

# BUCKWHEAT AND AVALOKITEŠVARA

## AJDA IN AVALOKITEŠVARA

Yutaka HONDA<sup>1</sup>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3986/fbg0065>

### ABSTRACT

#### Buckwheat and Avalokitešvara

I investigated the situation of the dedication ceremony of buckwheat noodle in two temples. The buckwheat noodle is dedicated to Avalokitešvara in both temples. These temples have long history from the foundation, however these ceremonies are never old, if anything new. Buckwheat production increased three times in the past thirty years in Japan. Domestic buckwheat is recognized as good taste and good quality. People visit temple and eat the famous buckwheat noodle in temple town. The interests or merits in the both of restaurants' owners and the temple's priests agree each other. Increasing of production gives birth to new concerned industry or activity of old industry. We can see that the increase of the crop production has the new potential in the human culture.

*Key words:* buckwheat, hand-made buckwheat noodle, Avalokitešvara, Buddhism temple

### IZVLEČEK

#### Ajda in Avalokitešvara

V dveh templjih je avtor raziskoval obred posvečenja ajdovih rezancev. V obeh so ajdovi rezanci posvečeni božanstvu Avalokitešvara. Templja imata dolgo zgodovino, toda svečanosti posvečene ajdi so se začele šele v novejšem času. V zadnjih tridesetih letih se je obseg pridelovanja ajde na Japonskem potrojil. Na Japonskem pridelana domača ajda je cenjena zaradi dobrega okusa in kakovosti. Ljudje obiskujejo tempelj, da bi v tempeljskem mestu jedli znano ajdo. Lastniki restavracij in svečeniki v templju skupaj skrbijo za kakovost. Povečana izdelava testenin omogoča pojavljanje novih izdelovalcev in razvoj dosedanjih. Povečano pridelovanje ajde je pomembno tudi z vidika kulturnega razvoja.

*Ključne besede:* ajda, ročno izdelane ajdove testenine, Avalokitešvara, budistični tempelj

---

<sup>1</sup> Headquarters, NARO, National Agriculture and Food Research Organization, Tsukuba, Ibaraki, 3058517 Japan, e-mail: [honda@affrc.go.jp](mailto:honda@affrc.go.jp)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The domestic production of buckwheat increased three times of 1980's in Japan. Present cultivated area increased from about 20,000 ha in 1986 to 63,900 ha in 2018 (Figure 1). According to the increase of buckwheat production the related industries have been activated. Especially the industry of flour millers and buckwheat noodle restaurants increased. Buckwheat noodle restaurants are often located in temple towns which spreads in front of gates of the temples from old

times in Japan. The guests of these restaurants are mainly the visitors of the temple to pray or for sight-seeing. Therefore owners of the restaurants pray to the temple for thriving business or good harvest of buckwheat. And they execute the ceremony of the dedication of buckwheat noodle for Buddha in a special term, for example buckwheat festival. I am reporting about the ceremony of dedication of buckwheat noodles in two temples.

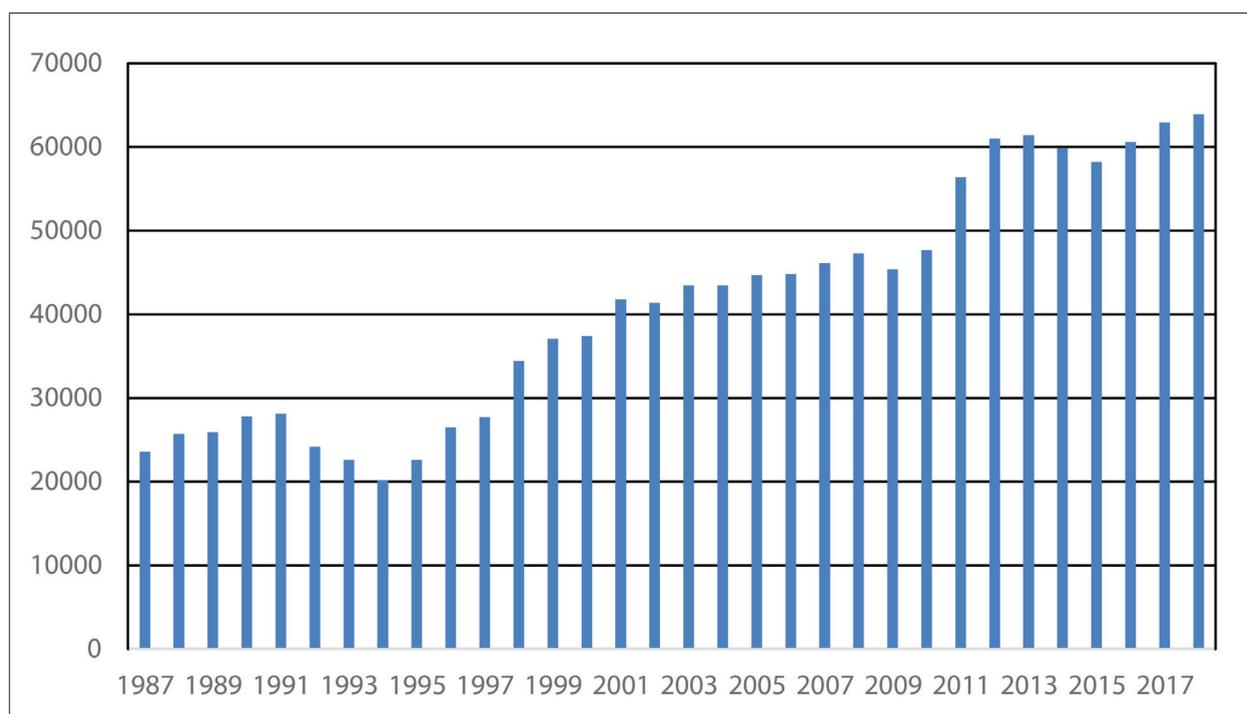


Figure 1: The increase of cultivated area in domestic buckwheat production in Japan  
 Graf 1: Povečanje obsega domačega pridelovanja ajde na Japonskem

## 2 METHODS OF RESEARCH

I investigated two famous Buddhist temples near our organization. There are many buckwheat noodle restaurants in front of the gate of these two temples, as if they seem street or town of buckwheat noodle restaurants. These streets are called as the temple town in Japan like cathedral town near church in western world.

One is Jindaiji temple which belongs to Tendai sect, whose general temple is Hieizan Enryakuji temple in Shiga prefecture. The other is Izurusan Manganji

temple which generally is called as Idurusan Manganji, which belongs to Chisan school of Shingon sect, whose general temple is Iobusan Negoroji Chishakuin temple, in Kyoto city.

The ceremony about the dedication of buckwheat for Avalokitešvara is performed once a year. I participated in the ceremony, and I went to the temple and heard the details of the ceremony from concerned persons of buckwheat noodle restaurant union, tourism association or the temples.

### 3 WHAT IS AVALOKITEŚVARA ?

'Avalokiteśvara' is written as 'अवलोकितेश्वर' by devanagary, which is synthesized from avalokita 'अवलोकिते' which means 'observe' and 'īśvara' 'ईश्वर' who is a person with supernatural power, translated by Xuanzang who was a famous Buddhist priest in China, AD 7C. And the other word 'Avalokitasvara' 'अवलोकितेश्वर' was the word synthesized from avalokita 'अवलोकिते' and svara 'स्वर' which means sound, that is 'observation of sound' in old translation

by Kumārajīva who was also translator of the Buddhist priest, arrived from the Western Regions of China, AD 4C to 5C.

These two translations are showed as '观自在/觀自在' and '观音/觀音' in Chinese letters, respectively. The translation by Kumārajīva was very popular and familiar with East Asian people, therefore Japanese people mainly use the latter word '观音/觀音'.

### 4 JINDAIJI TEMPLE

#### 4.1 Profile of Jindaiji-Temple

Jindaiji-Temple is located at Chofu, Tokyo, which belongs to Tendai Sect whose main believed sutra is lotus of sutra which is very popular one in East Asia, China, Korea and Japan. Avalokiteśvara is written in the 25

chapters of this Sutra, and he rescue people with troubles. And the owners of restaurants dedicated the Avalokiteśvara to wish thriving business or the safety of food for the temple (Photo 1). And they open the ceremony of dedication once a year in a buckwheat festival term of autumn.



Photo 1: Avalokiteśvara in Temple town of Jindaiji-Temple.  
Slika 1: Avalokiteśvara v tempeljskem mestu templja Jindaiji

#### 4.2 The order of ceremony

1. Chief priest march with chefs of buckwheat noodles and other priests from the priest's quarter to the front of main temple.
2. Buckwheat chefs dedicates their technics about making buckwheat, making dough from buckwheat flour, stretching the dough and making the belt, cutting the noodle belt for making buckwheat noodles (Photo 2). Priests respond the chanting of Buddhist hymns, kind of religious chorus at the same time in front of main temple.
3. They march from there to the statue of Avalokiteśvara with buckwheat noodles.
4. They dedicate the noodles for Avalokiteśvara in sutra chanting and people offer incense.
5. They march back to the priest's quarter.
6. Visitors eat the dedicated buckwheat noodles in the priest's quarter.



Photo 2: Dedication of making buckwheat noodles in front of the main hall of the Jindaiji -Temple  
Slika 2: Posvetitev izdelave ajdovih rezancev pred glavnim poslopjem templja Jindaiji

## 5 IDURUSAN MANGANJI TEMPLE

### 5.1 Profile of Idurusan Manganji -Temple

Idurusan Manganji Temple is located at Tochigi whose principal image is the Thousand Armed Avalokiteśvara. Many buckwheat noodle restaurants locate in front of

the gate of Manganji - Temple. The Festival of buckwheat exposed to cold are held in January. And the dedication ceremony of buckwheat noodles is held at the same time.



Photo 3: Meditation by sitting under a water fall in Manganji- Temple.  
Slika 3: Meditacija pod slapom v templju Manganji

## 5.2 The order of ceremony

1. Meditation by sitting under a water fall (Photo 3)
2. Dedication ceremony of making buckwheat noodles in front of the main temple (Photo 4).
3. Homa ceremony in main temple (Photo 5)
4. After that people or visitors can eat the new buckwheat noodles made from buckwheat grain exposed to cold

## 6 DISCUSSION

I have seen buckwheat festival and concerned ceremonies at two temples. These temples have a long history from the foundation. And they have many important and old cultural resources. Especially Jindaiji-Temple is proclaimed as the National Treasure, the Buddha statue is from Hakuho period of 1200 years ago. Compared with these resources the ceremony or festival on buckwheat is not so old. 'Jindaiji Buckwheat Festival' was 37th and 'Idurusan Dedication of Buckwheat Exposed to Cold' was eleventh. Buckwheat was not so im-

portant crop in Japanese agriculture about thirty years ago. However after that the domestic production of buckwheat increased for three times. The consumers consider that domestic buckwheat is very important from the viewpoint of quality or taste. The activity of industries concerned with buckwheat become popular in increasing the domestic production. The restaurants utilize the domestic buckwheat naturally, because domestic is recognized as good quality in taste. The good tasting buckwheat noodles make the fun and domestic



Photo 4: Dedication to Avalokitešvara in front of the main hall of Manganji-Temple.  
Slika 4: Čaščenje Avalokitešvare pred glavno stavbo templja Manganji.

production is increased. The buckwheat noodle restaurants become popular and gather people to temple or restaurant.

Interests concerned in buckwheat matched between temple and restaurant. Here new ceremonies or

festivals were born in the temple towns. Increasing of crop production give birth of new industry or increased activity of old industry. We can state that the increase of crop production has new potential in our life and culture.

## 7 REFERENCES

- Jindaiji official site. <https://www.jindaiji.or.jp/>  
 Jindaiji buckwheat noodle restaurant union. [https://chofu.com/web/jindaiji\\_soba/](https://chofu.com/web/jindaiji_soba/)  
 Idurusan Manganji. <https://www.idurusan.com/>  
 Iduru Sightseeing Associatin. <https://www.facebook.com/idutochigi>



*Photo 5 : Homa ceremony in the main hall of the Manganji-Temple.  
Slika 5: Svečanost v glavni stavbi templja Manganji.*