

Koichi Shinohara Recollections

By
James C. Dobbins
Professor Emeritus, Oberlin College

It has been my serendipity to know Koichi Shinohara for almost thirty years. It was not because we belonged to a common academic lineage. Nor that our scholarly specialties were close. Rather, it was because his friends were my friends, and friends' friends can easily become one's own friends. And so our lives intersected—first at a conference at McMaster, then in scholarly road trips ogling Buddhist monuments in China, and finally in symposia and committee collaborations at Yale. How do I admire Koichi? Aah! Let me count the ways.

First, I have always appreciated Koichi's scholarly approach and orientation. Though we both emerged from an academic culture that focused on Buddhist doctrine and systems of thought, he seemed to look beyond them for the lived religion of Buddhists in their own time. Hence, his engagement with biographies of monks, icons they venerated, and ritual acts they performed. It was a kind of anthropology of medieval Chinese Buddhism distilled from their texts. This was an approach close to my own heart as I studied Japan.

Next, I have always admired Koichi's academic demeanor and disposition. He is habitually inclined to reflect on evidence coolly and calmly. Koichi is seldom the one to speak up first in scholarly settings, and yet he often has the most salient comment to make. And there is not a whiff of self-congratulatory posturing or preening in anything he says. He makes himself invisible and let's the knowledge do the talking.

Finally, I have always loved being around Koichi. He is kind and open. He is a good listener and a good conversationalist. He is endlessly curious. He is devoted to family and friends. He enjoys food for thought and food for palate. And, lest I forget, he is a powerhouse in sync with Phyllis. Together they have become a force of nature in our field—intellectually, collegially, and socially.

Dear Koichi, shall we have a cool Xiliang beer on the front porch of the Mogao Hostel after another fun day of caving? I will meet you there.

October, 2021