

Malá, Zuzana

### **In the name of religious-cultural heritage**

In: Malá, Zuzana. *Religious practices in the Japanese mountains : from fleeing the hells towards the healthy, sustainable and spiritual practices of the consumer society*. First published Brno: Filozofická fakulta, Masarykova univerzita, 2019, pp. 75-106

ISBN 978-80-210-9197-9; ISBN 978-80-210-9198-6 (online : pdf)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/139116>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

## CHAPTER IV: IN THE NAME OF RELIGIOUS-CULTURAL HERITAGE

Among the striking traits of the present religious arena in Japan is an overlapping of religious and environmental issues and the debate on World (or Cultural) Heritage.<sup>1</sup> This chapter focuses on the process by which religious practices have started being ascribed with a cultural value. As a consequence of such evaluation, the same fusion of Shinto and Buddhism which was seen as an image of anti-progress and as a non-modern trait of Japanese religion by the Meiji government in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century becomes an acknowledged value recognized by the international community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This trend is observable in present-day Tateyama. The first part of this chapter therefore places the case of re-enactment of an ancient ritual in Tateyama as well as religious practices related to the tradition of Shugendō into the framework of the debate on the concept of cultural heritage.

Some examples are given here to demonstrate that in the process by which religious practices became acknowledged as a cultural value, nature figures as a connective element in the relationship between religion and culture. The key word of this relationship is a unique cultural heritage of co-existence with nature.

---

<sup>1</sup> This trend is not limited to Japan, it has been observed globally. See for example Aike (2015).

## The case of Tateyama

The village of Ashikuraji, which played a crucial role in the Tateyama cult during the Edo period, became the object of studies made by Averbuch (2011) and De Antoni (2009) from which the account of the current work benefits. Averbuch carefully explains the economic and political conditions under which the Cloth Bridge rite has been re-enacted in Ashikuraji. Her study informs about the delicate issue of presenting the religious rite as a cultural event in order not to violate the Japanese law of separation of religion and the state. In addition, De Antoni, building on Appadurai's concepts, examines the role of the Tateyama cult in the process of creating local identity and community. Her work, focusing on the process of construction of identity and community in Ashikuraji, illuminates the reproductions and signification of narratives about the 'cult of Tateyama' with a positive value of the 'traditional' based on the previous social-economic dynamics of the village.<sup>2</sup>

Borrowing Appadurai's concept of *locality*, the current work extends the analysis of re-enactment of the Cloth Bridge rite discussed by Averbuch (2011) and it also touches the topic of commodification of religious practices.

### Continuing practices in Ashikuraji

The Cloth Bridge rite is not the only practice related to the Tateyama cult that takes place in Ashikuraji. Every year on March 13<sup>th</sup>, ritual exchange of the robe for Uba, known as *meshikae*,<sup>3</sup> continues to be performed by local women in the Enma Hall (Figure 11). The ritual exchange of the robes is performed by the local Association of Women and attracts the attention of researchers, newspapers and local broadcasters (Figure 10). In the Edo period, the ritual was performed exclusively by women older than 60, but now the restriction is not strictly kept.<sup>4</sup> The new robes for the Uba statues are ritually sewn by hand – in a simple style of sewing without tying a knot, which is a style of making robes for the deceased (Figure 12, Figure 13). The robes are then taken to the local shrine Oyama jinja 雄山神社. Participants form a row and the procession moves from the Enma Hall towards the local shrine accompanied by the sound of a traditional drum

---

2 In a similar way Matsui (2012), for example, shows how the cultural value attributed to the Nagasaki heritage site attracts visitors and on the other hand causes changes in the self-reflection of Nagasaki groups.

3 *Meshikae* 召し変え was already introduced in the section above devoted to Uba.

4 I observed the ritual in 2013 and 2016. I was allowed to participate in the sewing of the new robes for the statues of Uba in the Enma Hall.



Fig. 10: Meshikae in 2014. Photograph by author.

(Figure 14, Figure 15). The robes are ritually purified there. The shrine priest chants texts and participants come to place a green branch of the sacred *sakaki* tree<sup>5</sup> decorated with white paper streamers as an offering for the kami (Figure 16). At the end everybody drinks the sake<sup>6</sup> served by the priest. The robes are then moved back to the Enma hall where a Buddhist ritual is held (Figure 18). While a Buddhist priest chants ritual texts, a wooden box containing a bowl of burning incense powder, fresh incense powder and a space for money donation is handed over by the participants. Each of the participants adds two pinches of the incense powder into the burning incense and donates money inside the circulating box. When the Buddhist ritual is over, one of the local women changes the robes of the statues placed on the altar. This moment catches the attention of the media. After the statues are dressed in the new garments, all the participants enjoy lunch inside the Enma Hall (Figure 21).<sup>7</sup>

5 A branch of the *sakaki* 榊, an evergreen tree (*Cleyera japonica*), is used in Shinto ritual offerings.

6 This Japanese alcoholic beverage, which is produced from fermented rice, is commonly used as a ritual offering.

7 The ritual is well documented by the Tateyama Museum of Toyama, see for example Tateyama Museum of Toyama (2009).



Fig. 11: The Enma Hall. Photograph by author.



Fig. 12: Sewing robes for the Uba statues (2014). Photograph by author.

The ritual of changing the robes of the Uba statues is preceded by another ritual gathering devoted to *yama no kami* on March 9<sup>th</sup>. In this case, only men gather in the precincts of the Shinpi jinja 神秘神社, which is a prayer hall *kiganden* 祈願殿 of the local shrine Oyama jinja. On this occasion participants from the village and people enrolled in forest-related work come to ask the *yama no kami* for protection. In Ashikuraji it has been believed that if somebody enters the mountain before this ritual, the person will be at risk of a bear attack or an avalanche.<sup>8</sup>

The participants gather early in the morning at 5 am, bring some offerings for the *yama no kami* (including sake), make a monetary offering into an offertory box and light candles. Meanwhile the priest from Oyama jinja chants texts, signalling the beginning and ending of the chanting by beating a drum. The participants then present branches of the sacred *sakaki* tree to the kami and share sacred sake. At the end, large round rice cakes are distributed among the participants.

---

<sup>8</sup> Information about this ritual comes from notes made by observers – representatives from the Tateyama town education committee, NHK (a national broadcaster), a local broadcaster, two local newspapers, as well as a conversation with one of the participants.



**Fig. 13:** A sample of the robe. Photograph by author.



Fig. 14: The procession moving towards the local shrine (2014). Photograph by author.



Fig. 15: The traditional drum. Photograph by author.





**Fig. 16:** The offering of *sakaki* (2016). Photograph by author.



**Fig. 17:** The priest from the Oyama jinja (2016). Photograph by author.



Fig. 18: The Buddhist ritual (2014). Photograph by author.



Fig. 19: Changing of the robes (2014). Photograph by author.



Fig. 20: Statues of Uba inside inside the Enma Hall. Photograph by author.

Interestingly, none of these continuing traditions became chosen as a local identity-creating ritual. That privilege was ascribed to a vanished ritual – once lost.

#### Re-enactment of the Cloth Bridge rite

As mentioned before, this ritual was popular in the Edo period, and was held for those who were not allowed, or were not able, to make the pilgrimage to the Tateyama Mountain Range. The re-enactment of the ritual was held for the first time in 1996. In a conversation with a researcher from the Tateyama Museum I was informed that the idea of re-enactment came from the former museum director – Yonehara Hiroshi. The idea was introduced to the Tourist Association of Tateyama town and discussed with the local people of Ashikuraji village.

Averbuch's study (2011) gives details of the negotiations about the re-enactment between the Tateyama town and Toyama Prefecture officials, Tateyama Museum and representatives from Buddhist sects who were asked to perform the rite. The rhetoric used by the organizers of the event in Tateyama illustrates



Fig. 21: The lunch inside the Enma Hall (2014.) Photograph by author.

how the concept of ‘cultural event’ has replaced the religious character of the ancient ritual.<sup>9</sup> As Averbuch has explained, the Cloth Bridge rite was renewed with the objective of investing the town with ‘economic energy (*machi okoshi* 町起こし)’ (Averbuch, 2011: 28). ‘Aware of the risk in using government money for religious purposes’ (Averbuch, 2011: 27), the organizers introduced the ritual as a *furusato* 故里 (故郷) tradition and as a cultural festival. In the editorial of the official report on the festival, they listed among the goals the promotion of Tateyama cultural heritage around Japan, and stated that the religious ceremony, which had not been practiced for 136 years, was revived as a ‘local identity-creating’ ritual. Furthermore, in the editorial they referred to the revived wisdom of their predecessors.<sup>10</sup>

Since 1996, the ritual has taken place six times in Ashikuraji village of Tateyama town, located in Toyama Prefecture. I participated in the re-enactment of the ritual in September 2014 (Appendix 2). The event was organized by local people, The Tourist Association of Tateyama town, and the local newspapers

9 On this topic see also Averbuch (2011).

10 *Dai 11 kai kokuminbunkasai Tateyama machi jikkō iinkai* (1997).

*Kita Nihon Shimbun* in co-operation with Japan Railways (JR).<sup>11</sup> JR made a special promotion under their campaign *Otona no kyūjitsu* 大人の休日 (Adult Holidays) aimed at people over 60 years old. Twenty participants out of 82 were attending the ritual via this special offer. Potential participants could apply via the internet but also through the local newspaper *Kita Nihon Shimbun* using a reply postcard. The ritual was later broadcast on the national television channel and the article in *Kita Nihon Shimbun* covered part of the first page inside the newspaper.

Interestingly, the rhetoric of the organizers has been changing from the original ‘cultural festival’, and later ‘healing ceremony’, to the rhetoric of ‘spiritual culture’.<sup>12</sup> The organizers of the ritual in 2014 were looking for participants seeking peace of mind, emotional support and those who were interested in ‘spiritual culture’ or ‘traditional culture’ (Figure 23). The newspaper *Kita Nihon Shimbun* (2014a) referred to the event with the headline ‘3800 people touched (might be translated as felt) the belief culture’, and characterized the rite as ‘a look into one’s heart (mind)’ (Figure 24).

The Museum of Tateyama figures as an advisor for the event. The museum in its advertisement pamphlet challenged potential visitors to ‘deepen their understanding of Japanese history and culture through the world of the Tateyama cult and nature’ and called for participants who ‘want to learn about the connection between the people of Tateyama and nature’ (Figure 25). In the same spirit, a special exhibition of the Tateyama Mandalas by the Tateyama museum was held in 2011 with the aim of demonstrating to the current generation the lost sense of approaching nature (Tateyama Museum of Toyama, 2011: 3). The rhetoric of the museum and event organizers shows a discursive framework which stresses Japanese history, cultural heritage and connection with nature.

Neither the relationship with nature nor the topic of traditional culture, however, echoed in the narrations of the participants. The participants in previous re-enactments<sup>13</sup> as well as those whom I could talk to directly expressed diverse reasons for participation. A young participant with whom I talked was related to the village as a seasonal worker (finishing the season). She wanted to show her gratitude for completion of the working season in Tateyama and to say goodbye to the area. Another was motivated by a suggestion from a researcher at the Ta-

---

11 Tsushima (2012) situates the beginning of the interaction of the railways and the pilgrimage sites to the Showa era (1935 or 1950). He claims that the tradition of inclusion of leisure activities in mountain shrine visits might be seen as a reason behind expectations of interest from modern Japanese people in the mountain pilgrimage places and profit from the side of the management of the private railway companies.

12 For development of the rhetoric of the organizers of the ritual up to 2009, see also Averbuch (2011).

13 Averbuch (2011) demonstrates the religious character of narratives about experiences during the previous rituals.

この日、立山は  
私のためにある。

越中國立山

布橋灌頂会

ぬのばしかんじょうえん

白衣の女人衆、参加者募集

平成二十六年九月二十一日(日) 十時~十二時 小雨決行  
開催場所/富山県立山町荻崎寺地内、立山博物館

◎主催 布橋灌頂会実行委員会 ◎お問い合わせ、申し込み、布橋灌頂会実行委員会事務局  
〒930-0292 富山県立山町前沢2-4-0 立山町観光協会内  
TEL 0764629971 FAX 0764636611

Fig. 22: The poster in 2014.

越中国立山  
えつちゅうのくにたてやま

立山を代表する荘厳かつ華麗な橋渡り儀式

# 布橋灌頂会

江戸時代に霊山立山への登拝が許されなかった女性が、白装束姿で白い布が敷かれた橋を渡り、極楽往生を願う儀式。現代の癒やしの行事として平成8年、国民文化祭とやまで復活し、その後、数年ごとに開かれ、今回5度目の開催となります。

復活した布橋灌頂会では白装束姿の女人衆が間魔(えんま)堂での儀式後、雅楽が流れる中、目隠しした姿で僧侶に導かれ、この世とあの世との境界とされる朱塗りの布橋を渡り、姥(うば)堂に入ります。



姥(うば)堂にあたる遙望(ようぼう)館では、女人衆が暗闇で目隠しを解くと室内の覆いが上がり、立山につながる別世界を目前に実感する儀式です。立山信仰の里・芦峯寺ならではの現代の癒やしの行事として女性に限らず、心の安らぎや支えを求める精神文化として関心を集めています。

## 参加者募集

◆募集人数 80名(応募多数の場合は抽選といたします)  
内20名は「大人の休日倶楽部」のツアーにて募集※  
※旅行代金等ツアーの詳細は、インターネット「日本の旅、鉄道の旅」検索  
コースNo.B5058 7月4日 13:00発売(6月下旬発表)  
(旅行企画・実施 JR東日本グループ 朝びょうトラベルサービス)

◆参加資格 女性の方(日本の伝統文化に関心を持ち、健康で一人で橋渡りができる方)

◆参加費用 2万円

◆申込期限 8月20日(水)消印有効





**応募方法** 往復はがきかファクスで、①郵便番号②住所③氏名④電話番号⑤身長をご記入の上、北日本新聞社 営業局までお申し込みください。ハガキかファクス1通につき1名で受け付けます。応募多数の場合は抽選とし、抽選結果は返信はがきか電話でお知らせします。

◎費用の支払い方法など詳細は参加者決定後お知らせします。  
参加者は十分な健康管理のもとにご参加をお願いします。  
万一、事故等が発生した場合、主催者は加入している傷害保険の範囲および応急処置以外の責任は負いません。

**TOPIX 布橋灌頂会開催記念展**

「布橋灌頂会がわかる! -あの世とこの世を渡す白道-」

○会期 9月13日(土)~23日(火)

○会場 富山県[立山博物館]

立山博物館 検索

※詳細は富山県[立山博物館]HPをご覧ください。

申し込み先 **北日本新聞社 営業局 布橋灌頂会係**  
〒930-0094 富山市安住町 2-14 TEL076-445-3320 FAX076-445-3338

◎お問い合わせ 布橋灌頂会実行委員会事務局 〒930-0292 富山県立山町前沢2440 立山町観光協会内 TEL076-462-9971 FAX076-463-6611  
主催/布橋灌頂会実行委員会 後援/富山県、立山町、公益社団法人日本ユネスコ協会連盟、北日本新聞社 特別協力/富山県 [立山博物館]

Fig. 23: Information about the event (the poster in 2014).



Fig. 24: The newspaper article.

tateyama Museum. There was also a participant from Korea, taking part in the rite for the purpose of her research.

Another reason was a birthday – a woman who participated in the rite for the second time expressed her intention to participate for each lived decade of her life. For the first time she crossed the bridge when she was twenty years old. This time it was her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Two other participants described their feelings about the ritual to me. They were stressing that the official term used for the campaign describing the rite as ‘healing’ is not an appropriate description of the experience they had. More than just a healing or an emotionally powerful feeling, as it was suggested by the organizers, they referred to it as a deeper, inner, religious *shūkyōtekina* 宗教的な experience.

The descriptions from participants referred to such feelings as: ‘My mind (heart) has been cleansed (purified)’ *kokoro ga arawareru kimochi* 心が洗われる気



## 立山信仰の世界と立山の自然を通じて 日本の文化や歴史への理解を深める

とやま文化を  
学習する

万葉の時代から神の山として崇められてきた立山。平安時代以降、仏教と融合して独自の信仰体系を確立してきました。立山博物館が位置する立山山麓・芦峯寺(あしくらじ)は、かつて立山信仰の拠点集落でした。現在でも雄山神社や間魔堂、燭堂(うぼどう)基壇、

石仏群などがあり、立山信仰の原風景を成しています。立山博物館は、これらの歴史的遺構を有機的に結びつけた広域分散型博物館で、「立山の自然と人間の関わり」をテーマに、様々な調査・研究の成果を紹介しています。



展示館



展示室



布織濯ぎ会(ゆのぼしかんじょうえ; 立山が女人禁制だった江戸時代に、極寒往生を願う女性の救済のために営まれた儀式)



まんだら遊苑

見どころ  
学びどころ

1

### 展示物や資料から立山信仰と立山の自然を学ぶ

富山県の精神的シンボルであり、日本人の思想体系にも影響を与えた立山について、映像やジオラマ、復元を通じて体感し、立山信仰の精神世界についての造詣を深めます。

見どころ  
学びどころ

2

### 少人数グループによる調査を行う

少人数グループでテーマを設定して、博物館施設や歴史的遺構がたたずむ広大な芦峯寺周辺を散策・調査することで立山の歴史や文化・人々の暮らしについて学ぶことができます。  
【テーマ例】立山信仰の儀式、立山の自然、『立山曼荼羅』を体感する、ちょっと昔の登山について、など

#### 事前学習のポイント

- ・山岳信仰とは何か調べる
- ・現在の立山はどのような場所か調べる



#### 現地学習のポイント

- ・展示物や資料から、立山信仰の歴史や文化について学ぶ
- ・少人数グループでの調査で理解を深める



#### 事後学習のポイント

- ・『立山曼荼羅』に込められたメッセージについて考察する
- ・立山信仰の精神世界と現代生活の関わりを話し合う

#### i information

##### 【立山博物館】

〒930-1406 中新川郡立山町芦峯寺93-1  
☎(076)481-1216 FAX(076)481-1144  
●開館時間 9:30~17:00  
●受入期間 通年  
●休館日 月曜、祝日の翌日、年末年始  
●定員 160人程度

- 所要時間 約2時間10分(展示館40分、遙望館40分、まんだら遊苑50分)
- 体験料金 無料(学校教育で利用する児童・生徒とその引率者、「観覧料免除申請書」の提出要)
- 駐車場 有【団体バス(50人乗り)10台(応相談、周辺施設駐車場の利用可)】
- アクセス 立山ICから車で30分

立山における人と自然との関わりを学ぶ

Fig. 25: The Tateyama Museum poster.

持ち, and a fresh experience *shinsenna keiken* 新鮮な経験. Still another participant said that the moment of the ritual when the participants are exposed to light after praying in the darkness ‘soaked into her mind (heart)’ *kokoro ni shimi-mashita* 心にしみました.<sup>14</sup> A local woman who participated in one of the previous re-enactments confessed to me that at the moment of crossing the bridge she found herself in a surprising silence – all of a sudden all the sounds were suppressed, the sound of the crowd, river, music – describing it as ‘a strange feeling’ *fushigina kimochi* 不思議な気持ち.

An article in the local newspaper *Kita Nihon Shimbun* (2014b) focused on a 68 year old participant from Fukushima – an area hit by a massive earthquake in 2011 followed by a nuclear disaster. She was impressed by the Cloth Bridge ritual held in 2011. Worried about her future, she decided to participate in the ritual to clear her mind in 2014. She described that she could feel how strength sprang up inside her when she resigned herself to Tateyama nature and the tones of music during the ritual and expressed her feeling of calm.

The organizers as well as the media offered to the observers and also to the participants an idealized image of a healing ritual for women who are seeking peace of mind. Yet the presence of media during the whole ceremony in Enma Hall as well as in Yōbōkan, with reporters interviewing the participants before they entered the Enma Hall and the positioning of volunteers along the stairs leading to the bridge in order to guide the steps of the participants, signified a performance-like event. Moreover, to give a good visual impression, the participants were carefully instructed to walk in a synchronized way across the bridge at a set pace. In some aspects this accords with Reader (2014) who, giving an example from the Shikoku pilgrimage, demonstrates that the attempt to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site includes imposing an idealized image of tradition on a site.

Indeed, the ritual was successfully registered as a ‘future heritage project’ by the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan in 2012. On this occasion, a cultural foundation called Santori medialized the *Nunohashi kanjō e* via its public channel as a ritual ‘not strictly in a religious sense’, at the same time adding that women come to pray for ‘healing’ *iyashi* 癒し. Despite downplaying the religious character of the ritual, the narrator explained that by crossing the bridge the participants repeat the meaning of entering the other world of Tateyama and noted the similarities with a ritual walking through mountains performed by *yamabushi*.<sup>15</sup>

14 Reactions reported in the TVNet3 broadcast, later also broadcast via the national channel NHK.

15 A ritual entering and walking through mountains during which the participants pay homage to sacred places, worship deities, practice austerities and are ritually reborn. This video is available online at Santory Net 3 channel (2014).

The discrepancy between the original intention of the organizers to create a performance-like event and the reactions of the participants showing religious experiences has been analyzed by Averbuch (2011). Averbuch (2011) has interpreted this gap between the politics of re-enactments and the reactions of women through the relations between religion and the state in contemporary Japan.

De Antoni's work (2009), theoretically anchored in the Appadurai's concepts, does not analyze the re-enactments of the Cloth Bridge ceremony. The current work finds Appadurai's concepts of *locality* with regard to the nation-state useful, specifically in the analysis of the inconsistency in descriptions of the rite. In his work, Appadurai notes that:

'Locality for the modern nation-state is either a site of nationally appropriated nostalgias, celebrations, and commemorations or a necessary condition of the production of nationals' (Appadurai, 2010: 190).

He goes on claiming that:

'it is nature of local life to develop partly in contrast to other neighbourhoods, by producing its own contexts of alterity'.... 'contexts that might not meet the needs for spatial and social standardization that is prerequisite for the disciplined national citizen' (Appadurai, 2010: 191).

In such an understanding, the official rhetoric would represent *locality*, and the reactions of the participants may be seen as the 'contexts of alterity' mentioned by Appadurai.

Elsewhere Appadurai refers to 'the powerful tendency for local subjectivity itself to be commoditized' (Appadurai, 2010: 192). Indeed, the rite on the bridge became so popular that according to a representative from the Tateyama Museum, a 'mini version' of the *Nunohashi* is held every year for around twenty participants as part of the JR campaign *Otona no kyūjitsu*.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, this ritual was introduced overseas as a part of *Nuit Blanche* – a cultural event dedicated to art – held annually in Paris since 2002. This all-night event is located in over twenty places around the city. In October 2015, one of these stages presented the Cloth Bridge rite. On this occasion, the same priest who officiates the rite in Ashikuraji, accompanied by a group of Japanese *gagaku* 雅楽 musicians, was brought to Paris to perform the rite for the Parisians.<sup>17</sup>

---

16 Twenty participants is considered as 'mini' only now; the first re-enactment had the same number of participants.

17 This event had the support of the Japanese Ministry of Trade and the Economy. Besides the Cloth Bridge rite, *anime* works of the Toyama Prefecture were presented to the visitors.



Fig. 26: Participants crossing the bridge. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.

Interestingly the Japanese internet media reported on this event as a ‘traditional rite of praying for rebirth in paradise’<sup>18</sup> and as a ‘traditional healing ritual’ re-enacted in Paris,<sup>19</sup> while the French internet media described the ritual as an ‘inner journey’ or a ‘journey of life’,<sup>20</sup> linking it to the Zen tradition which they interpreted as the ‘quintessence of Japanese culture’.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned above, it is hard to interpret the history of the Cloth Bridge rite within one particular religious tradition. Even in the short history of its re-enactment, the ritual has been performed under Shingon as well as Tendai Buddhist guidance.

The representation of the rite by the French and the Japanese media evokes other concepts from Appadurai – of *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*. Appadurai uses these terms to describe imagined ideas about communities (the other community as well as the home community), the role of the media in producing images of the world and the distribution of these images among populations. In the case

18 Available online at David (2015a). This description was quoted online at David (2015b).

19 Available online at Best Broadcast Toyama Television (2015), Uozumi (2015) and Visual Industry Promotion Organisation (2015).

20 Available online at Camélia (2015).

21 See, for example, online at Japan facile (2015), Hibbs (2015), Observatoire (2015), Renard Urbain (2015), and Lamuse (2015).



Fig. 27: The spectators. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.

of the Cloth Bridge rite it is not only information that moves trans-locally via the media, but the whole ritual being de-territorialized. However, the interpretation of the rite has been accommodated to the new locality and imagination of the French people about Japanese religious culture.

From the perspective of the consumer society, it is possible to say that rituals once associated with secure passage through the afterlife and merit transference, have been re-branded. The Tateyama cult is now being introduced as a sustainable religious practice. The practice of changing the robes for Uba and the ritual held for the *yama no kami* have survived; however, they have been inscribed with the new concept of cultural tradition. The Cloth Bridge ritual has been associated with the immaterial quality of cultural tradition, as well as with spirituality, and healing.

Reviving the ritual in 1996 was not originally associated with healing or spirituality, as was understandable from the aims of the organizers of the first event. That came later, as a response of the organizers to the reactions of participants.<sup>22</sup> Averbuch, in the conclusion of her study, claims that:

‘In the modern re-enactment of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* we witnessed an attempt to sponsor a Buddhist ritual through government funding, by shifting its categorization

<sup>22</sup> For this see also Averbuch (2011).

from ‘religious ritual’ to ‘traditional culture.’ And raises a question if this is a lonely example or ‘a new trend of transforming Buddhist rites into ‘traditional culture’” (Averbuch, 2011: 49).

The case of Tateyama is not a rarity. Religious practices introduced as ancient cultural heritage appear, for instance, in the rhetoric of Japanese religious groups, local governments striving for promotion of regions, Non-Profit Organizations (NPO), the media and UNESCO. The following section demonstrates the inclusion of religious practices in practices recognized as cultural heritage, as well as a tendency to present them as sustainable practices.

## The Japanese sense of nature

In 1990 Japan signed the World Heritage Convention. As a country which had long experience in the protection of intangible heritage, Japan took a key role in the re-thinking of the concept of ‘cultural heritage’, its definition and boundaries (Sand, 2015; Inaba, 2005).<sup>23</sup> The process of re-evaluation of this concept can be seen as a good example of religious practices being appreciated for their cultural value. According to UNESCO:

‘Cultural heritage ... includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.’<sup>24</sup>

By introducing a concept of cultural heritage that includes rituals along with ‘knowledge and practices concerning nature’, UNESCO offered space for the inclusion of places of Japanese religious practices and rituals on the World Heritage List. Based on this concept of cultural heritage, Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004. The official website of UNESCO informs that:

‘The property consists of three sacred sites including precincts and buildings of temples and shrines in the heavily forested Kii Mountains, and a complex pattern of tracks and paths that link the sites together. These component parts are essential for demonstrating the religious framework of Shintoism (rooted in the ancient tradition of nature worship in Japan), Buddhism (introduced to Japan from China and the

<sup>23</sup> The concept of intangible heritage was introduced into Japan’s formal modern heritage preservation system in 1950 (Inaba, 2005: 48).

<sup>24</sup> Intangible Cultural Heritage. Available online at UNESCO (2003a).

Korean Peninsula), and Shugen-dô (the Shugen sect) which was influenced by the former two faiths. The three sacred sites with their surroundings demonstrate high degree of integrity. Also the pilgrimage routes, as part of the extensive cultural landscape, at present retain a significant degree of integrity.'

'Together, the sites and the forest landscape of the Kii Mountains reflect a persistent and extraordinarily well-documented tradition of sacred mountains over the past 1,200 years.'

'The Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in the Kii Mountains, and their associated rituals, bear exceptional testimony to the development of Japan's religious culture over more than a thousand years.'<sup>25</sup>

In addition, in 2013, Mount Fuji was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a sacred place and source of artistic inspiration according to the following criteria:

'The majestic form of Fujisan... has inspired a tradition of mountain worship from ancient times to the present day. Through worship-ascents of its peaks and pilgrimages to sacred sites around its lower slopes, pilgrims aspired to be imbued with the spiritual powers possessed by the gods and buddhas believed to reside there. These religious associations were linked to a deep adoration of Fujisan that inspired countless works of art depicting what was seen as its perfect form, gratitude for its bounty, and a tradition that emphasised co-existence with the natural environment. The series of sites are an exceptional testimony to a living cultural tradition centred on the veneration of Fujisan and its almost perfect form.'<sup>26</sup>

Among the arguments for the cultural value of the Kii Mountain Range and Mount Fuji that support their inscription on the World Heritage List are religious practices such as: 'ancient tradition of nature worship', 'a living cultural tradition centred on the veneration of Fujisan' and the 'tradition of mountain worship'. In addition, the arguments underline the value that Japanese people put on co-existence with the natural environment and its association with religion.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, studies suggest that before its consideration within the concept of cultural heritage, the discourse about the harmonious co-existence of the

---

25 World Heritage List. Available online at UNESCO (2004).

26 World Heritage List. Available online at UNESCO (2013).

27 Further examples are those nominated for inscription on the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity such as 'Nachi no Dengaku' a religious performing art held at the Nachi fire festival, nominated in 2012 (Nomination file no. 00413); and 'Sada Shin Noh' sacred dancing at the Sada shrine at Shimane, nominated in 2011 (Nomination file no. 00412).

Japanese people with the natural environment played an important role in the concepts of *urusato* and *satoyama* (里山).

Catherine Knight (2010), exploring the concepts of *urusato* and *satoyama*, demonstrates the overlapping of their visual imagery. She explains that ‘whereas the idea of *urusato* appeals to the Japanese sense of ‘belonging’ and having a place of comfort and peacefulness to return to, *satoyama* appeals to the Japanese conviction that they are people that have traditionally lived in harmony with nature, and *satoyama* is a model of such harmonious coexistence in practice’ (Knight, 2010: 436). Knight shows that within Japanese academic discourse on the purported love for nature, *satoyama* epitomizes the ideal human nature relationship (Knight, 2010: 435–436).

Moreover, these concepts figure prominently in popular and media discourse, for example in the programming of the state broadcaster NHK and content of the *Mainichi shinbun* newspaper, as well as in materials outlining government policy and initiatives, such as those of the Ministry of the Environment and prefectural government (Knight, 2010: 426–430).

An example of such an initiative is the current project of the United Nations University called *The International Partnership on the Satoyama Initiative* supported by the Ministry of Environment. It has been described as follows:

‘The Satoyama Initiative is a global effort to realize societies in harmony with nature, through promoting the maintenance and rebuilding of socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes, for the benefit of biodiversity and human wellbeing.’<sup>28</sup>

Scholars associated with this project have discussed the ways to connect policy and science with traditional knowledge, local wisdom, and the culture of *satoyama*.<sup>29</sup>

The concepts of *urusato* and *satoyama* have been included in this study for a better understanding of the rhetoric of cultural heritage, in which love for nature is introduced as a tradition inherited from ancestors. The academic debate on changes in values attributed to heritage has also focused on the concepts of *urusato* and *satoyama* and their later commercialized versions within the patterns of consumption and mass tourism since the 1980s (Brumann and Cox, 2010; Ivy, 1995; Knight, 2010; Robertson, 1991, 1998). Indeed, as was seen in the previous section, the concept of cultural heritage and the concept of *urusato* were actively deployed in the rhetoric of the organizers of the re-enactment of the Cloth Bridge Consecration rite in Ashikuraji.

28 The outline of the Satoyama Initiative is available online at United Nations University (2009).

29 This was the topic of the international conference on local knowledge of traditional *satochi* and *satoyama* (socio-ecological production landscapes; SEPLS) held in Komatsu City, Ishikawa Prefecture in 2014. More details are available online at United Nations University (2014).



The official rhetoric emphasizing the cultural character of the rite in Ashikuraji seems to be in contrast with the experiences of the participants who have stressed the religious character of the rite. It is interesting in this context that Japanese religious groups themselves actively wrap the religious character of their activities within the rhetoric of cultural heritage and tradition.

Recent studies on Japanese religions have not avoided the discourse about cultural heritage and the co-existence with nature as constructed by Japanese religious groups (Aike, 2015; Azegami, 2015; Dessi, 2013; Rambelli, 2001). In his study of the sacred forests of Shinto shrines, Azegami (2015), building on historical research, proves that the Shinto shrine landscape as it is perceived nowadays was constructed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the same token, Aike (2015) discusses the topic of the sacred shrine forests linking it with a global trend ‘to redefine sacred sites as ecological resources in need of conservation’. He points to a new paradigm which presents Shinto as a ‘primordial tradition of nature worship (sometimes referred to as “animistic”), said to contain ancient ecological knowledge on how to live in harmonious coexistence with nature’ (Aike, 2015: 213). Indeed, Ugo Dessi has argued that the Japanese themselves decisively contribute to the rhetoric of a very common stereotype about Japanese people and their love and reverence for nature, allegedly deriving from an unspecified spirituality and ancient religious heritage (Dessi, 2013: 48).<sup>30</sup>

Dessi argues that the progressive reforestation policies implemented from the mid-seventeenth century onwards cast doubt on the claim about the explicit and reflexive concern of pre-modern Japanese culture and Shinto for ecology. Another question regarding this issue was raised by Rambelli (2001), who argues that pre-medieval ideas of the sacredness of trees were often borrowings from Chinese and other continental cultures. His research provides insight into the politics of power of the religious institutions and their attempt to sacralize the very important material with which they were building their temples and shrines (Rambelli, 2001: 43–59).

Studies have not omitted the attitudes of Japanese religious groups towards environmental issues, or their cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs). Ugo Dessi describes the involvement of Shinto religious groups and new religious movements in environmental activism. He relates them to other phenomena like the promotion

---

30 Dessi gives examples of such rhetoric within the context of Shinto by presenting some pamphlets, booklet guides published by The Association of Shinto Shrines Jinja Honchō and a text written by a Shinto scholar named Sonoda Minoru. The rhetoric referring to a special connection between Shinto and nature is used as an argument by Jinja Honchō for the active involvement of Shinto in debates regarding environmental issues (Jinja Honchō texts in Dessi, 2013: 48–50).

of inter-religious dialogue, macrobiotics, and the emergence of a new religious political party in Japan. He interprets them as attempts to reassert a new role in a globalized society, in other words as part of the globalization process (Dessi, 2013: 148–149). Dessi explains that these activities are variously conducted at the denomination level through inter-religious cooperation, and through the establishment of NGOs and NPOs.

The above mentioned studies have identified the special relationship between Japanese religion and nature as an important factor in the rhetoric of Japanese religious groups, focusing on the creators of the rhetoric coming from religious groups, NPOs and Non-Governmental Organizations. Other studies, such as Reader (2005) and Mori (2005), paid attention to how religious followers, members, or participants in the activities of such institutions react to or interpret the rhetoric of cultural-religious heritage. By the same token, the following case of Dewa Sanzan shows that such rhetoric works as one of the possible strategies used by the actors at mountain sites to gain the attention of visitors, but also demonstrates the diversity of motivations among the participants.

## Mediating Shugendō

The mountains of Dewa Sanzan (Three mountains of Dewa province) – Mount Haguro, Mount Gassan and Mount Yudono – are located in Yamagata Prefecture in the northeastern region of Japan. Dewa Sanzan has a long history as a centre of the mountain cult and Shugendō.<sup>31</sup> Shugendō practitioners, also known as mountain ascetics, are called *yamabushi* 山伏. Their practices involve austerities and physically demanding mountain climbing, which are called *shugyō* 修行 or *gyō* 行. It is difficult to clearly differentiate Shugendō as a separate category, as the practices are a combination, among others of Buddhist, Shinto and Daoist elements and can be observed among a variety of Buddhist and Shinto groups.

Similarly to the Tateyama and Kumano areas, a system of pilgrim guides and lay believers also developed in Dewa Sanzan. The lay believers formed confraternities known as *kō* 講.<sup>32</sup> Like the Tateyama *shūto*, the *sendatsu* based at the village of Tōge, at the foot of Mount Haguro, guide those who come to undertake austerities in the mountains of Haguro, Gassan and Yudono.<sup>33</sup>

31 For information on Shugendō in Dewa Sanzan, see for example, Miyake (2000), Iwahana (1996, 2003) and Earhart (1970).

32 See Miyake (2005), and study by A. M. Bouchy on the Atago confraternities (Bouchy, 1987).

33 It seems that the terminology describing the professional practitioners assigned to guide pilgrims through mountains was not uniform. In the case of Tateyama these guides were known as *shūto* (Fukue, 2005) and in Dewa Sanzan as *sendatsu* (Miyake, 2005) or *shugenja* 修験者 (Sekimori, 2005).



Fig. 28: Hachiko Hall at the top of Mount Haguro. Photograph by author.

In this area Shugendō practices are to be found in Buddhist temples as well as Shinto shrines or lodging houses run by *sendatsu* called *shukubō* 宿坊. Sekimori (2005) notes that before the reorganization and conversion to the Tendai Buddhist sect in 1641, the Haguro temple-shrine area had no particular sectarian affiliation and Yudono was under the Shingon Buddhist influence. This development of affiliation became more distinct due to the changes in the Buddhist temples and shrines system which took place in the Meiji era. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, beginning in 1868, the Meiji government issued a series of separation edicts *shinbutsu bunri rei*.<sup>34</sup> The edicts disassociated Buddhism from Shinto shrines and worship, which had an impact on religious practices that combined Shinto and

---

According to Sekimori (following Miyake, 2002), in Kumano these guides were called *oshi*, while the role of *sendatsu* (*shugenja*) was to bring the pilgrims to the *oshi* (Sekimori, 2002: 209). However, Ambros (2008) (following Shinjō) claims that *sendatsu* were acting as pilgrimage guides in Kumano, while *oshi* provided ritual prayers and lodging for the pilgrims (Ambros, 2008: 6). The tradition of lay supporters of the Dewa Sanzan cult still exists in Tōge. The pilgrims pay visits to the three mountains. For the historical data see, for example, Miyake (2005) and Sekimori (2002).

<sup>34</sup> More details about the topic of *shinbutsu bunri* may be found in Tsuji et al. (1983, 1984). More details about the Meiji reforms in Haguro can be found e.g. in Sekimori (2005).

Buddhist traditions such as Shugendō.<sup>35</sup> This new regulation turned the temple-shrine area of the Dewa Sanzan into a Shinto domain. Similarly to Tateyama, this included restriction of the use of the name ‘*gongen*’ for the Main shrine at Mount Haguro, disposal of Buddhist images and tools, and reinterpretation of practices related to the shrine. Under such circumstances, ritual entering of the mountain area in the autumn ‘*Aki no mine*’ 秋の峰 (autumn peak) – the most important ritual of Shugendō, which during the Edo period represented progress from spiritual darkness towards Buddhahood via the Ten Worlds (Ten realms) – became a ritual assuring protection of crops and avoiding disasters (Watanabe, 2015: 4). Restrictions caused by the separation edicts related to Shugendō practice came to an end after the Second World War in 1945 (Watanabe, 2015: 4).

Nowadays, *Aki no mine* seems to be a popular practice (Sekimori, 2005). There were 100 participants in the ritual seclusion in the mountains in autumn 2015, during my visit to the shrine precincts at Mount Haguro. The interest in participation is so great, that the shrine – organizer of the ritual – needs to set limits on the number of participants.<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned earlier, it is hard to differentiate Shugendō from other religious traditions because the boundaries are blurred. Furthermore, each locality has its own original style and interpretation of Shugendō practice. Within the framework of this book, the interesting point about Shugendō groups is the rhetoric which is used in promotion of Shugendō religious practices. Shugendō professionals typically present Shugendō as rooted in a traditional form of Japanese religion which views humans as a part of nature. This is interpreted as knowledge inherited from ancient predecessors. Participating in Shugendō practices serves as a way to re-connect with nature and also with one’s own culture.

A religious representative of the temple Kinpusenji 金峯山寺 in the Yoshino mountain area Tanaka Riten, for instance, claims that:

‘The mountain ascetic practice of Shugendō is deeply rooted in the hearts of Japanese people which has its foundation in ancient beliefs. For that reason, this practice is an experience which ought to be suitable for Japanese people. It is possible to say that the roots of the Japanese people’s love for mountains are in the world of Shugendō’ (Tanaka, 2014: 11). [Translated by author] (Appendix 1, note 1)

---

35 The Buddhist temples of Kōtakuji and Kongōjuin located outside the shrine precincts, were not directly affected by the reforms (Sekimori, 2005: 212). These Buddhist temples are not analyzed in the current work.

36 The ritual of *Aki no mine* is organized separately in Dewa Sanzan by both the Buddhist and the Shintō affiliated groups. For details about the rituals see, for example, Lobetti (2014: 108–116) and Earhart (1970: 113–136).



Fig. 29: Yamabushi in front of the main shrine of Mount Haguro. Photograph by author.

A promotional video presenting Shugendō at Mount Hōman<sup>37</sup> (located in Fukuoka, Kyūshū) also relates the tradition of Shugendō to ancient predecessors. Similarly, a DVD informing about pilgrimages to Mount Ishizuchi<sup>38</sup> (one of the sacred Shugendō sites in Shikoku) introduces Shugendō by referring to Japanese spiritual culture and linking it with the view of nature inherited from ancient times as old as the Jōmon period (12000 – 2000 BCE).<sup>39</sup>

Similar ideas have also echoed in attempts to revitalize the mountain site of Dewa Sanzan. In the interview that I made with a representative of the Dewa Sanzan Shrine of Mount Haguro, I asked how they attract the interest of the present generation. The priest replied that they are facing a problem of aging generations of believers and supporters of the shrine. Therefore, they are trying to appeal to the present generation through the ascetic mountain practices of *shugyō*. They try to direct the attention of the younger generations to nature, in

37 Onoboru (2013) *The Shugendoh* 修験道.

38 Ishizuchi jinja (unknown year) *Ishizuchi kodō o yuku* 石鎚古道をゆく.

39 This rhetoric is not particular to Shugendō, it has been shared by Shintō representatives. On this topic, see for example Aike (2015: 217). Moreover, as was mentioned above, Shugendō representatives themselves might fall within the Shintō tradition.

an effort to teach the young to feel gratitude towards nature for life. ‘Nature and kami are the same. Love for nature and love for kami are closely linked.’ [Translated by author] (Appendix 1, note 2)

However, it should be noted that although Shugendō representatives may seem to engage with the values of the contemporary society via the self-interpretation as a tradition associated with knowledge concerning nature-related practices, other religious traditions might not look at the aspects of Shugendō practices as equal. After the ban on practices that combined Buddhist and Shinto traditions was lifted, the resurgence and revitalization of Shugendō practices have not been immediately welcomed by existing religious groups.<sup>40</sup>

## Retreat

One of the pilgrimage lodgings, located at the foot of Mount Haguro, in the village of Tōge, offers the option of a three-day experience of *shugyō*. In August 2014, I observed and participated in such a three-day *shugyō* experience in one of the *shukubō* (Appendix 3).<sup>41</sup> A *shukubō* is not an institutional type of religious centre in the sense of a temple or a shrine, although they are related. It is part of an agglomeration of lodging houses which still keep the tradition of accommodation and guidance in the mountains for pilgrims and supporters of the Dewa Sanzan cult.<sup>42</sup>

At the end of the third day, participants were discussing their experiences, motivations and feelings about the retreat. Among the speeches that I could hear, the majority of the 26 participants mentioned sessions in Jiyū Daigaku as the source of information about the Shugendō retreat. I found out later that Jiyū Daigaku (Freedom University) is an NPO located in Tokyo. Among other subjects it offers seminars on art and culture. The yearly newsletter of the web-magazine ‘The Earth of Free Green’, published by Jiyū Daigaku informs readers about the topics of seminars held in the current year.<sup>43</sup> Among the topics of seminars held in 2013 were lectures on Shugendō, titled ‘Yamabushi and

---

40 This was the case, for example, in Nikkō. This information comes from a conversation with a member of the Shugendō group in Nikkō and from an interview with the leader of a Shugendō group located in Kanuma.

41 The interpretation and practice of this *shukubō* might be viewed critically from the side of the local Buddhist temples. I met with such reactions.

42 There are currently 34 *shukubō* in Dewa Sanzan connected to a temple or a shrine. *Shukubō* representatives do not keep celibate, they have settled down at the foot of the mountain and perform the traditional role of the *sendatsu* and spread the cult of Dewa Sanzan. For information on *shukubō* in Haguro see e.g. Sekimori (2005).

43 Available online at Jiyūdaigaku (2013).

Shugendō – the technique of listening to the life of the forest’. The lectures were part of a series of seminars in which scholars and religious representatives gave presentations on topics related to environmental issues. The sessions brought together NPO, religious movements and academia. Presenters at the sessions included a *yamabushi*, a lecturer representing Japanese folklore studies, a lecturer from the All Japan Young Buddhist Association, and a lecturer from the Meiji University Institute of Life.

One of the reactions by participants to the seminar series illustrates that the rhetoric of the unique Japanese connection to nature was used by presenters and also gained the attention of some participants:

‘As I felt like I want to learn about Japanese old source of religiosity, the concept of the seminar sessions corresponds to it.’ [Translated by author] (Appendix 1, note 3)

‘Japan should be proud of Shugendō that worships the great nature and its idea that “people are truly part of nature”’. [Translated by author]<sup>44</sup> (Appendix 1, note 4)

For people who participated in the retreat, the experience and motivations were diverse – one of the participants for example participated after her relative, who had an experience of a Shugendō retreat, mentioned it as a part of a joke, that she should try Shugendō as a form of diet. Because she felt that she was eating too much, it caught her interest.<sup>45</sup> Another participant was motivated by the passing of her father. Yet another wanted to walk in the white garments worn by *yamabushi*. However, the motivation which echoed among the newcomers most was an “unknown” experience of the mountains. One participant expressed her wish to learn, how the experience of a common person climbing a mountain differed from the experience of a *yamabushi* climbing a mountain. Another participant explained that hiking and walking in the mountains was not a new kind of experience for her. What she wanted to gain was an “unknown” experience of the mountains. Yet another participant said she had heard the presentation of the pilgrim guide in Jiyū Daigaku and she was impressed by how ‘cool’ the old man was. She continued saying that she had always liked hiking and walking in the mountains, but she wanted to get to know ‘herself as Japanese’ *nihonjin toshite jibun* 日本人として自分.

44 Available online at Jiyūdaigaku (2013).

45 During the retreat, participants are allowed to eat only three times a day briefly. Dietary food consisted of soya beans paste soup poured into a bowl with a small portion of rice and vegetables such as two slices of cucumber. Food was eaten in silence and as fast as possible – approximately within five minutes. Food was available in the evening and in the morning after waking up at 4:30am. On the second day the lunch consisted of two rice balls is eaten after climbing to Mount Gassan. The dietary food was served again in the evening, and in the morning on the third day. After morning ablution and climbing to Mount Haguro the shugyō was completed and *shōjin ryōri* lunch was served with sake.

The following reactions may be read on the social network that serves for communication among participants after the retreat:

‘Being in my first year of *yamabushi shugyō*, I am intuitively convinced that *yamabushi* who have been here from the ancient times have played an important role in the revival of Japanese spirituality ... Through *shugyō*, I could experience connection with nature, connection with people and the richness of what is within such connection.’  
[Translated by author] (Appendix 1, note 5)

These reactions demonstrate that some participants actively used the rhetoric of the unique Japanese connection to nature and its relation to spirituality or Shugendō. However, these examples do not represent sufficient data to make any generalizations.

During the retreat the participants were not allowed to talk and there were no lectures or any explanations connected to this kind of rhetoric. The pilgrim guide talked briefly three times during the retreat. I attended a lecture given by the pilgrim guide later, in spring 2015 in Tokyo, where I heard his speech about respect for nature and co-existence with nature originating in ancient Japanese history. I understood that such rhetoric was part of the information about Shugendō shared in the lectures that participants attended at Jiyū Daigaku or gained from other sources about Shugendō.

It is likely that such rhetoric is not restricted to the NPOs or religious representatives. I do not presume, however, to argue further about the involvement of other actors using such rhetoric. As Reader (2006), for instance, demonstrated in his examination of the mass media and their portrayals of pilgrimages in Japan, the media construct positive images of pilgrimage sites and in that way they have contributed to increased interest in pilgrimages. Nevertheless, as Reader explains, the media are most likely to be positive about pilgrimages within the context of heritage, tradition and culture, and can be detached from overt associations with religious phenomena such as faith (Reader, 2006: 27). As Reader adds, this has been a recurrent theme in the theories of being Japanese, known as *Nihonjin ron* 日本人論.

What this section has documented is the social interactions between the religious representatives constructing the rhetoric and their listeners. This is not to conclude that Japanese people in general, or all participants at *shugyō* share the view presented by the rhetoric. Nevertheless, such a paradigm becomes a motivation for participation in religious practices such as pilgrimages, and it has been noted by scholars (Reader, 2005, 2009; Mori, 2005) that it does not mean that the participants are stripped of any religious experiences. The aim here was to stress how such rhetoric has been constructed and used in the promotion of



a Shugendō site. This section has demonstrated a small part of the rhetoric flow between religious sites, NPO and the listeners who visit the holy sites and actively participate in religious practices, even though not necessarily being religiously motivated.

The interesting point which the observation of the retreat reveals is the emergence of practitioners who are not necessarily associated with any temple, shrine or *shukubō*. Another notable detail is an affinity among the participants for new (one-time) experiences as well as an orientation towards such groups among the religious representatives.

A tendency to present the Tateyama Cloth Bridge rite as a healing practice (*iyashi no 癒しの*), which may be seen as a reaction towards the busy working lifestyle of people (as one of the participants explained to me during the Tateyama Cloth Bridge rite), as well as the endeavour – observable in the cases of both Tateyama and Dewa Sanzan – to demonstrate new values such as cultural heritage and co-existence with nature, together suggest a trend to re-brand religious practices in accordance with current values. This brings us to the topic of the consumer society.