z, which is virtually unattended at other times. On a 12-year basis, these three places are equally sacred; but when measured by a time unit of a year, places X and Y are more important than Z except for one year in twelve. If the sanctity of a site is measured by the magnitude of daily pilgrims, then place X is usually the most sacred.

A third reason for not equating number of pilgrims coming to a site with its sanctity is the feeling by some devotees that popularity diminishes its sacredness. A place that is very accessible and is patronized by numerous tourists, vendors, and others with marginal religious motives loses some of its spirituality (Stirrat 1979). Conversely, a place that requires much physical effort to reach may be perceived as especially sacred, partly because it is not crowded with casual visitors (Aziz 1982). It is difficult to assess the extent to which this factor is applicable to pilgrimage sites in general, but it may diminish the validity of using attendance data as a surrogate for the sanctity of a place.

Although the sanctity level of a pilgrimage site may be determined by methods other than its popularity, the alternative methods also have weaknesses that limit their effectiveness as way of grouping pilgrimages (as discussed in the definitional section). Therefore, the criterion of sanctity holds less promise for a classification scheme than those ultimately accepted here.
Motivation of Pilgrims

By definition, the primary motive for each traveler is religious, but this general category can be subdivided. Primary motives may be (1) to request a favor, (2) to offer thanks, (3) to fulfill a vow, (4) to express penitence, (5) to meet an obligation, and (6) to gain merit and salvation. Illustrations of the first type—requests for favors—include the birth of a son, the protection from a disease, an increase in material wealth, success in an examination, a worthy marriage, and a multitude of other human desires.

The second type of reason may be the offering of thanks for specific items (e.g., the safe birth of a child) or for general conditions. If the journey is made as a vow or promise of thanks for favors previously requested, such illustrates the third motivation class. A fourth possible motive is to endure sacrificial hardships as an act of worship or penitence. (In earlier centuries, this category might include those required to go on a pilgrimage as a form of punishment and supposedly to repent of their sins; see Davies and Davies 1982).

A fifth reason results from religious obligations to participate in one or more pilgrimages (such as the Hajj). A similar motive—the sixth listed here—is to acquire merit toward an ultimate salvation (in its broadest sense).

Just as the objectives for most travelers are mixed, making it difficult to assess the importance of religion in general, the various religious motives themselves overlap. To objectively group pilgrims from a wide variety of religious traditions and cultural settings according to their primary inner motivations for worship seems virtually impossible. This is not to deny the value of in-depth studies into motivating factors (Gross 1971; Pruess 1974); but the general application of this criterion is not promising.

Characteristics of Pilgrims and Other Factors

Pilgrimages differ in terms of the attributes of the participants such as their age, life stage, gender, family status, occupation, income, and religious affiliation. Information about each of these variables is fairly easy to obtain visually or by interviewing pilgrims. Furthermore, they are factors that contribute to differences among pilgrimage events.

A major disadvantage in using these variables results from their potential as explanatory associations. As discussed above (see "Relative Location"), the utility of a classification scheme is improved by keeping the discriminating criteria to a minimum and then by detecting relationships with other phenomena. Powerful generalizations about pilgrimages will be most successful when a classification scheme having a parsimonious number of criteria is employed to detect relationships with other phenom-
ena. Therefore, characteristics of the pilgrims themselves should be avoided in designing a classificatory tool for differentiating pilgrimage events.

The criteria discussed here do not exhaust the potential list of classifying factors. For example, pilgrimages can be differentiated according to their historical period (Turner and Turner 1978; Nolan and Nolan 1989; and this volume). Nevertheless, the criteria enumerated here do include the primary components essential for spatial analyses.

A Classification Scheme

One of the purposes of this paper is to suggest a classification of pilgrimages according to their geographic characteristics. The goal is to select criteria that can be used effectively to describe differences and to measure variation that can be utilized in detecting relationships. Although greater precision in differentiating pilgrimage events can be achieved with many criteria, effective utilization by scholars will probably result from only a few criteria. Therefore, the scheme recommended here is based on three variables.

Classification of pilgrimages is based on (1) length of journey, (2) frequency of pilgrimage event, and (3) the pilgrimage route. These are given highest priority because of their conceptual importance (e.g., both length of journey and event frequency are closely related to the definition of pilgrimage) and because they can be effectively measured.

Of lesser utility for a classification scheme are the other criteria discussed here: (4) location of pilgrimage destination, (5) importance of pilgrimage place, (6) motivation of pilgrims, and (7) characteristics of pilgrims. Although these tend to have less direct bearing on pilgrimage movements than the first three criteria, one or more could be incorporated into an alternative classification scheme if greater specificity is desired.

According to the scheme suggested here, each of the three criteria are divided into three categories. The length of journey is divided into regional, national, and international; the frequency of pilgrimage events is typed as frequent, annual, and rare; and, the pilgrimage route is categorized as convergence, prescribed circular, and prescribed processional. Consequently, a total of 27 potential pilgrimage classes result (fig. 2).

One of the merits of this scheme is its capability for conveying immediately certain characteristics of a particular pilgrimage. For example, the Hajj (Din and Hadi, this volume; Rowley, this volume) represents an international, annual, converging pilgrimage.

A second advantage of this classification scheme is its utility in cross-cultural comparisons. The prescribed circular pilgrimage around Varanasi (Singh, this volume) can be analyzed for similarities and contrasts with the prescribed circular pilgrimage on Shikoku (Shimazaki, this volume).
Frequency Classes

Route Classes

Distance Classes

Fig. 2. The classification scheme proposed here is based on three criteria: distance (length of journey), frequency (frequency of pilgrimage event), and route (pilgrimage path). Because each criterion is divided into three classes, a total of 27 pilgrimage types are defined.

A third benefit of this classification scheme is its potential for detecting spatial regularities and relationships with other variables associated with pilgrimages. Only with the ability to measure variations with a classification scheme will geographers some day be able to state, for example, that pilgrimages of type X normally display patterns of movement deviating from traditional gravity models. The classification scheme presented here contains the ingredients of a valuable aid for discovering numerous geographic characteristics of pilgrimage behavior.

Endnotes

1. Bodhi, from Sanskrit, means "wisdom," which for Buddhists refers to perfect wisdom or enlightenment. In one sense, the Bodhi-Tree (or Bo-Tree), or the "tree of enlightenment," is the pipal tree under which Gautama sat in meditation until enlightenment came to him and he became the Buddha. However, a shoot from the original tree in northern India was taken to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. and planted in the city of Anuradhapura; and this offspring tree — said to be now the oldest historical tree in the world — is also called the Bodhi-Tree.

2. The percentages selected here for illustrative purposes are not based on accumulated data concerning travel distances for the major pilgrimages of the world, which should be the case to make the operational delineation of class boundaries truly meaningful.
3. It is appropriate to note the relationship between the extreme limit of the frequent (oftener-than-annual) class, the magnitude of the an event, and the distances traveled. If the operational definition of a pilgrimage event had not been restricted to a magnitude of "numerous" pilgrims (as proposed above), then the classification scheme would need to include the religious journeys of only a few individuals. However, it would have been almost impossible to identify discrete pilgrimages that occur at places (such as at Varanasi) visited by a small number of pilgrims almost continuously throughout the year.

Similarly, extreme values of this frequency variable would have been much different if the distance criterion in the definition proposed here had not excluded local movements. That is, if moving only a few meters or kilometers had been regarded as a pilgrimage, then all the daily journeys to a local place of worship would have produced a group of pilgrimages with very high frequencies. That is, the exclusion of local movements from the definition of pilgrimage events simultaneously excluded most of the very frequent trips to neighborhood shrines.

References


