

“SPIRITUAL TOURISTS” AND LOCAL HEALERS AT A HAWAIIAN “POWER SPOT”

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This field report is based on work undertaken during a research stay in Hawaii in 2014–2015. I investigate Japanese “spiritual tourists” and local Hawaiian healers at the Keaiwa heiau, an ancient healing temple that is well-known in Japanese media as a “power spot.”

TOURISM LITERATURE has tended to view the relationship between tourism and culture in terms of authenticity. On the other hand, while there has been relatively little research from an anthropological perspective regarding how locals perceive the effects of tourism,¹ there has been a focus in cultural anthropology and ethnic studies on cultural invention and identity.² This field note explores some of these issues in the context of Japanese tourism to Hawaii, focusing on questions about power spots and “spiritual” tourism, its representation in Japanese media, and the impact tourism is having on Hawaiian locals.³ I concentrated on the Keaiwa heiau, an ancient healing temple located in Keaiwa Heiau State Park on Oahu, as my initial field site for two reasons. First, it attracts small groups of Japanese tourists regularly who visit the site on “spiritual tours.”⁴ Second, I developed a relationship with a small group of locals who gathered together at the heiau most weeks to discuss their mutual interest in spiritual issues. The members of this group at that time included a professional psychic healer, an “intuitive reader” (a woman originally from Japan now living in Hawaii), and a man starting a traditional Hawaiian tattoo business. They were occasionally visited by people seeking their help and

1. STRONZA, 269.

2. CANEEN, 101.

3. While I have retained some Hawaiian diacritical marks, they are not included for words in common English usage.

4. I did not interview the tourists or the tour operators directly but observed them at the site. I made eight separate visits to the heiau between October 2014 and March 2015. Japanese spiritual tour groups were present in varying numbers of between four to fifteen people on each occasion.

advice on various matters such as interpersonal relationships. They also performed a number of ceremonies for people who had requested them in advance.

The Keaiwa heiau is listed as a power spot in some Japanese guidebooks and tourism-related web sites. The heiau is located within the Keiawa Heiau State Recreation Area, and the Department of Land & Natural Resources with the State of Hawaii's Division of State Parks in charge with maintaining the area. The stacked rock wall approximately one-meter high encloses the sacred area that measures about thirty meters by fifty meters. A plaque embedded in a rock on the exterior of the heiau by the Commission of Historical Sites describes the site as follows: "A temple with life giving powers believed to be a center where the Hawaiian kahuna lapaau or herb doctor practiced the art of healing. Herbs grown in nearby gardens were compounded and prescribed with prayer." Keaiwa has been translated as "mysterious" or "incomprehensible," possibly reflecting the powers of the kahuna and the herbs. Although it is unknown when this heiau was built, it has been suggested that it was constructed in the sixteenth century. According to a pamphlet produced by the Department of Land & Natural Resources, women were not allowed in the heiau but could receive training outside the heiau.

Based on my observations, while Japanese tourists and the locals appeared to use the site to explore their own spiritual purposes and motivations, there was a degree of uncertainty associated with the site. On the one hand, most visitors from Japan rely on information on Hawaiian power spots from guidebooks, which the locals I interviewed felt contained misleading information. They are also told stories by tour operators that completely miss the original purpose of the site itself. On the other hand, the locals viewed the site of the heiau in ways that reflected differing motivations. One informant was very concerned with cultural heritage, identity, and protocol, another felt it was



Figure 1. Keaiwa heiau

a good place to learn about new ways of “dealing with energy,” while another simply enjoyed participating in casual gatherings with like-minded friends.

The Power Spot “Boom” and “Spiritual Tours”

The power spot “boom” has faded significantly in the Japanese media since 2010 was declared to be “the year of the power spot.”⁵ The term existed since the mid-1980s although it began to be used widely in women’s magazines in 2005, starting with special in *Asahi Shinbun*’s weekly magazine AERA (October) entitled 恋も仕事もパワースポ頼み (*koi mo shigoto mo pawasupo tanomi*; Supplications for love and work at power spots). Suga Naoko suggests that the word “power spot” became associated primarily with Shinto shrines domestically in women’s magazines from 2005 to 2009.⁶ Book publications followed, and at one stage Amazon Japan had at least 30 books with the word “power spot” in the title.

The flood of publications was followed by discussions of power spots on Japanese television. The well-known self-styled spiritual counselor, Ehara Hiroyuki, often spoke about power spots during his appearances and claimed that one could absorb spiritual power by visiting these areas. Ehara has published on power spots in Hawaii, encouraging his readers to visit them.⁷ His latest book on the subject is titled 自分の家をパワースポットに変える最強のルール 46 (*Jibun no ie o pawā supotto ni kaeru saikyō no rûru 46*; How to turn your own home into a power spot with the strongest 46 rules). Its title alone suggests the ambiguous nature of the notion of power spots, or at least their representation. The suggestion that people could turn their own homes into power spots and, presumably, absorb power from them, may indicate an awareness on his part of the depreciating yen and less being spent on overseas tourism. But it also reveals that the idea of power spots incorporates somewhat vague connections to feng shui, qigong, and other forms of spirituality. Clearly, the term “power spot” is ambiguous and flexible; depending on the purpose of the user, it can be represented in various ways.

Surveys suggest that the aftermath of the Aum Shinrikyō affair of 1995 and the deepened suspicion of religious organizations contributed to 80 percent of respondents claiming to be “non-religious,”⁸ while between 60 to 70 percent claimed they had some belief in kami (gods), hotoke (buddhas), spirits, and souls, as well as supernatural phenomena, destiny, and retribution for past deeds.⁹ From around 2000, pilgrimages to Shinto temples began to increase,

5. TSUKADA and ÔMI, 30.

6. SUGA 2010.

7. For example, EHARA 2006.

8. NISHIWAKI, *Nihonjin no shūkyōteki shizenkan*, 43.

9. NISHIWAKI, 67.

together with public celebrities such as Ehara and the fortune teller Hosoki Kazuko, who incorporated popular concepts of ancestor veneration into her divination and began a huge television star in her own right. Thus, there was an explosion of popular representations of spirituality not associated specifically with religious institutions that appeared in print and on television. With the decrease in international tourism, visits to Shinto shrines labeled power spots increased. Power spots came to be seen as relatively safe havens for people seeking spiritual relief, free from any affiliations or commitments to official religious institutions or sites. It is not surprising that promoting a shrine as a power spot was criticized. The newspaper *Jinja shinpō* (19 March 2013), which is connected to the Association of Shinto Shrines, the idea of power spots simply promoted the pursuit of simple, vulgar, “practical” benefits, rather than the true meaning of a visit to a shrine. In some ways, this criticism mirrors the kinds of issues surrounding the continued characterization of heiau in Hawaii as power spots.

Japanese guidebooks related to power spots tend to be somewhat prescriptive in the advice they offer regarding attitudes of visitors. One book, *Spiritual Journey: 癒しのパワースポット* (*Spiritual Journey: Iyashi no pawāsupotto*; *Spiritual Journey: Healing power spots*) and published in 2009, describes the reason why tourists might choose to visit these sites in the first place:

A spiritual journey is a quest of the heart for each of us to cleanse our souls. Why were we born in this world? What is our purpose? What is love? What is truth? What is happiness? It is a journey of realization where we set out to find the answers to those questions. We all start our journey from the instant we take physical form in this world.... This book is not just a guidebook for sacred sites. We hope that when you visit these sites, you have the chance to activate your true self, and call forth the power latent within you. We believe that if you have a spirit of gratitude within your heart, you will be able to live a fulfilling life overflowing with love.¹⁰

This contains clear statements of purpose: visitors will cleanse themselves as a way to find the path to love and happiness, and by visiting the healing power spots they have the chance to draw forth innate power from within.

One of my local informants, Tae Basta, a Japanese woman who moved to Hawaii in 2009, performs traditional Hawaiian lomi-lomi massage and describes herself as an “intuitive healer.” She conducts sessions in Hawaii with clients from Japan, and occasionally returns to Japan and meets clients. Tae contends that of all the tourists from different countries who visit Hawaii, in her experience only

10. TAKAHASHI and SENDA, iii.

Japanese people go on “spiritual tours” in groups.¹¹ One significant problem she notes in relation to the “spiritual tours” is that “most Japanese are very obedient ... when someone says ‘this is the power spot, do this do that,’ or ‘you should feel this way, Japanese will try to do as they are told.”¹² This comment reflects the prescriptive nature of power spot guidebooks; the assumption appears to be that there is a kind of transaction taking place between the tourists who wish to be told how to approach an unfamiliar site with the “correct” spiritual attitude and the providers of that information, guidebooks or tour operators.

Heiau, Cultural Connection, and Desecration

According to Hawaiian anthropologist Malia Evans, “a heiau is a religious temple ... it is where our ali‘i [hereditary nobles of ancient Hawaiian society; chiefs] and our people did certain ceremonies and rituals where they connected with the akua [gods] ... but they are still relevant for us as lāhui [Hawaiian people] today.” She explains that the word “heiau” comes from “hei,” which is to entrap or entangle, and “au,” which is a time frame or time period.¹³ Heiau are places where there is a “beautiful connection to our kupuna [elders, people of one’s grandparents generation], to our ancestors, to the people who came before us, and the people who will come after us. So it’s really a place for us as people to connect with our culture and connect with our identity ... and with each other.” This understanding of heiau as sites that have intimate connections to the cultural identity of the Hawaiian people was reflected in comments by some of my informants. While this understanding of the sacred nature of heiau and their connection to native Hawaiians certainly does not prohibit non-Hawaiians from visiting these places, it requires respect for the area and asks visitors to make some attempt to understand the history and traditions. Evans appeals to the notion of authenticity of heiau in terms of awareness of their history and meaning for present-day Hawaiian people.

Visitors and others who are unaware or ignorant of heiau and their cultural significance can cause problems, particularly with the desecration of certain sites. Evans states the Hawaiian state government puts a low priority on historic preservation. Thus, in certain places individuals, groups, and families take on

11. Tae Basta and the other local informants mentioned in this note, Darrell Harada and Pa‘a Alana, are public figures who run websites advertising their work. As such, I have chosen to use their real names with permission. Her webpage is <http://tae-basta.blogspot.jp/>. Tae’s English webpage (<http://lemurian-angel.blogspot.com/>) lists her as an “intuitive healer.”

12. Email exchange, 7 March 2016.

13. “Ancient Stones of Kaiaka – A Visit with Malia Evans” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKKG7Y-HAKs&feature=youtu.be>). Voices of Truth – One-on-One with Hawai‘i’s Future (YouTube channel). Accessed 28 February 2016.

the responsibility to protect them—they are charged with, or charge themselves with, maintaining the authenticity of the sites. Evans appeared in a news story in March 2015 claiming that a landowner may have desecrated a heiau on the north shore of Oahu in order to build a fence to protect his property. The landowner issued a counter-claim about Evans, questioning whether she may have interfered with the site to prove her point.¹⁴ This particular incident is related to land and property ownership, and thus differs from tourists who visit heiau for other purposes. Nevertheless, this example is useful in terms of exploring other sacred sites that can become sites of contestation.

The Keiawa heiau was badly damaged during World War II when soldiers removed stones from the heiau in order to build a road. An effort was made to re-establish the heiau's original historical setting with plantings of medicinal plants, and it was "rededicated" in 1951.¹⁵ The removal of stones from the heiau would constitute desecration from the perspective of traditional Hawaiian consciousness. The Department of Land & Natural Resources asks that visitors "show respect and do not move, remove or wrap the rocks," or place objects such as coins, incense, candles or other items that are not traditional offerings because they may cause long-term damage to the site. Despite this, it was clear that some people ignore this advice and placed a variety of foreign objects in the heiau, moved the rocks, or even brought in rocks from other areas. However, I did not observe any such behavior from Japanese tourists. As with other heiau noted by Evans above, there is no single family or group or community who take charge of looking after the Keiawa heiau. It appears that maintaining the cultural connections, and respecting the history, and traditional uses of heiau is a constant concern for people like Evans and other concerned locals.

Spiritual Exploration at Keaiwa Heiau

The three local informants I discuss below each had different perspectives on their meetings at the heiau and the impact of Japanese tourists.

Darrell Harada

I first met Darrell Harada, a professional psychic healer, in late March 2011 while I was attending an Association of Asian Studies conference in Honolulu. I had heard that he was able to "see things," and that he had the ability to communicate with the deceased, including family members. I arranged to meet him, and we had a long conversation that covered a wide range of topics, including

14. <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/28546064/north-shore-heiau-center-of-desecration-allegation> (accessed 12 March 2016).

15. http://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dsp/files/2014/09/Keaiwa-_Heiau_SRA.pdf (accessed 3 March 2016).

my academic background and his experience studying religious studies at the University of Hawaii. He told me the effect the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan’s Tohoku region was having on the Hawaiian tourism and travel business (indeed, the number of participants from Japan at the conference I was attending was significantly lower than normal). But he also mentioned that he had been asked by various Japanese people to visit Japan and offer readings for people who had lost friends and relatives. Darrell is quite well known, and



Figure 2: Entrance sign to heiau

he has a number of clients in Japan who either visit him in Hawaii or conduct Skype sessions with him. When I returned to Hawaii in 2014, I interviewed him again about his work. He then mentioned the occasional meetings at the Keiawa heiau and invited me to attend.

When I asked what he felt the motivations of the group were in meeting at this heiau, Darrell explained it in this way:

It’s a relaxing place to hang out and share our experiences. It sort of evolved.... Somebody would bring a friend [who] needed help, so we’d end up helping them. Sometimes we don’t do anything. Sometimes we just eat, hang out, burn incense.... We’re just open. If something is going to happen it’s going to happen. But we don’t try to make anything happen, it’s not like a coven where there are rules, and there’s a hierarchy. It’s just friends hanging out who happen to have a similar

interest. An interest that is very hard for most people to understand or to deal with seriously. And so it's just a kind safe place to play with energy and see what we can do with it, and explore it and try to not be influenced by expectations. Even in healing there's an expectation of an outcome and people forget there's a process to it... People



Figure 3: Darrell Harada performing reiki on a member of the local group. The heiau is approximately 50 meters from this rest area within the park.

talk about magic, but I don't think people know the difference between Hollywood magic and real life magic. Everything is magical if you look at it that way. (March 10 interview at Keiawa heiau)

The help Darrell mentioned involved people that appeared at someone's invitation to discuss with members of the group issues they were facing. One man came to the heiau believing he had been cursed, a woman sought advice regarding someone at their workplace who was "drawing energy from her," while another was

recovering from a particularly bad relationship and wanted to know what measures to take to prevent this from happening again. Occasionally the person seeking advice spoke with a number of people in the group; at other times they consulted only one or two people. Sometimes if someone had asked for a Hawaiian blessing the group would perform it inside the heiau itself.

Darrell's view of the heiau can perhaps be characterized as a place for friends or acquaintances to gather and practice "energy work" or perform occasional ceremonies within the heiau itself. He received training in *la'au lapa'au* (herbal healing), *la'au kahea* (spiritual healing), *pule* (prayer), and *ho'oponopono* (conflict resolution, peacemaking, re-harmonizing or rebalancing relationships).

Darrell noted that Japanese clients often asked him about power spots in Hawaii. In response to one young woman's inquiry, he asked her if she knew *what* the greatest power spot is. She replied excitedly, "no, no," and he responded, "it's you." The reason, he states, is because we are the ones who can direct energy with our minds. A power spot, according to Darrell, is just a particular kind of energy that is undirected.

It's up to the person to decide how that energy is going to be used for them. And there are people who are afraid of this place because of mise-

ducation. They think of this place [Keaiwa heiau] as a burial site, or a sacrificial site—they don’t know it’s a healing school.... (10 March 2015)

Darrell also noted that the Japanese tourists were, above all, quite respectful of the area. They did not litter the site, and did not move rocks around or disturb the area in any way.

From what I understand of the Japanese people who come here, they’re actually trying to experience the quality of what’s there. So their mindset is that they’re going to go to a power spot and they’re really going to experience what’s in the power spot, and then compare it to experiences with other power spots rather than layer stuff upon it. I think they’re just trying to be very open ... but still, it’s going to filter through their experience, through their culture, through their understanding, just like it does with anybody else in a way.... I think they give a pretty good go of it.

His view indicates that different people take different perspectives of the area, depending on their own culture, background, and influences.

Pa’a Alana

When I first met Pa’a Alana at the heiau on 20 January 2015 he was about to start his own traditional Hawaiian tattooing business. As a child, he was always interested in drawing. He was raised by Samoans and grew up in California. The Hawaiian culture, he told me, is not what it once was, and the similarities on the older culture are closer to the Samoan culture; the Polynesian aspect is something Hawaiians have moved away from because Hawaii’s connection to America. He searched for his own identity and purpose: “some people are hula dancers, some people are canoe people ... everyone has different things.... I just didn’t know what my thing was.” He realized that tattooing was the path he should follow. Pa’a told me that he was very concerned with ritual and the traditional ways of doing things. Pa’a has now established a business and is promoting himself as a traditional Hawaiian tattooist and genealogical researcher. Pa’a took me on a tour of the heiau to show me certain issues he was concerned with. He explained that heiaus were not respected as they should be, reflecting the comments of Malia Evans above. We walked around the heiau and he pointed out problems he saw:

Figure 4 shows a rock structure with coral lying at the bottom. As Keiawa heiau was not related to the sea but to healing, it did not belong to this heiau. Pa’a then pointed to an orange sitting on a rock (Figure 5). “Hippies” put it there for reasons other than the original purpose of the heiau, which is healing.

Pa'a also mentioned his concern that women entered the main heiau circle, which was an action specifically prohibited originally (the Department of Land & Natural Resources pamphlet also mentions that women were not allowed in the heiau but could receive training outside the heiau). As Pa'a took me around the site, it was clear that apart from the maintenance of the heiau itself—the grounds were always kept in excellent condition—there is



Figure 4: Coral and rope beneath heiau rock

no one supervising other activities at the heiau or preventing people from placing foreign objects in the area, or even displacing the rocks. The protection of cultural heritage came down to the advice outside the heiau itself.

Later that day, Darrell, Pa'a, and other members of the group performed a Hawaiian ceremony of Pa'a's traditional tattoo tools he was planning to use for his business. The ceremony began with cleansing the tattoo tools with plants from the heiau that had been dipped in salt water, and then cleansing Pa'a's body. After this was completed, some participants began to blow Pū, Hawaiian conch shells, a number of times in various directions (I did not ask for the details of the use of Pū at that time). The ceremony was closely watched by a group of Japanese tourists who had arrived at the heiau and stood some distance

Pa'a's perspective of Japanese tourists was largely dismissive. In his idea, tourists do not have access to the type of knowledge that Hawaiians have, and therefore there is something illegitimate about their quest to go to this heiau on a power spot tour. At the same time as acknowledging the value of having tourists come to Hawaii and at least see the places, the problem, in his eyes, was that the information they received about the site was most likely fraudulent, thereby invalidating their experience. Pa'a tries to view things from a traditional perspective, and his ideas of heiau differ from the notion of power spots, at least from tourists' perspectives.

Tae Basta

Tae Basta describes herself as a "facilitator" and lomi lomi (Hawaiian massage) practitioner. Unlike other members of the group, Tae communicates with Japanese clients in Japanese: her insights into their motivations were revealing. Although she was occasionally critical of the tour groups because she felt



Figure 5

because “salt is the universal cleansing tool.” The advice she gives them is to pay attention to their own intentions and emotions as they visit any area.

The idea of visiting power spots, she believes, is connected to visiting a particular domestic Shinto shrine to pray for a specific wish, such as romance, fertility, passing an exam, success in business, and so on. She feels that as this is the kind of pattern that Japanese are culturally accustomed to—visiting an area to pray for wishes for the future—most would expect that this kind of activity would be valid even in a foreign land. Essentially, visiting a power spot is the

the operators’ stories were probably suspect, she was still relatively sympathetic to the tourists’ needs. I mentioned that power spots were not appearing as much in Japanese media as before, but from her perspective, visiting power spots on “spiritual tours” is still a popular part of Japanese tourists’ experiences when they visit Hawaii. She finds that many Japanese clients ask her which power spots they should visit; she usually tells them to go to the ocean and swim



Figure 6: Darrell and Pa’a walking around the heiau’s sacred circle before the tattoo tool ceremony.



Figure 7: Pa'a prepares his tools before ceremony within the heiau. Darrell (far right) holds Ti leaves he picked from the heiau's outer edge. Japanese tourists keep a respectful distance in the background.

same as asking “for help from something bigger than us.”¹⁶ However, she is concerned that when it comes to Hawaii, there are deeper meanings and history of the sites which mostly do not appear in the guide books. In fact, “there are many sites that Hawaiians hide from ... outsiders, because in the past, many places were misunderstood.” Sadly, she continues, not everything in the

guidebooks is true, and some explanations are twisted in the wrong way by non-Hawaiians. This occurs because Hawaiians have a very specific point view of the world which can not be explained in words but only through experience. Given that experiences will non-Hawaiians to understand, Tae feels a sense of disappointment when Japanese tourists come on “spiritual tours” and do things that are not supposed to be done. She mentions people who visit the Kūkaniloko birthing stones—although its original purpose was for Hawaiian royalty to give birth, Japanese tourists sometimes visit this highly significant cultural site to pray for fertility, a common practice in Japan. Nevertheless, most Japanese tourists do seem to show respect towards the site and do not damage the site. As for Tae’s recommendations to clients, she does not take them to places or send them anywhere, especially if she does not know the history, because she does not want to disturb someone else’s secret sites. Although Tae did not offer comments on the Keaiwa heiau specifically, she mentioned that she was trying to gain as much knowledge from Hawaiians as she could.

Conclusion

My observations at the Keaiwa heiau indicated that for the locals I met, the motivations for gathering together served a number of functions that allowed them to further explore their own spiritual journeys. They discussed, debated,

16. Email exchange, 7 March 2016.

and shared what could be termed “spiritual” information, including topics like the energy of crystals, reiki, and ancestor spirits. They took part in Hawaiian rituals such as Pa’a’s tattoo tool ceremony within the sacred circle of the heiau and incorporated the healing plants of the heiau in these rituals. For these people, the heiau seemed to serve as a site where social and material exchanges occur that serve to strengthen and possibly valid certain beliefs



Figure 8: Japanese tourists prepare to enter the heiau

about materiality, spiritual power, and life’s purpose. Although the locals appeared somewhat dismissive of the tourists and tour groups, the tourists made an impact on the locals’ perceptions of the site and its uses. Darrell viewed the site as an area that tourists could explore their own spiritual motivations even though they may have been based on cultural preconceptions. Pa’a was more concerned that the heiau was not being used as it should be—rather than a power spot, Keaiwa heiau was originally a healing temple and other uses were not really valid. He was very concerned with what he saw as traditional ways. That being said, he was not only concerned about tourists not understanding the history and uses of the heiau; he was also addressing people—locals included—who did not respect the area. Tae was concerned that tourists were being given misleading information but she also related to the specific qualities of Japanese tourists, who may have had limited access to English resources and were operating on the strict deadlines of tour groups. Like Pa’a, Tae was concerned that people would go to areas like heiau with the wrong knowledge and commit some kind of transgression as a result of their own ignorance.

Heiau and other power spots differ significantly from other tourist attractions of Hawaii, such as the Polynesian Cultural Center run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Laie, located some 50 kilometers north of Honolulu. Shows at the Polynesian Cultural Center, the most commercially successful tourist attraction in Hawaii, are very popular. CANEEN (2014, 117–18) argues that tourists form an image of “authentic” Polynesia before their arrival in Hawaii whereas the indigenous performers participate in the shows with a sense of identity that confirms their culture’s positive dissimilarity from the hegemonic culture of the West. The image of authenticity held by tourists is modified as the tour concludes and the cultural identity of the indigenous

performers is modified as they interact with fellow performers and the audience. “Spiritual tours” to heiau and power spots differ because the way they are presented depends almost entirely on either the information the tourists have at hand in the form of guidebooks or what is presented to them by tour guides.

Although this field note could only cover some points, I intend to continue this research by studying “spiritual tour” operators and their clients. The questions of authenticity, cultural invention, and identity require further examination in relation to power spots and “spiritual tours” by Japanese tourists.

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