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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

The Japanese mountains contain areas associated with various religious practices[1] combining elements of what are nowadays known as different religious traditions. However, clear boundaries between such traditions were crystallized only with time. Materials such as discovered ritual tools, texts and visual images demonstrate notions of mountains as dwelling places of *kami* and other deities, as well as areas of encountering spirits of the dead. They have also provided space for rituals aimed at securing a favourable fate in the afterlife. Among the ideas linked with practices enacted in the mountains is the idea of rebirth connected to notions of Buddhist cosmology and eagerness to escape the punishments of hell.

This book presents an example of a locality associated with such religious practices – the mountains of Tateyama (located in today's Toyama Prefecture). Tateyama was a popular pilgrimage site progressing throughout the 18th up to the 19th century. A distinctive characteristic of the mountain cult which developed in this area is the use of the visual objects known as the Tateyama Mandalas. These mandalas encompass religious practices and ideas of the Tateyama cult. While the given visual objects – the Tateyama Mandalas – have been examined by the Tateyama Museum of Toyama, especially by Professor Fukue Mitsuru, and also by Caroline Hirasawa (2012) from the historical perspective, this work examines the Tateyama cult in relation to the current state of local practice, considering the trends of 21st century society. In this sense, the Tateyama cult represents a landmark moment in the historical development of religious practices in the mountains.

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[1]   The term religious practices will be used throughout this work in reference to practices encompassing human interactions with superhuman powers. This definition is borrowed from Martin Riesebrodt (2010: 72).

In this context, it is interesting to note that the economic conditions in mountain religious sites such as Tateyama caused changes in the character of religious practices. This development was pointed out by some studies about Japanese religion during the Edo period (Hirasawa, 2012; Hur, 2009). At this time, as has been noted by some authors (Formanek, 1998; Tsushima, 2012; Reader, 2014), the motivations of pilgrims changed with increasing inclination towards comfort and relaxation on their journeys.

The popularity of pilgrimages to sacred mountains reached its peak in the Edo period. However, the Meiji government intervention around 1868 interrupted the status quo of mountain pilgrimage sites. New ideas introduced during the Meiji period (1868 – 1912) were applied to the religious network. This process ended up in restructuralization procedures. These novelties also affected the cult of Tateyama. Moreover, the later impact of the Second World War, urbanization, technology, science but also new types of leisure transformed the religious mountain sites into quiet peripheries.

The 1980s saw a pilgrimage boom that was followed by a decline 20 years later (Reader, 2014). In the 21st century, the Tateyama Mandalas – religious objects which guide observers through the tortures of multiple hells but also through rituals promising rebirth in a paradise or attainment of Buddhahood – still arouse admiration among viewers. However, nowadays they are admired as objects of cultural value. Interestingly, a ritual depicted in these mandalas which gave hope to people in the Edo period for rebirth in a paradise has been revived. Moreover, this religious practice has even been exported abroad as a valuable cultural item, and it is not the only case of export of religious culture from Japan.

In this sense, transformations in the Tateyama cult link with the broader academic debate on commodification of religious practices. The examples of religious practices enacted in mountain sites which are documented in the following chapters indicate an enduring interest in these practices among the Japanese people. Moreover, the ways providers of these religious practices have adapted to changing conditions reveal social changes related to consumerism.

In order to analyze such a topic, theories of social change based on consumerism seem to provide a useful tool. An analysis of this consumerist behaviour in the sphere of religion, with this phenomenon not viewed as negative, has been chosen to guide the reader in understanding these changes. The aim is to show how consumerism affects the maintenance or revival of religious practices in mountain sites.

The importance of the role of mountains in Japanese culture and religiosity has been stressed in Japanese folklore and historical studies (among others by: Hori Ichiro, Miyake Hitoshi, Wakamori Taro, Gorai Shigeru and in publications known as *Sangaku shūkyōshi kenkyū sōsho* 山岳宗教史研究叢書).

In these studies, mountains figure as the other world. Yet, this view bears the risk of giving only a limited insight into the everyday lives of people inhabiting mountain areas. A religious sect known as Shugendō appears in the centre of these studies. Ascetic practices enacted in the mountains by Shugendō followers have been interpreted by scholars as a means of acquiring supernatural or magico-religious powers. The power is attained by a symbolic passage through Buddhist realms or religious practices representing the growth of the foetus. However, such interpretations seem too narrow for an analysis of current religious practices in the mountains. The reason for this is that the current practices show a wider range of ways in which participants experience them and engage in them.

Shugendō has been viewed by Japanese scholars as an ahistorical concept. Suzuki (2012, 2013a, 2013b), for example, criticizes the academic usage of the term Shugendō as vague and as a problematic analytical, historical and substantial concept. Suzuki also argues that Shugendō is an academic term produced by scientists under the specific conditions of a given historical era.[2] Nevertheless, practices related to Shugendō are linked to the mountains and for this reason they also serve as useful examples for the research presented here. With awareness that it is not a homogenous concept, this term will be used throughout the book to refer to specific religious practices and ideas.

Among non-Japanese scholars, it was in the 1970s that H. Byron Earhart and C. Blacker conducted research on religiosity in Japan related to mountains and mountain ascetic practices. Similarly to Japanese folklore and historical studies, Earhart (1970) focused in his study on Shugendō at Mount Haguro. In this work he explains specific relations between Shugendō and sacred mountains in Japan. He warns that *sangaku shinkō* (mountain cult) 'should not be confused with the misleading notion of "mountain worship", which falsely implies that a mountain is deified or worshipped' (Earhart, 1970: 7).

In his research, Earhart has been concerned with the structural meaning of various components he observed in the practices of the Shugendō group. However, research focused on categories such as the meaning or belief was viewed critically by scholars of non-western religions. The weakness of analyses based on these categories is caused by an understanding of religions as beliefs or worldviews that are articulated in creeds or texts or as sets of meaning systems. This approach has been criticized for being rooted in Christocentric models (Asad, 1993; Chakrabarty, 2000; Bender, 2013). Reader and Tanabe (1998) have demonstrated these limitations in the case of Japan, highlighting practice and action

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2   From the lecture *Shugendō wa minzoku shūkyōka?* — *Shūkyō jinruigaku no men kara*. This lecture was presented by Suzuki Masataka at the 72nd Annual Conference of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies on September 7th (Suzuki, 2013b).

as more important to non-Western religion than belief.[3] Accordingly, religious practices which appear throughout the current work lack a unified or prescribed form and their meaning seems to be actively modified by their providers.

For Earhart, Shugendō consists of various religious elements which exist together as a complex unity. He has also emphasized the selective process in usage of doctrine that can be applied to Shugendō practice. This combinative character of Japanese religion together with focus on specific localities has been at the centre of attention of studies (Hur, 1992; Hardacre, 2002; Moerman, 2005; Thal, 2005; Ambros, 2008) influenced by Allan Grapard (1982).

While these studies have analyzed the historical background related to negotiations of power or politics, a different approach to religious practices has been taken in studies which have developed around the concept of embodiment. These have changed the focus of research analysis from the meanings people give to their actions to observation of those actions in everyday lives. These studies view humans as part of processes and phenomena to which they sometimes do not attach any meanings. The focus of these studies is the human body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964; Csordas, 1993; Jackson, 1989; Ingold, 2000, 2011; Wylie, 2007).

Despite physical activity being an intrinsic part of practices related to Shugendō, not enough attention has been paid to the embodiment perspective on religious practice in the Japanese mountains. An exception is Lobetti (2014), whose work acknowledges such aspects in the ascetic tradition connected to Shugendō. Drawing on these approaches, sensory experiences in religious practices is one of the themes addressed in this book.

The approaches which have influenced this book are many; however, with its focus on the maintenance and revival of religious practices in the mountains, the most helpful have been those which consider the economic context of religion. In this economic context, consumerism appears as an important characteristic of contemporary societies. That is why the current work analyzes the examined religious practices in relation to consumerist behaviour. In this respect it draws on the study of Reader (2014) who discusses Japanese mountain pilgrimages in relation to commodification and argues for consumer attitudes in the religious sphere, stressing that these attitudes should not be viewed as negative traits.

The analytical part of this book has mainly benefited from the work of Gauthier and Marikainen *Religion in consumer society*, in which they argue that we live in consumer societies where consumerism is a culturally dominant ethos (Gauthier

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3   They have focused on practices related to 'this-worldly benefits' *genze riyaku* 現世利益 which, as they have argued, are a normative and central theme in the structure and framework of religion in Japan. The idea of 'this-worldly benefits' was also used as a theoretical background in the studies on religious practices related to death by Formanek & LaFleur (2004).

and Martikainen, 2013a: xv). The research presented here bolsters their claim that consumer attitudes have a profound influence on religious practices and that this is happening in an era of commoditization,[4] globalization and mediatization[5] (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 2). As such, this book offers additional insight into changes in the values which are attached to religious practices as well as novelties in interactions between practitioners and providers.

Field work

The findings of this book are based on ethnographic study and participant observations conducted in the Japanese mountains of Tateyama (currently located in Toyama Prefecture), Dewa Sanzan (currently located in Yamagata Prefecture) and Nikkō (currently located in Tochigi Prefecture) over the course of three years of research, as well as review of academic studies related to these localities. In addition, experience from other sites, such as the Kumano mountains located in the current Wakayama Prefecture, the Mitsumine mountains located in the current Saitama Prefecture, and Mount Ishizuchi located on the island of Shikoku, together with perceptions gathered from numerous religious sites, including those not located in the mountains, also provided valuable data for the research on religious practices. Experiences of climbing and hiking in these mountain sites enabled an embodied perception of the landscape which is also part of the ritual ascending.

Long term research has been conducted in the area of Nikkō, which included observation and participation in rituals during the cycle of the religious year. This included participation in the ritual opening of the Mount Nantai in the summer, which is held annually on July 31st. The climb to the summit starts at midnight. During the ascent in 2013, in a heavy rain, I discovered my bodily limits in climbing as well as my altitude sickness. The ritual finishes in the morning, after descending to the shrine at the foot of the mountain. I also participated in the ritual worshipping of sacred spots held at the Chūzenji Lake, which is performed from a boat in August. These were followed by rituals of the Autumn peak lasting for three days, and later the Spring peak conducted on two consecutive days. I chose to omit their first (physically demanding) parts, in order

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4   Commodification refers to the action or process of turning something into, or treating something as, a commodity, even if it is generally viewed as non-marketable. Commoditization refers to the action of rendering (a good or service) widely available and interchangeable with one provided by another company (source: Merriam Webster Dictionary). This affects companies in their endeavour to stand out against their competitors.

5   In this sense, the term mediatization indicates the process by which media influence religion in present-day society.

to be able to fully concentrate on the subsequent rituals. I also observed the ritual walking on fire twice. The event is held in May. The first time, I tried to document the ritual proceedings by taking notes and pictures. I participated in the walking only the second time. The last ritual I attended was *segaki*[6], a set of religious practices held in August devoted to the deceased. Apart from these observations, semi-conducted interviews were carried out with some of the members with whom I developed closer relationships during the period of joining their ritual activities. Research within this group provided valuable information on participants in religious practices who have a long-term affiliation with a Shugendō group. Nevertheless, the focus of the work presented here is on different types of affiliations and, therefore, details from the observations and interviews have not been included.

A three-day participant observation of a Shugendō retreat took place at the site of Dewa Sanzan. This was followed by later observation of a Shinto ritual known as *Hassaku sai*[7] which coincides with a Shugendō ritual known as the Autumn peak. Similarly as in Nikkō, short conversations with participants and visitors, including interviews with two Shugendō guides – one related to the shrine complex and one to a lodging for pilgrims – were carried out.

The research on the Tateyama cult owes a lot to Professor Fukue Mitsuru, who handed to me a whole collection of the published Bulletin of the Tateyama museum, including some special issues. He also kindly accompanied me during my first visit to the village of Ashikuraji and introduced me to the local community as well as to the researchers in the museum. There I participated twice in the ritual of exchanging the robes of the statues of the local deity. During my second visit to the village and participation in the ritual, I conducted interviews and short conversations with participants, one local inhabitant and a researcher from the Tateyama museum. Another participant observation was conducted during the re-enactment of the Cloth Bridge Consecration rite.

The research is lacking, particularly in the limited number of times of participation in religious practices. This was caused by high participation fees as well as by the limited budget for the fieldwork and for the research in general. For this reason, and also because three years of research is a relatively short time compared to long and complex field experiences, the current work does not intend to match the quality of descriptions and analysis based on data collected over a span of decades by other researchers, such as Reader (1998, 2005, 2014).

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6   The word *segaki* 施餓鬼 stands for rituals performed for the sake of the dead.

7   The term *hassaku* 八朔 indicates the 1st day of the 8th month according to the old Japanese calendar and *sai* 祭 refers to a festival.

Conventions

I use the modified Hepburn system when Romanizing Japanese words and use macrons to indicate long sounds of vowels such as Shugendō. I have omitted macrons from Japanese names and some words widely used in English such as Shinto or Tokyo.

Some Japanese terms appear in the text in italics. This indicates that they are non-English terms. The Japanese characters and the meaning of these terms are explained the first time they are used; afterwards they may be found in Japanese, indicated by italics. I use the standard mode of reference to Japanese religious institutions. Therefore, the term 'shrine' indicates an institution related to Shinto, and 'temple' indicates an institution related to Buddhism. Names of Japanese historical eras appear through the text. These are specified by years when they appear for the first time. Thereafter they are not specified. Japanese names are given in the following order: family name and given name. Original versions of translations from Japanese are given in Appendix 1. My own translations are marked as 'translated by the author'. Interviews and conversations have not been translated verbatim and I have paraphrased or summarized what was said.

Structure of the book

The book is divided into five chapters. The first three chapters introduce the reader to concepts and practices related to the mountains which attracted the visitors of mountain religious sites up to the Edo period, with the focus on the specific locality of Tateyama. This information provides an insight into concepts which have developed under the influence of Buddhism and are still a vivid part of current practices. An understanding of the elements of various religious traditions which appealed to practitioners in the past helps readers to see the shift in interpretations encountered in the current enactments of religious practices. The example of a specific locality demonstrates how important these concepts have been for providers of religious practices in a mountain site for the maintenance of a mountain cult. This historical overview is followed by two chapters about the maintenance and reviving of mountain religious practices in the 21st century.

The focus of Chapter I is on rebirth as an important concept in early Japanese notions of the afterlife, and at the same time one of the central ideas that later aroused the popularity of the mountain cults. The first section of the chapter introduces some continental texts dealing with cosmological concepts related to the afterlife, as well as texts of Japanese origins, in order to demonstrate the

assimilation of various concepts of the afterlife. These texts also show that mountains figure as an important element in Japanese notions of the afterlife. Following the concept of rebirth, in the next section I first look at the Six Realms of existence and the cult of the Ten Kings, both of which have been associated with rituals related to retribution in the afterlife. Then, I discuss more closely the Six Realms of existence and other afterlife fates rendered in visual images.

In order to look at an overlap of such concepts with local knowledge, Chapter II presents the visual objects known as Tateyama Mandalas. These mandalas encompass the concepts introduced in the first chapter, together with local notions and practices reflected in the geographical space of the Tateyama Mountain Range. Moreover, this type of image demonstrates a relationship between visualization of the realms of existence and the cult of mountains in Japan. I analyze scenes depicted in the images of the Tateyama Mandala, benefiting from the study of Wang (2005). By doing so, this part draws further attention to the visualization of scenes which reflect local notions and practices overlapping with concepts related to the Buddhist tradition.

Chapter III extends the discussion on rituals related to aspirations for rebirth in the supreme realms. In this context, the chapter focuses on rituals enacted in Tateyama and the way these were promoted around the country. With the aim of spreading the Tateyama cult, representatives of the cult visited distant areas, where they presented the cult using images of the Tateyama Mandala. This chapter calls attention to religious practices as ways to sustain pilgrimage places. It therefore considers closely the Cloth Bridge Consecration rite and its role in the financial sustenance of the cult. Orientation of the cult towards rituals for women is an aspect of the cult which indicates that mercantile activities were part of the activities of mountain pilgrimage centres. This chapter also discusses the political intervention which affected the religious structure of Tateyama together with other religious sites, and the final vanishing of the Tateyama cult.

Chapters IV and V bring the reader to the question of new values ascribed to religious practices. Chapter IV looks at how religious practices became associated with a cultural value. It is within this process that the concept of cultural heritage has been applied in the promotion of pilgrimage sites. The chapter is intended to demonstrate this process with examples from research conducted in mountain sites. The first example is the Cloth Bridge rite which is now re-enacted in Tateyama as a cultural event. This case also demonstrates the discrepancy between the official rhetoric and reactions of the participants. The chapter then touches on the topic of the current discourse about the relationship of Japanese people with nature. This claimed relationship is the key to understanding the process in which religious practices have emerged as an activity associated with a cultural value. An example from the site of Dewa Sanzan is introduced to show

how such rhetoric works for Japanese religious groups. Lastly, this part also addresses the topic of commodification of religious practices.

The last chapter extends the analysis of new values ascribed to religious practices by turning attention to the debate on contemporary consumer society and questions about what kinds of immaterial values, such as experiences, are associated with religious practices in order to attract prospective practitioners. In respect to this view, the analysis demonstrates the attempt to present current religious practices as sustainable. This work recognizes such an endeavour, as well as the growing significance of one-time experiences and body-oriented religious practices as an adaptation to the current trend within the consumer society. It also introduces the variety of choices that are offered to potential practitioners in religious sites to identify with. Special attention is paid to the practice of *taki gyō*[8] in this kind of enterprise.

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8   The term *taki* 滝 refers to waterfall and the expression *gyō* 行 stands for austerities.