

Barbara AMBROS

Researching Place, Emplacing the Researcher

Reflections on the Making of a Documentary on a Pilgrimage Confraternity

This essay reflects on the roles of the researcher, gender, place, and nostalgia in the making of an ethnographic documentary film on a contemporary pilgrimage confraternity. Every year the group visits Ōyama, a sacred mountain in central Kanagawa Prefecture, on the occasion of the mountain-opening ceremony on 27 July. The Ohana Confraternity mainly consists of members working at two manufacturing companies in Tokyo. A sense of belonging to the group is mostly based on professional and personal relationships rather than a common sense of faith. The yearly pilgrimage is an example of how contemporary corporations use religious rituals to foster social relations and promote a productive work ethic among their employees. The presence of a foreign researcher and a local archivist influenced the ritual activities of the confraternity in many, sometimes unexpected, ways. Gender determined the place of individual members (including the researcher) in the group and their mode of association with the confraternity. The group's approach to traditions and rituals of the pilgrimage was nostalgic yet playful and malleable.

KEYWORDS: Ōyama—Ohanakō—*yamabiraki*—*misogi*—furi Shrine—Fudō Myōō—*kekkaï*—*nyonin kinsei*—nostalgia

Barbara AMBROS is an assistant professor of East Asian religions in the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct. This is the baseline proposition from which I start. The only interesting question that can then be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?

David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*

At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.

Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*

ACCORDING TO M. Eliade, sacred places are sanctified through hierophany, a divine manifestation empowering this-worldly space with other-worldly qualities. An Eliadian sacred place is timeless and divorced from profane places (ELIADE 1961, 20–29). This Eliadian understanding of the sacred has colored the ways in which scholars of Japanese religion have viewed sacred mountains in Japan. For example, the folklorist Hori Ichirō proposed three basic typological aspects of mountain cults in Japan. The first is the veneration of volcanoes and other conically shaped mountains as the residence or embodiment of the divine. Second, mountains were revered as watersheds and sources of water, fertility and, by implication, material wealth. Third, mountains were regarded as the realm of spirits and the dead. As abodes of divinities, spirits, and the dead, mountains were regarded as portals to other worlds or as an *axis mundi*, the embodiment of the entire universe like the mythical Buddhist peak Mt. Sumeru (HORI 1966, 1–23).

During the past few decades, scholars of cultural geography, cultural anthropology, and religious studies have questioned the timelessness of sacred places and the rigid distinction of the sacred and the profane posited by Eliade. Instead

* I wish to thank Helen Hardacre, Miyazaki Fumiko, Shimazono Susumu, Tamamuro Fumio, Duncan Williams, Paul Swanson, Donald Swearer, Andrew Bernstein, and James Robson for their valuable feedback as the documentary project progressed. It is due to their encouraging suggestions that I wrote this essay. I would also like to give special thanks to Thomas Tweed and Shem Aaron-Bartner for their comments on this essay. I am especially grateful to the Ohana Confraternity and the Inn Kageyu for their warm hospitality and generous cooperation.

they have suggested that sacred places are culturally and socially constructed.¹ John Eade and Michael Sallnow, for example, argue for an approach to the study of pilgrimage sites that shifts the focus from the place to the person: pilgrimage shrines are sites where divergent religious discourses collide as pilgrims and shrine authorities each aim to assert their meanings and perceptions (EADE and SALLNOW 1991, 5–10). This essay is a case study of a sacred mountain in central Kanagawa Prefecture on the western edge of the Kantō Plain that is a popular regional pilgrimage and hiking destination. This mountain, Ōyama, serves as an illuminating example of how a sacred place is maintained and created in a complex process that involves pilgrims, innkeepers, priests, and researchers. In this sense, many divergent voices continually negotiate the meanings of Ōyama's social and physical space.

The study is based on fieldwork conducted in the summers of 2000 and 2004, when I accompanied a pilgrimage confraternity called Ohanakō 御花講 on their annual visit to the mountain during the summer festival. I was interested in how this contemporary group related to Ōyama's physical and social space and, especially, what role gender played in this formulation. I found that the impact of my presence as an ethnographer was greater than anticipated. My participation turned out to be one of factors in the group's perception of space, which was of course also influenced by the group's leadership, the innkeeper, and the local municipal archivist who came to witness some of the rites and ended up relaying information to some group members. Furthermore, even though gender distinctions were no longer inscribed onto the physical landscape as concrete boundaries as they had been in the premodern period, they continue to shape Ōyama's social spaces.

Ōyama has been a popular regional pilgrimage destination since the late seventeenth century. The site now houses a Shingon Buddhist temple on the lower slope, a large Shinto shrine on the central slope, and a conglomeration of unstaffed Shinto shrines on the summit. The main street through the village, which rests at the foot of the mountain, is lined with over fifty inns. In the early modern period, the heyday of pilgrimage to the site, the inns numbered close to one hundred and fifty. Along the paths from the village to the mountaintop, the

1. Most recently, phenomenological approaches, such as that of Edward Casey, have questioned the exclusive reliance on a constructivist perspective, arguing that the relationship between humans and places is reciprocal. In other words, human perceptions of places are shaped in part by the landscape itself (LANE 2001, 57–59). This sense of caution is important. In the case of Japanese sacred mountains, the mountainscape certainly informs ritual practices, such as ritual ascents, ablutions under waterfalls, entry into caves, and viewing of the land or the sun from the summit. Without these physical features of the mountain such rituals would be impossible. However, the exact meanings assigned to such practices and to the physical features of the land are nevertheless socially and culturally constructed.

whole mountain bears the marks of pilgrimage confraternities whose members have returned annually during the summer festival and have left memorials—plaques, steles, stone lanterns, stone posts, gates, and small monuments—that mark their connection with the site. Such markers have generally been erected by pilgrimage confraternities rather than individual donors and bear the name and origin of the groups.

Until the late nineteenth century, the religious institutions on the mountain constrained the mobility of pilgrims by limiting access to the summit, though it could be argued that it was precisely such limitations that made the site a popular destination for travel.² The summit was only open to pilgrims during the summer festival, which lasted three weeks. Moreover, the summit was permanently closed to women, who were considered ritually polluted by menstruation and parturitive blood. In addition, women were also barred from spending the night on the central slope, which then housed a large Shingon Buddhist temple complex, because women might have tempted the monks to violate their rules of celibacy. Ultimately, the exclusion of women was based on notions about female sexuality, which was regarded as powerful and destructive toward (male) sacred space.³

Eventually, pressure from the West, where mountaineering was becoming increasingly popular, began to break down limitations on women's presence on these sacred mountains. Once Japan had renewed contact with the West in the nineteenth century, several Americans attempted to transgress the boundaries of Ōyama's sacred space. During the summer festival of 1861, a group of American men visited the mountain. Since they carried the correct permits and paid the appropriate donations, they were not prevented from ascending the mountain. However, when Francis Hall, another American, visited Ōyama with a group of American men in the Second Month of 1862, village officials diverted Hall's party on their ascent to the central slope. Not only was Hall's party attempting the ascent in the off-season when the summit was off-limits, but the officials also doubted that the Americans were within US-Japan treaty regulations that allowed them to travel only within a specified radius around the treaty port of Yokohama (TENAKA 1992, 758 and 767; 1993, 22; NOTEHELPER 2001, 283–86). Here the exclusion arose from political motivations. In addition, it reflected a clash of attitudes between modern, Western alpinism and Japanese cartographies of sacred space.

The prohibition against women remained in place until it was lifted by government decree in 1872. In this case, too, Western mountaineering and the

2. This argument is still maintained by those defending the prohibition against women in the Mt. Ōmine region.

3. Despite the prohibition, women still traveled to Ōyama with pilgrimage confraternities. Among Ōyama pilgrims from the Bōsō Peninsula, the practice of women accompanying confraternities appears to have been so common that the *bakufu* took note of it as early as 1695 (YASUIKE 1992, 259–60).

presence of foreign tourists, especially those associated with the 1872 Kyoto Exhibition of Arts and Manufacturers, had an impact since the Japanese authorities wanted to avoid conflict with foreign visitors. The opening of sacred space to a broader constituency also occurred in the larger context of the restructuring of mountain cults due to the disassociation of the Buddhas and *kami* in 1868 and the dismantling of organized mountain asceticism (*shugendō* 修験道) in 1872 (SUZUKI 2002, 9). In the wake of all these changes, Ōyama's sacred space underwent drastic changes. The Buddhist monastic temple complex was displaced by a Shinto shrine and rebuilt on a reduced scale on the lower slope while the summit became accessible to female pilgrims.

The mountain in central Kanagawa Prefecture still attracts large numbers of pilgrims today. Most come from urban and suburban areas of the Kantō Plain in and around Tokyo and Yokohama. In the summer of 2000, I accompanied a pilgrimage association on its yearly visit to Ōyama and chronicled the pilgrimage on digital video in order to turn the footage into a documentary for classroom use. The pilgrimage association Ohanakō 御花講 (Flower Confraternity) used to offer flowers to the Buddhist deity Fudō Myōō 不動明王, once the central deity revered on the mountain before the disassociation of Buddhas and *kami* in the early Meiji period. The group visit the mountain every year to participate in the mountain opening rite (*yamabiraki* 山開) that marks the start of the annual summer festival and with it the primary pilgrimage season. Since the



FIGURE 1. The confraternity leaders represent the group in the *yamabiraki* ceremony performed by a priest of the adjacent Afuri Shrine. (All photos by author)

mountain became a so-called “quasi national park” in the 1960s, it has become a popular destination for weekend hikers from the urban sprawl in the Kantō Plain throughout the year. Yet harkening back to the Edo period, when the upper slopes were only accessible for three weeks in the summer, the summer festival still begins with a symbolic opening of the path to the summit. The Ohana Confraternity participates in this rite because they donated the gate that marks the entrance to the path next to the Outer Afuri Shrine on the central slope. The group had the current gate constructed in 1988.

It was at these gates that I had first noticed the name of the confraternity carved prominently into the posts. Since I had a strong interest in the historical development of sacred space on Ōyama, I was curious to learn more about the confraternity. On one of my many hikes, I discovered the same name on some of the stone posts that fenced in a traditional inn, Kageyu, in the village at the foot of the mountain. Since the late seventeenth century, Ōyama pilgrimage confraternities have maintained customary ties with such inns, which often provide lodging for them on their yearly visits. Utsumi Masashi, the current owner of the Inn Kageyu, was kind enough to surmount his guarded skepticism when I appeared out of the blue on his doorstep in my sweaty, mud-caked hiking gear and asked if he could put me in touch with the Ohana Confraternity affiliated with his inn. As Ian Reader suggests—and this is contrary to the received wisdom that letters of introduction are the surest route to research access in Japan—“one gets a good sense of what institutions and individuals are like (and who might be most receptive to intrusive requests) when one approaches them informally and without prior arrangement” (READER 2003, 93). In this case, this serendipitous method certainly worked for me, but this may have been precisely because I was not Japanese and so considered somewhat exempt from ordinary social niceties that Japanese researchers have to obey. One Japanese colleague, for example, assured me upon viewing the documentary that she would have had a much harder time getting the same kind of access. At any rate, Utsumi Masashi agreed to contact the leaders of the confraternity on my behalf to ask whether they would be willing to get in touch with me. Seeing the doubtful look on his face, it was my turn to be skeptical, but he kept his word.

Within a few weeks, I was invited to attend an organizational meeting in downtown Tokyo during which the leadership was planning the upcoming pilgrimage and deciding whether to allow me to participate and film their pilgrimage. In retrospect, it is clear that my presence affected the group’s ordinary routine from the start. This was, in part, because I was conducting research on a group that remains flexible enough to incorporate impromptu changes in the name of “revitalization.” The problem was not that I asked leading questions that produced answers I had expected to hear but instead I encountered a more fundamental challenge, one described succinctly by Scott Schnell: “the impact of

the ethnographer's own presence on the data that are obtained" (SCHNELL 2006, 389). The most fruitful way of dealing with this dilemma was to consciously position myself in the narrative by adopting what Thomas Tweed has termed the "locative approach," which "begins with the assumption that all interpreters are situated and all interpretations emerge from categorical schemes and social contexts" (TWEED 2002, 256). For example, my gender immediately became an issue. As usual, the meeting was attended by the leader of the confraternity (*kōmoto* 講元), the assistant leader (*fuku kōmoto* 副講元), and several officers (*sewanin* 世話人), such as the treasurer and the master of ceremony for the inevitable dinner party at the inn, and Mr. Utsumi, in his role as innkeeper. However, Mrs. Ōno, the wife of the leader, had also come along to "keep me company among all these men" as she pointed out later that evening. This was a pattern that would recur repeatedly during my work with the confraternity.

Another important modification was also linked to my status as an outsider, not just any outsider, but a foreigner of European heritage. This was not only the source of much curiosity among the group but also made them eager to please me. The effect was intensified because I was both a woman and a researcher. It led to many curious questions from the group and frequent efforts to show me what they thought I might find interesting. A good example occurred on the second day of the pilgrimage. I had hiked overnight to the summit with a section of the confraternity and asked a confraternity member who had a digital video camera to tape anything he found interesting during the rest of the group's ascent to the Outer Afuri Shrine the next morning. When I reviewed the footage for editing, I overheard him talking to a few other members who were curious about why he was filming so much. He responded that I had asked him to film, but because he had no idea what I was looking for, he was filming everything. A few minutes later, I could hear him telling the group's treasurer to take a coin, offer it at a small Kasuga Shrine by the side of the road and pray—since this would be of interest to me. The treasurer obliged so that the other member could record this "spontaneous expression of devotion." The videographer had decided that I could not possibly be content with footage that only showed confraternity members slurping buckwheat noodles for breakfast but imagined that I wanted to see more overtly devotional behavior. When there was nothing forthcoming from the group, he orchestrated a staged performance.

The confraternity leadership also felt the need to embellish the regular activities of the confraternity for my benefit. I was not the first to record the group's pilgrimage on film. Regional TV stations have filmed the Ohana Confraternity several times. And on such occasions, the group would enhance how they would be represented by engaging in an activity that commemorated the historical traditions of the pilgrimage to Ōyama. For example, in the late 1980s several members closely connected to the leadership of the group retraced famous sites

along one of the pilgrimage routes from Tokyo to Ōyama while TV cameras chronicled their journey. When I accompanied the group, the innkeeper and the confraternity leadership felt that they needed to enhance their pilgrimage with a special event, partially for my benefit. The innkeeper suggested that the group perform cold-water ablutions (*misogi* 禊), a rite of purification, which has been traditionally performed on pilgrimages to sacred mountains before entry into sacred space. The group agreed enthusiastically and applauded Mr. Utsumi's comment that "this would also be a great and unique experience for a foreigner." As an ethnographer I felt uncomfortable because I had come to document them during an ordinary pilgrimage. However, I knew that out of politeness I could not reject their very generous offer. The leadership then began to plan the logistics of the special event. The men were to wear traditional loincloths (*fundoshi* 褌) while the women were to wear bathing suits under the confraternity's white pilgrimage jacket (*happi* 法被). It did not occur to me until much later that even the discussion of the women's clothing during the rite would probably not have occurred if I had not been present since it would have been unlikely that any of the women in the group would have participated. However, since I agreed to participate, the wife of the leader, who had come to keep me company, also wanted to participate. The rest of the meeting was rather uneventful and consisted of the MC convincing the leaders that last year's bingo during the dinner party had been so successful that it would provide good entertainment this year as well.

On the day of the pilgrimage, we all made our way separately from the various Tokyo suburbs to the foot of the mountain—some by car, others by public transportation. The Ohana Confraternity consists of the employees of two small manufacturing companies, Ishiguro Seisakusho and Miki Kōgyō, which were once based near Nihonbashi in eastern central Tokyo. The association with the place is still reflected in the confraternity's formal name: Nihonbashi Ohanakō. Nowadays, the notion that the confraternity represents a particular Tokyo neighborhood is partially fictive. One of the companies has since moved out of the Nihonbashi neighborhood and the employees of both companies live scattered throughout the larger Tokyo metropolitan area. The company affiliation has replaced identification with a particular residential community, creating what Jan Swyngedouw has termed a "company-community" (SWYNGEDOUW 1993, 67). Since the Edo period, many Ōyama confraternities were either based on neighborhood or village affiliations or associated with particular professions (for example, firefighters, actors, or fishmongers) or businesses (for example, merchant houses) (MATSUOKA 1995, 204–9; AMBROS 2008, 160–73). The affiliation of the Ohana Confraternity with two manufacturing companies is therefore not particularly unusual; however, as settlement patterns and transportation infrastructure in Tokyo have greatly changed since the Edo period, the purpose of the confraternity has changed as well. Earlier confraternities dispatched a few

members, usually two to five men, to represent the group and bring back amulets for the other members in the community. In contrast, the contemporary Ohana Confraternity strengthens or even creates a sense community among company members by allowing them to go on the journey together. Its members no longer live near each other but use this rare yearly opportunity to go on a company trip with sixty to eighty employees in attendance. This sense of community, however, is different from Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*, which is based on the notion of pilgrimage as anti-structure. The activities of the Ohana Confraternity reinforce societal ties of the workplace by bringing those relationships into leisure time rather than creating a complete disjuncture from their ordinary daily lives.

Cold Water Ablutions

On 26 July 2000, the families of the two leaders, the Ōnos and the Nakayamas, were the first to arrive—about two hours before the other members—because we



FIGURE 2. The confraternity leader, Mr. Ōno, performs cold water ablations under Rōbendaki on the afternoon before the nightly ascent.

were to participate in cold-water ablutions. Mr. Utsumi gave us careful instructions on how to conduct the rite before driving us in his minivan to Rōbendaki 良弁瀧, a waterfall along the main road through the village. We had changed into our designated dress back at the inn: loincloths for men and bathing suits for women. Our party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Ōno and their daughter, and Mr. and Mrs. Nakayama and their daughter. At the waterfall Mr. Utsumi showed us how to pay Shinto-style obeisance at Rōbendō, a small shrine dedicated to Rōben 良弁, the Kegon patriarch credited with opening up Ōyama for Buddhist practice in the eighth century: bow twice, clap twice, and bow once more. Afterwards, we followed Mr. Ōno and Mr. Nakayama in taking our turns under the waterfall. The rite was accompanied by much levity due to the coldness of the water and the unusual clothing of the confraternity leaders, whose families had never seen them in loincloths before. There were also expressions of approval for those who had managed to hold still under the pelting cold water for a considerable length of time.

Days later, the performance was duly noted in the local newspaper under a headline that read “Tradition Revived,” ignoring the fact that the Ohana Confraternity had never carried out ablutions at this waterfall before and that the last time such a rite had been performed by the group, about forty years ago, it had been at Fudōdaki 不動滝, another waterfall further up the slope. In the eyes of the local community and the Ohana Confraternity, they were reliving an old tradition, even if it was not their own tradition. A similar phenomenon often occurs in the construction of contemporary festivals. For example, to build a sense of ethnic community, Korean residents of Japan and overseas Chinese in Japan have developed elaborate ethnic festivals in Osaka and the Chinatowns in Yokohama and Nagasaki, respectively. While these performances and events are heralded as “ethnic traditions,” they are often not based on rites preserved within the community but are instead recently imported, modern festivals from Korea and China (IIDA 2002, 312; WANG 2001, 105–106). Yet in the eyes of the observers they pass as tradition and fulfill the function of community-building for the participants.

Nevertheless, I felt a stinging sense of guilt. Of course, I was delighted at the opportunity to film the ablutions, but would the group have ever chosen to perform cold-water ablutions without my presence? This discomfort lessened four years later when I found out how the group adapted the rite subsequently. When I attended their pilgrimage in 2004 to show them the finished documentary, I learned that the group had made it a regular practice to hold cold-water ablutions at Rōbendaki on the afternoon before their ascent. They had even adapted the rite to follow a common pattern observed by the group by selecting a confraternity leader to act as stand-in for the entire group during the ritual. Mr. Ōno represented the confraternity in his capacity as the leader. He alone performed ablutions while two to three other members watched him and cheered him on.

Only when I returned in 2004 did several other members join him—in this case the Nakayama's and their nephew. Mr. Nakayama even violated his doctor's orders not to expose himself to such cold water because of his heart condition. My eagerness to be a good sport by participating enthusiastically in the rite was matched by the Nakayama's eagerness to join in due to my presence. When I participated in their pilgrimage again in 2007, I was told that it was now common for a few other members to join Mr. Ōno in the ablutions. As a matter of fact, members were asked to confirm their participation in advance. In the end, it made me realize that the members of the Ōyama confraternity were free agents, and I had been a catalyst, not the sole determining cause, of their decision to enact the ritual. They had reasons— their own reasons—to stage rituals.

The Dinner Party

By the time we walked back to the Inn Kageyu, most of the other confraternity members had arrived. Our wet and scanty attire was greeted by many curious looks and bewildered questions. Most members had not been aware that the leadership had planned ablutions for this trip. We went to our rooms to change and dry off. The women, regardless of which company they were connected to, shared one room. Most were not employees of the companies anyway. Their affiliation was generally based on personal relationships rather than professional ties. Other than Mrs. Ōno, Mrs. Nakayama, and their daughters, there were a few young women, who remained aloof, and a pair of middle-aged women, both close friends of the Ōnos. The men, however, had been segregated based on their company affiliation. Mr. Ōno, who was also the president of his company, and his employees were lodged in the rooms on one wing of the building while Mr. Nakayama, also a company president, and his employees occupied the rooms on the other.

The members of the two companies were less obviously separated during the dinner party, but still congregated in little clusters along the elongated dining table, which seated about sixty people. Four years later, when I returned to show the confraternity the finished documentary, the separation was clearly maintained. Attendance had fallen slightly to about fifty, which meant that there was room to split the dining table in two, one for each company. Back in 2000, however, the division was not as clear. In addition to lack of space, another factor contributed to the blurring of boundaries between the two constituencies. Until the previous year, the confraternity had consisted of three companies, not two. In April 2000, the president of the third company, Mr. Shimura, who had formed the major link to the confraternity for his company's contingent, had passed away at the age of eighty. Mr. Ōno described him as a highly motivated member: he had participated yearly in the nightly ascent to the summit and had served as a confraternity officer and leader in the past. Once Mr. Shimura was gone,

attendance by the employees of his company dwindled. Having shrunk from a three-company to a two-company confraternity, attendance fell from 80–100 to 60–80 participants. The sudden shift in membership must have impacted group dynamics. Four years later, the confraternity had stabilized and become accustomed to its two-company structure. Another three years later, Mr. Shimura's son and heir participated in the pilgrimage, unaccompanied by his other employees.

The dinner was one of the few occasions that brought all the confraternity members together in one place and was certainly the most convivial aspect of the trip. The meal began with a brief toast by Mr. Ogasawara, the eighty-three year-old former leader and father-in-law of Mr. Nakayama, and was punctuated by speeches by Mr. Ōno and Mr. Utsumi, who used the occasion to commemorate Mr. Shimura's death and inform the group of the purpose of their visit. Mr. Ōno, for example, followed his brief eulogy of Mr. Shimura with a short speech on the meaning of a confraternity (*kō* 講) and their guide (*sendōshi* 先導師)—the latter being the official title for Mr. Utsumi, their innkeeper. For example, he explained that the role of the *sendōshi*—once called *oshi* 御師 before the Meiji period—was not of a guide leading pilgrims up the mountain but of a liaison between pilgrims and the Afuri Shrine. The confraternity officers had helped Mr. Ōno research important pilgrimage terms from works by local historians, Japanese religion dictionaries, and *rakugo* literature and had compiled it into a short reference pamphlet.⁴ While this may have been of interest to many in the room, it seemed to have been intended particularly for those who were attending the trip for the first or second time. Mr. Utsumi welcomed all the members and informed them of the order of events for the trip: the nightly ascent to the summit starting at 2 A.M., the alternative ascent to the Outer Afuri Shrine by cable car at 8 A.M., and the mountain-opening and offertory rites at the Outer Shrine that morning. Citing the *Kōjien*, a well-known Japanese dictionary, he explained that *bonyama* 盆山 used to be the designation for a visit to Ōyama during *obon* season in the Edo period. Since *obon* 御盆 is the festival of the dead, people believed that the spirits of the deceased would come to Ōyama. Therefore, he stated, perhaps the group would climb the mountain with the spirit of Mr. Shimura on their ascent the next day. Nobody seemed to question the fact it was not *obon* right at the moment,⁵ and nobody referred to Mr. Utsumi's comments later either, which led me to conclude that the presence of Mr. Shimura's spirit was not of utmost concern to most of the confraternity members.

4. Sanyūtei Enshō, a well-known *rakugo* performer, counted a piece entitled *Ōyamamairi* (The Pilgrimage to Ōyama) in his repertoire, which poked fun at the pilgrimage by a Ōyama confraternity. The piece was derived from a similar one on the pilgrimage to the Ise Shrines.

5. *Obon* was traditionally held on the 15th of the 7th lunar month and is now celebrated in either July or on 15 August. The Ohana Confraternity's pilgrimage takes place on 26–27 July.

Mr. Ōno and Mr. Utsumi delivered their addresses from a stage at the head of the table that was decorated with a large banner reading *sange, sange rokkon shōjō*, a chant that the confraternity intones before and after the mountain-opening rite. Interestingly, the chant had an unusual spelling. The Ohana Confraternity's version read: "Scatter flowers, scatter flowers, purification of the six senses" *sange, sange rokkon shōjō* 散華散華六根清淨 in reference to the confraternity's name (Flower Confraternity) rather than the more common version "Repentance, repentance, purification of the six senses" *zange, zange rokkon shōjō* 懺悔懺悔六根清淨, which is popular with many confraternities associated with sacred mountains. The chant remained largely unexplained, except for Mr. Ōno's brief mention of it when he encouraged the confraternity to intone it loudly during the ceremonious ascent associated with the mountain-opening rite. Confraternity members took no note of the detailed etymology of the chant given in the reference manual prepared by the confraternity officers.

The sense of formality quickly dissipated during the meal, as beer was served liberally and the men took turns singing karaoke. The dinner was followed by a game of bingo, which members followed half-heartedly despite the small prizes



FIGURE 3. The innkeeper, Mr. Utsumi, awaits the group with a simple breakfast served in a traditional lacquered lunchbox, the confraternity's heirloom kept at the inn.

that awaited lucky winners. Most seemed more interested in socializing freely over food and drink rather than following the planned activities for the evening. The relaxed atmosphere during the meal was a great opportunity for me to gather information about the group. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Mr. Ogasawara, who was the previous leader and, as the oldest living member, proved to be an invaluable and eager source on the history of the group.

The highlight of the evening occurred when Mr. Ogasawara had the innkeeper produce an antique lunch box to illustrate the long history of the confraternity. In 1688, the box had been inscribed with the confraternity's name, which had been temporarily changed from Ohanakō to Hōheikō 奉幣講 (Votive Offering Confraternity) in the aftermath of the disassociation of *kami* and Buddhas in 1868. Mr. Ogasawara delighted in reading the inscription aloud and explaining its significance. He was obviously proud that his confraternity was connected to an artifact this old. Probing questions from confraternity members led him to investigate the contents of the box. It contained twenty-one smaller boxes for individual meals, which led me to assume that the box was once used by Ohanakō members to hold provisions for their journey to Ōyama and display an identifying marker to everyone they encountered on the way. The box is now stored at the Inn Kageyu and is used to deliver lunch to the confraternity at the cafeteria below the Outer Afuri Shrine after the mountain-opening and offertory rites. During lunch the next day, the hungry confraternity members paid little attention to the unassuming lacquered box, but during Mr. Ogasawara's impromptu demonstration at the dinner party the box elicited much interest. Again it had been my presence and probing about the history of the group that had led the former leader to pull out the box and draw the members' attention to it. Moreover, it had been his assumption that as a foreigner I was probably barely able to speak or read Japanese that led him to explain the significance of the box in the most basic terms—much to the delight of the other members—and later to the envy of my Japanese colleagues who probably would not have been treated to a similar show since Mr. Ogasawara would probably have assumed that they would be able to understand the meaning of the box on their own.

Eventually, the women members and I retired from the party to our room. We tried to catch some sleep despite the drunken clamor and cigarette smoke that wafted up to our second-floor room from the partying men on the floor below us. In the privacy of our room, some of women began to discuss whether to participate in the nightly ascent to the summit. In the end, the deciding factor was that I myself planned to hike to the summit, which led the women to conclude that if I went they were going to go, too. They were clearly as interested in what I was doing as I was interested in the actions of the various Ohana Confraternity members. As a result, however, there were more women than men in the group that chose to complete the full ascent. This was remarkable considering that the

pilgrimage as a whole was attended by a majority of men—after all most of the companies’ employees were men. The large amounts of alcohol consumed by the men late into the night were also a contributing factor to the gender imbalance on the hike.

The Nightly Ascent

When we gathered as planned in front of the inn at 2 A.M., we were a group of twenty, or one-third of the Ohana Confraternity. The leader, Mr. Ōno, who was still noticeably inebriated from the dinner party, took charge in leading us on our ascent to the summit. The things that distinguished us from ordinary hikers were the unusual hour of our ascent, our white, waist-long jackets (*happi* 法被) imprinted with the name Ōhanakō in black letters on the back, and the jingling bells each of us carried on a string around our necks. The purpose of the bells was to scare bears away, as the leaders of the group explained with a twinkle in their eyes. The fact that we did not use any motorized means of transportation, such as buses or the cable car, also marked us as distinct. Ordinary hikers will usually ride the bus to the end of the line, ascend along a flight of stairs lined with gift shops to the cable car station, where they usually take the train to the outer Afuri Shrine before hiking to the summit. In our case, we did not have much of a choice: buses and cable cars do not run in the middle of the night. Then again, if we had truly wanted to cut our hike short we could have taken cars—after all, Mr. Utsumi had driven us to the waterfall near the last bus stop the previous afternoon—but this option was never discussed.

As it was, we followed the paved road through the town, climbed the stairs through the row of shuttered gift shops, and took the forest path that forked off in front of the entrance to the cable car station. We took occasional breaks at well-lit landmarks but were also grateful for our flashlights that helped us navigate the crude steps leading to Taisanji 大山寺, a temple dedicated to a famous thirteenth-century iron statue of Fudō Myōō that had once been the central devotional object, and from there to the Outer Afuri Shrine, a Shinto institution that has occupied the central slope since the 1870s. The steep hike was a challenge. Once we arrived at the Outer Afuri Shrine at 4 A.M., seven of the members decided to wait there for our return instead of completing the hike to the summit. Two women who had joined the ascent because of my presence contemplated giving up, but again my presence and determination to complete the hike propelled them to keep going.

Anyone who expected a more ceremonious ascent would have been disappointed by the nonchalant attitude of the group, but special rituals to mark transitions between the stages of the hike were not considered necessary by the members. As we passed through the half-open gate, which the Ohana Confrater-

nity had donated, onto the path to the summit, no one really took notice. Everyone was exhausted and hiked in a silent file as the path became rougher and littered with boulders. I began to wonder if our ascent was going to be marked by any particular rituals or chants. To my delight I heard a young man at the end of the file murmur *sange, sange rokkon shōjō* under his breath. Eventually I asked Mr. Ōno whether we were going to intone the chant as a group at any point during our ascent. The group answered me with amused laughter. Mr. Ōno explained that everyone was too exhausted now, but that once we joined up with the rest of the confraternity on the central slope after our descent we would all chant it together for the show of it. Even for the young man, it turned out later, it had not been a matter of devotion but rather of fascination with the sound of the chant. Having recently moved from Kyushu in southwestern Japan to Tokyo for work, this was his first visit to Ōyama, of which he had never heard before he joined the company. When we arrived on the summit and had our breakfast of rice balls and eggs, he asked me curiously what the chant meant and then proceeded to intone my name (“Barbara-san”) in its stead during the descent. Apparently, the foreign sound of my name fascinated him as much as the chant. An interesting contrast occurred on the ascent four years later, when one of the middle-aged men repeatedly tried to lead the group in recitations of the chant. At first, the members obliged him with amused grins on their faces, but as we slowly approached the summit, the chants trickled slowly away, and he eventually gave up. Without an audience lining the path, it seemed, the chant was not worth the effort on the strenuous ascent.

Our breakfast gave me another opportunity to interview members. I was wondering why we had ascended to the summit overnight. A nightly ascent to mountaintops is not uncommon, but in the case of the Ohana Confraternity it was striking that the ascent took place before the official opening of the gate during the mountain-opening rite. Documents from the Edo period indicate that since 1713, pilgrims had been allowed to ascend to the summit the day before the official start of the festival. It is unclear whether this referred to overnight ascents, but the temple authorities granted this exception to cope with the large numbers of pilgrims (ISEHARA SHISHI HENSHŪ I’INKAI 1994, 25–27). While this may have provided a precedent for the current practice, the circumstances of the Ohana Confraternity’s ascent were considerably different. In the Edo period, the summit was officially off-limits to pilgrims outside the summer festival—in addition to being closed to women throughout the year. Neither of the restrictions is observed today. With the introduction of the modern workweek, most hikers and pilgrimage confraternities come to visit the site on the weekend rather than during the week. The Ohana Confraternity is an exception because its visit is tied to the date of the mountain-opening rite at the start of the festival, which is always held on 27 July. When the day falls in the middle of the week, there are

only a few pilgrimage confraternities and hikers climbing the mountain at the same time. During our nightly ascent, we were the only ones on the slopes of the mountain. We did not need to beat any large crowds to the summit.

What then motivated the confraternity to climb overnight? One reason was practical, and would be obvious to anyone who has ever climbed the mountain in the sweltering, humid summer heat after the rainy season. Despite the strain of the long hike and the unavailability of public transportation, the ascent was not unmanageable in the pleasantly cool night air. The other reasons were related to habitual practices observed by the group. When asked why the confraternity hiked to the summit at night, Mrs. Ōno blinked and thought about the question for a few seconds. Then she answered: “The rising sun is nice to watch.” While this is a common motivating factor for pilgrims on Mt. Fuji, who tend to witness—or venerate—the rising sun from the summit, the statement seemed only partially applicable to the Ohana Confraternity on Ōyama. I remarked that the sun rose during our ascent—in fact, it was obscured by the mist and dense vegetation so that nobody really noticed it until we suddenly had daylight. This gave Mrs. Ōno another moment of pause, and she said with a questioning look at her husband: “The confraternity has done it this way for over one hundred years.” Nobody added further explanations. For the group, the maintenance of tradition was reason enough. A similar attitude surfaced later toward the more formally ritualized parts of the pilgrimage.

After our descent back to the Outer Afuri Shrine, we were reunited over beer and tofu ice cream with the seven members who had stayed behind. Together we awaited the arrival of the remaining members of the confraternity at one of the teashops. We were joined by an unexpected visitor: Mr. Ōnuki, the municipal archivist of the city of Isehara at the foot of the mountain, who knew that I had joined the Ohana Confraternity on their pilgrimage and who had therefore decided to come out to the mountain for the occasion. He was familiar with the confraternity’s name through his work, but they had never heard of him. I introduced Mr. Ōnuki to the group gathered at the teashop. Before long he began to lecture the group on the history of the pilgrimage. Confraternity members were particularly fascinated with his explanation that during the early modern period Ōyama attracted pilgrims praying for fertility and abundant offspring during a time of high child mortality rates. Another topic that arose from my prodding was the idea of “restricted ground” (*kekkaï* 結界), a concept that even the leader, Mr. Ōno, could not immediately make sense of, until Mr. Ōnuki explained that it was a synonym for *nyonin kinsei* 女人禁制 (the prohibition against women). As Mr. Ōnuki noted, in the pre-modern period, the restriction against women began just below the cable car station. His explanation surprised the confraternity members, to whom the idea that the mountain was once closed to women had been of no great importance. Mr. Ōnuki did not explain that while the restriction officially

began below the cable car station, it had not been fully observed, and women were allowed to visit the central slope up to the gate that marked the entrance to the path to the summit, the precursor of the gate that was now maintained by the confraternity.⁶ Had he mentioned this detail, perhaps his comments would have elicited greater interest among the confraternity members. The only hint of any awareness that access to the summit was once restricted had come from Mr. Ogasawara, who had mentioned the previous night during dinner that the path to the summit used to be closed in the off-season. The reason he gave had nothing to do with gender, but was entirely practical: the path was poorly maintained and dangerous. Now that it had improved, there was no need for such restrictions.

While the exclusion of women from Ōyama's summit has become distant history, barely remembered except by scholars, there are a few instances in Japan where it is still practiced. Several recent cases were well-publicized in the news. There was the Japan Sumo Association, which did not permit the former governor of Osaka, Ota Fusae, to enter the sumo ring to present the winner with the trophy, a decision that was backed by the Osaka District Court and—astonishingly—seventy-one percent of the audience at a major sumo tournament (*Japan Times* 2004a; 2004b; 2005).⁷

Then there was the debate over whether the Kii Mountain range should be declared a UNESCO Heritage Site. Several citizens groups opposing the plan argued that since the area around Mt. Ōmine, which is part of the range, was off-limits to women, the site did not deserve this special status because of gender-based discrimination. The debate has pitched local supporters of the ban—a coalition of temple priests and those depending on tourism—against citizens' groups who have sought to end the ban. Some have adopted unusual measures to challenge or transgress the prohibition. Yamaguchi Masao, a man in his sixties from Nara, has repeatedly hiked up the mountain while in drag—in clothes borrowed from his wife (WIJERS-HASEGAWA 2004; *Japan Times* 2004c). In November 2005, a group of thirty-five transsexuals, who had had their gender surgically altered, attempted to ascend to Sanjōgatake, a summit in the Ōmine Range, to raise awareness about transgender issues. Local residents responded by saying that when the prohibition against women was established the concept of a transgender identity did not exist, but that women should refrain from transgressing the prohibition based on “tradition and a way of life.” Eventually, after negotiations with the residents failed, three women out of the group of thirty-five circumvented

6. For a detailed discussion of the prohibition against women on Ōyama's slopes in the early modern period, see AMBROS 2008, 41–52.

7. For more information on the prohibition against women entering the sumo ring, see SUZUKI 2002, 19–21.

the official entrance guarded by local residents and forced their way to the summit (*Asahi Shimbun* 2005a, 28; 2005b, 31).⁸

Yet while instances such as these are high-profile cases, the reality in contemporary Japan is that such rigid spatial divisions based on gender are the exception rather than the rule. Gender divisions still exist in many contexts, but the boundaries are generally more subtle and pliable, as at Ōyama, where the ban against women ended in 1872 and has almost been forgotten. Few reminders of the ban remain visible on the mountain. On one of the less frequented western routes to the summit, a stone post erected in the nineteenth century still marks the prohibition, but on a hiking map near the cable car station a representation of the stone has been crudely pasted over so that it is almost invisible unless one traces the barely visible outline of the Chinese characters. Gender divisions at Ōyama, where many of the contemporary hikers and pilgrims are women, have been hidden from view.

Mountain-opening and Offertory Rites

Eventually, the other members, led by Mr. Ogasawara and Mr. Nakayama, arrived by cable car. The confraternity members, all dressed in the confraternity's white, waist-long jackets, lined up in pairs in front of the last flight of stairs that led to the Outer Shrine. Here the most ritualized aspect of the pilgrimage began, and it was here that my presence really made no impact at all, since the events progressed in a carefully planned fashion. The confraternity marched up the stairs echoing Mr. Ogasawara and Mr. Ōno's enthusiastic chants of *sange*, *sange* with loud intonations of *rokkon shōjō*. This formal ascent had been eagerly anticipated by regional newspapers, which had sent photographers to capture the moment. Once the confraternity had marched through the *torii* at the top of the stairs, the group fell silent again and strolled over to the Ohanakō gate. Here the Shinto priests of the Outer Afuri Shrine had set up a small altar. Mr. Utsumi held a traditional lock, which was kept at the Outer Afuri Shrine during the rest of the year. After letting the last pair of early morning hikers slip through the half-opened gate, Mr. Utsumi, Mr. Ōno, and Mr. Nakayama closed both doors and locked them. The Ohana Confraternity gathered in a half circle around the three leaders, who acted as their representatives, and stood before the small altar, blue cotton cloth wrapped around their foreheads. A Shinto priest performed a purification rite in front of the gate and then turned to wave his staff with paper streamers at the crowd. Mr. Ōno and Mr. Nakayama then jointly unlocked the gate and threw open both doors to reveal a long, steep flight of stairs. The Ōhana Confraternity quickly followed Mr. Ōno and Mr. Ogasawara to the top of the

8. For more on the prohibition against women entering the Ōmine, see SUZUKI 2002, 28–56.

stairs, again alternating chants of *sange*, *sange*, *rokkon shōjō*. Once they arrived at the top of the stairs, they fell silent again, and then turned around to descend to the base of the stairs again. The truncated ascent was a ceremonial enactment of a full ascent to the summit, which had conveniently already been performed by the smaller group during the night. It took place when one would have expected a full ascent to occur, namely after the mountain had been ritually opened for pilgrims. Confraternity members were clearly aware of this fact and joked about it. Mr. Ogasawara said to me with a laugh as he descended: “Barbara, this is a short cut.” Another member who had been one of the seven who had remained behind at the Outer Afuri Shrine at night proudly waved his bell at me and said, tongue in cheek: “Hah, I went to the summit!”

The Ohana Confraternity then moved to the courtyard in front of the shrine, where another purification rite was to be performed in preparation for an offertory ceremony in the worship hall. This event was organized on a much grander scale. The rite was performed or attended by a number of Shrine priests, included the vice-head priest as the officiant. It was sponsored not only by the Ohana Confraternity but also by another confraternity from Yokohama as well as the local parishioners (*ujiko* 氏子) of the Afuri Shrine, whose representatives took their places along with Mr. Ōno, the Ohana Confraternity representative. Each of the priestly officiants and the representatives rinsed their hands and mouths before entering a small, roped-off enclosure and followed the vice-head priest in an offering of *sakaki* 榊 branches on a temporary wooden altar, which was slightly larger than the one during the previous mountain-opening rite. Two of the younger priests then performed another purification rite (*kiyome* 清め) using *sakaki* branches to sprinkle water at the assembled priests, representatives, and the crowd beyond the enclosure.

Now that we had been ritually purified, we followed the priests into the worship hall for an elaborate rite beginning with a lengthy recitation of the names of all those who were present, followed by an offering of various foodstuffs, including fish, grains, sake, and vegetables, at the main altar. Afterwards, the gods were entertained during their symbolic meal with a *kagura* dance called *Yamatomai* 大和舞—a rare dance because it is performed by boys rather than by girls—and then offered more *sakaki* branches by the representatives. The continuous, slow-moving ceremonial music lulled many of the members to sleep so that occasionally loud snores erupted from the audience. Those who remained awake shifted uncomfortably back and forth as their legs turned numb from kneeling on the hardwood floor. Finally, the head-priest appeared and gave a short address to the crowd, in which he thanked the two confraternities and the shrine parishioners for their attendance on this day. While this ritual had been of great importance to the priests of Outer Afuri Shrine, the confraternity members attended it with much less enthusiasm than the mountain-opening rite. Once the head priest had

finished, everybody rose eagerly to stretch their legs and receive a small sip of consecrated rice wine at the side of the hall.⁹

As noted before, the schedule of the rituals, starting with the mountain-opening rite and ending with the offertory ceremony, had been extremely rigid so that my presence—and Mr. Ōnuki’s—had had no impact. It was only during those transitional moments when the schedule left gaps that the effects of our presence were noticeable. As we were waiting in the courtyard in front of the shrine for the Shinto priests to appear, confraternity members strolled idly around engaging in conversation with one another. Eventually one young man and two middle-aged women belonging to the confraternity began to talk about the deities worshipped at the shrine—the first time that anyone had broached the issue. The young man asked the women whether they knew which deities were worshipped at the shrine. In response, the women first said in an amused tone: “What? You don’t know?” but quickly admitted that they had no clue either. One then suggested, “Well then...we should find out” and added, to my surprise, “Let’s ask Barbara.” I really did not want to answer this question. After all I had come to study what they thought about the mountain and not to lecture them on what they ought to believe. I suppose I could have pretended that I had no idea either, but I was doubtful whether they would have believed me. Luckily I spotted Mr. Ōnuki in the crowd and encouraged them to ask the municipal archivist.

As a result, the archivist launched into a short lecture on the various aspects of the Ōyama cult. He covered the identity of the deities—who, according to him, responded to all kinds of concerns, especially rainmaking in times of drought, as was apparent from Ōyama’s alternate name “Rain Falling Mountain.” He also addressed the connection between the male Ōyama deity (or deities) and the female deities of Mt. Fuji and nearby Enoshima. He pointed out that the geography of both featured caves symbolic of the female genitalia, indicating a connection to fertility cults. His explanation was met with surprised interest from his audience. He then shifted to the global significance of sacred mountains and their connection with the Other World, particularly the world of the dead. This, he noted, was particularly clear in the case of Tibetan sky burials. His remarks reflected his familiarity not only with the Ōyama’s history but also with folklore studies on sacred mountains in Japan and around the world. While there had been very little to connect the Ohana Confraternity’s pilgrimage to matters of rainmaking, fertility, or death—other than the mention of Mr. Shimura’s incidental

9. The Ohana Confraternity was not the only pilgrimage association that valued other aspects of their pilgrimage over the rituals held at the Outer Afuri Shrine. The members of one confraternity from Yotsuya, in Tokyo, whom I interviewed in the courtyard before the shrine about ten days later, reacted surprised when I asked whether they would sponsor a *kagura* rite in the worship hall this year. The leader of the group, a strong-minded middle-aged woman, replied: “So is that what’s going on in the worship hall? We never knew.”

death in the spring during the speeches at the dinner party—the confraternity members eagerly nodded in response to Mr. Ōnuki's explanation. Whether they accepted his interpretation was not clear to me, but at least they seemed very interested.

On other occasions, Mr. Ōnuki demonstrated his fascination with folklore and rituals such as the mountain-opening rite. Upon viewing my documentary, he gave his interpretation of what was “really happening” during the mountain-opening rite: the deities that ordinarily reside on the summit of Ōyama were transferred from the summit to the enclosure in the courtyard and then to the worship hall, where they were feasted and entertained. This was a plausible and interesting interpretation, but nowhere during their pilgrimage did any of the Ohana Confraternity members mention that they understood the rite in this way.

Once the elaborate rites were over, a looser atmosphere prevailed among the group. We congregated in the cafeteria below the Outer Afuri Shrine and were served a simple lunch—rice, salted salmon, and a quail egg—from the antique lunchbox that Mr. Ogasawara had showed me and from another just like it, minus the inscription. The old lunchbox had obviously been intended for a much smaller group. After the meal, the confraternity split into smaller groups, as everyone felt the purpose of the pilgrimage had been served. I joined Mr. Ogasawara, his nephew, his grandson and the Nakayama family on a visit to Taisanji, the Buddhist temple dedicated to Fudō Myōō, which we had passed on our nightly hike. The trip was largely motivated by Mr. Ogasawara—the only member to enter the temple and offer a prayer to the Buddhist deity. On several occasions during the pilgrimage, he had mentioned the name of Fudō. He seemed to be the only one who still had an interest in the deity, which had once been so important at the site. Four years later, when I returned to the mountain with the confraternity, Mr. Ogasawara could not join us on the pilgrimage because of illness. As before, the Nakayamas went with me to the temple, but I suspect that this was because I had mentioned that I liked to visit it. At the temple, they both went inside with me. Mrs. Nakayama remarked that to that day she had never set foot inside the temple hall even though she had visited the mountain many times since she was young. It seems again that the group preferred the pattern of relying on a representative—in this case, Mr. Ogasawara—to make a prayer rather than taking individual initiative. Only when Mr. Ogasawara was no longer there with them did the Nakayamas venture into the temple.

Back at the Inn Kageyu, confraternity members drifted randomly into the dining room to partake in a last informal meal, after which they prepared to leave. As they exited through the front door they were given small paper amulets from the Afuri Shrine. Mrs. Ogasawara noted that the amulet would surely help her regain her health. In the past, such amulets were the primary souvenirs for confraternity members to bring back to their communities. Nowadays, Ohana

Confraternity members collect one amulet per person for their own personal use only. The two leaders of the confraternity, however, received large wooden talismans on behalf of their companies to ensure business success. This appears to be an important motivation for the confraternity leadership, which mirrored the company management structure. When asked during a TV interview in 1989 why the group made their yearly pilgrimage, a much younger Mr. Ogasawara, who was then the confraternity leader and president of Miki Kōgyō, responded that it was for business success. The reporter followed up with the question of whether their pilgrimages had had the intended effect. Mr. Ogasawara responded without hesitation that of course they had, while the rest of the confraternity laughed. Their laughter seemed to have been initiated by the assured assertiveness with which Mr. Ogasawara answered a question most of them had not contemplated. During the Ōhana Confraternity pilgrimages that I participated in, the concrete efficacy or purpose of the pilgrimage remained largely unarticulated.

Conclusion

The Ōhana Confraternity embodies typical elements of contemporary Japanese religiosity. There are parallels with Ian Reader's characterization of contemporary Japanese religious values in his *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, such as a



FIGURE 4. The innkeeper has prepared amulets of the Afuri Shrine for the group, which he distributes before everyone leaves. The Nakayamas receive special talismans for business success for their company, Miki Kōgyō, and for healing and family safety for Mr. Ogasawara, Mrs. Nakayama's father, who could not attend the pilgrimage in 2004 because of ill health.

pervasive sense of belonging to the confraternity and an emphasis on action and experience while questions of belief are de-emphasized. Affiliation is not based on individual belief but on professional, household, and personal ties (READER 1991, 1–22). As Winston Davis notes in his analysis of contemporary Japanese religious affiliations, “Japan’s confraternities are based on a rich mixture of motivations and obligations, some of them religious, some secular, but most inseparably religious and secular at the same time” (DAVIS 1992, 30)—which certainly applies to the Ohana Confraternity.

That the confraternity structure mirrors company ties is not just rooted in confraternity traditions at Ōyama, which has had professionally based confra-



FIGURE 5. One talisman for business success has been enshrined on a Shinto altar (*kamidana*) at a company branch of Miki Kōgyō.

ternities for centuries, but it also reflects the typical intertwining of business and religious interests often seen in the post-war period. According to a survey cited by Jan Swyngedouw, while Shinto shrines maintained on company premises are often dedicated to deities commonly associated with business success or to tutelary divinities associated with the profession, a large number of companies also choose local divinities associated with the place where the company was founded or divinities venerated by the company's founder or by the company management (SWYNGEDOUW 1993, 56–58).

The choice of Ōyama as a focus of worship was based on the company management's wishes. Furthermore, while the Ōyama deities were not local divinities in downtown Tokyo, the Ōyama cult has had a strong presence among businesses in the Nihonbashi area where the companies were founded. Swyngedouw aptly characterizes the relationship between business and religious observances. In companies, “the sacredness of [...] production [...] can only be maintained by regular celebrations that glorify the work ethic and strengthen the communal bonds between workers and management. In present-day Japanese companies, recourse to gods and buddhas to symbolize the integration of the community and the labor done in it [...] is increasing. The main actors are [...] primarily the managers and the workers, but their families are also often invited” (SWYNGEDOUW 1993, 67). Swyngedouw's analysis is particularly applicable to the 1980s, when lifetime employment—the motivating factor behind strong, family-like identification with one's company—was still common. In recent years, as lifetime employment is no longer a certainty, the willingness of workers to bond strongly with their companies has been declining—and so has attendance at Ohana Confraternity pilgrimages. In the face of this decline, confraternity boundaries are extended to include temporary members not directly linked to the company, such as female family friends of the leadership, who have the time to spare and bear no strong obligations to another company.

Ōyama's space remains gendered—though not in the form of rigid physical boundaries but due to unspoken social lines of professional and personal affiliation of members, which are reflected in the participation in rites and in the group's leadership structures. For instance, the leaders of the confraternity are all male and will likely be male in the future. Mr. Ogasawara, for example, was succeeded by his son-in-law, Mr. Nakayama, who also succeeded him as company director, and not by his daughter as the leader of the group, even though she had attended the pilgrimage since childhood. The gendered nature of the confraternity leadership is not prescribed by any of the religious institutions of the mountain. Though it is a rare example, I have met a confraternity representing a neighborhood in the Yotsuya area of Tokyo whose leader was a woman. In the case of the Ohana Confraternity, however, the leadership was identical with the company management. Since most of the women in the group had personal

affiliations with the group as family members and family friends of the leaders but not professional ties to the company, it is unlikely that any of them will ever serve as confraternity officers. This gendered pattern of affiliation is not without precedent. In the Tokugawa period, pilgrimage confraternities associated with other sacred sites, such as the Ise Shrines, tended to be limited to men but women could sometimes join the groups' pilgrimages as non-members (VAPORIS 1994, 243). In the Ōhana Confraternity, the loose connection the women have with the two companies is clearly reflected by how they are accommodated in the inn. Rather than maintaining strict boundaries along company lines among the women, they were lodged in one room. While this is partially motivated by practicality due to their small number, it would have been possible to house them in two small rooms rather than one large room. The lack of a clear spatial boundary illustrates that the women were less strongly identified with a particular company but seen as a collective group.

It is through their role as company presidents that Mr. Ōno and Mr. Nakayama can keep the confraternity alive. The disappearance of the membership from Mr. Shimura's company after his death is instructive. Unless the professional successors of Mr. Ōno and Mr. Nakayama also take an interest in the pilgrimage, it is not likely that the group will continue to exist in its current form in the future. The group's leadership is aware of this problem. When the Nakayama's teenage nephew expressed his interest in taking on the leadership of the group after participating in the pilgrimage in 2004, his aunt and uncle greeted his intentions with enthusiasm, but ultimately, he would probably also have to become a leader in his uncle's company to be effective in holding the confraternity together. This, however, is typical of confraternities, which often do not last more than a few generations after the charismatic leader who started the group disappears.

Over the last one hundred and forty years, Ōyama has become more open as male and female hikers scale the slopes throughout the year. However, the site still serves as place of nostalgia in which collective memories are invoked as local residents and pilgrims continually reinterpret the space. In the widest sense, this process also includes the memory of historians (such as the archivist Mr. Ōnuki and myself) who circulate images gleaned from documents and scholarship back to local residents and regional pilgrims. For example, the construction of my narrative of the pilgrimage (as well as Mr. Ōnuki's role in it) has a tendency toward historicization, especially references to early modern history. While this reflects my own inclinations, it was also reinforced by suggestions from some of my colleagues—with whom I shared my documentary project—to place the pilgrimage in a comparative historical context.

Yet the Ohana Confraternity also has a sense of history, much of which is oral and visual. Like other Ōyama confraternities, members sometimes reenact what they see in historical woodblock prints, such as cold-water ablutions in

loincloths. Other confraternities may be even more extreme in their mimetic, performative tendencies. On the most popular days of the summer festival, one can see construction workers strutting around half-naked in loincloths, exposing their tattoos, just as one might frequently see in woodblock prints of the festival from the early modern period. This gives the festival the atmosphere of a carnival where it is acceptable to violate contemporary taboos by calling on traditions. The openly playful manner in which confraternities enact perceived traditions is striking. Other confraternities have some members dress up in clothing reminiscent of the early modern period and carry traditional accoutrements (such as shoulder boxes with offertory rice wine). Openly posing for photographers, some clearly perform for the crowd. According to the municipal archivist, the shoulder box is often empty because there is another confraternity member following a few steps behind and carrying the rice wine in bottles. Thus, ironically, the practice has become a simulacrum of woodblock print images. Yet such performances that nostalgically invoke the past should not be dismissed as irrelevant or misguided.

In recent years, scholars have argued for a positive reevaluation of nostalgia—the longing (*algia*) for home (*nostos*), which was previously viewed as a simplistic misconstruction of the past. They have argued that nostalgia can serve to give meaning to the present and is intimately linked to the construction of identity and collective memory (WENGER 1997, 4; LOWENTHAL 1989, 18–32; BOYM 2001, xiii–xix; WILSON 2005, 21–37). Thus when Ōyama confraternities perform for photographers, this does not mean that the event has lost its meaning for the participants. Similarly, just because restricted ground is no longer observed on Ōyama’s summit and just because the gate-opening rite has become nominal, the rite itself is not meaningless for the Ohana Confraternity members. Its meaning seems to be tied precisely to the nostalgic, playful enactment of tradition.

Winston Davis argues that it is the hierarchical and community-like features of confraternities that are linked to vanishing “traditional patterns of social and economic interaction,” which have contributed to the overall decline in the number of active confraternities (DAVIS 1992, 30). Conversely, one might argue that those confraternities that remain active are able to capitalize exactly on these features as attractions to keep their members involved. As Boym argues, “Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values” (BOYM 2001, 8). Contemporary Japanese society may be in flux and pressured by increasing globalization, yet confraternities invoke a mythic time when local identities were strong and cohesive, when townspeople were the protagonists of a ritual drama, and when workmen identified strongly with their profession.

As William Kelly argues, nostalgia is a common theme in late twentieth-century Japanese middle-class representations of the countryside that is simultaneously

regarded as underdeveloped and backwards and as reflecting a Japanese identity in its truest form. The countryside is both *inaka* (the boonies) and *urusato* (hometown) (KELLY 1986, 611). Ian Reader has shown that Japanese religion often displays a nostalgic tone. Pilgrimages in particular are marketed by appealing to nostalgic themes: the pilgrimage destination is the symbolic *urusato* and pilgrims return to their spiritual hometown (READER 1987, 288–94). Thus the urban Ohana Confraternity returns yearly to their customary inn, their own *urusato* in the idyllic countryside on the foot of Ōyama—even if some members are actually from Kyushu and had never heard of Ōyama before they joined their company in Tokyo.

Yet this nostalgia is clearly playful. Confraternity members are aware that their pilgrimages are partially performative and that they themselves are actors in a spectacle. They perform for tourists, other pilgrims, and the media who engage in their own forms of nostalgia. The Ohana Confraternity's leadership was clearly aware of the societal changes that were affecting their group. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why they were happy to accommodate me as an outsider. They recognized that a (foreign) researcher could serve as a means for revitalization by becoming a catalyst for the adoption of “traditional” rituals or by rekindling interest among confraternity members. In the end, perhaps it was the scholars—including me, Mr. Ōnuki and some of the colleagues who viewed the documentary—who were most enthralled by nostalgia. We were longing for a time when the mountain actually required opening, when there was rice wine in the shoulder box, and when pilgrims actually came from the Nihonbashi area, understood the pilgrimage chants, and knew the gods they had come to worship.

REFERENCES

AMBROS, Barbara

2008 *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The Ōyama Cult and Religious Religion in Early Modern Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.

Asahi Shimbun 朝日新聞

2005a Joseira sannin, tozan o kyōkō: Kinsei no Ōminesan 女性ら3人、登山を強行: 禁制の大峰山. (Osaka edition, November 4): 28.

2005b Nyonin kinsei, seidōitsusei shōgai wa? Kyō 30 nin ga Ōminesan tozan e, jimoto “enryo o” 女人禁制、性同一性障害は?きょう30人が大峰山登山へ、地元「遠慮を」。Osaka edition (November 3): 31.

BOYM, Svetlana

2001 *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

DAVIS, Winston

1992 *Japanese Religion and Society*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

EADE, John, and Michael J. SALLNOW, eds.

- 1991 *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. London: Routledge.

ELIADE, Mircea

- 1961 *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harper and Row.

HARVEY, David

- 1996 *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

HORI, Ichirō 堀一郎

- 1966 Mountains and their importance for the idea of the other world in Japanese folk religion. *History of Religion* 6/1: 1–23.

IDA Takafumi 飯田剛史

- 2002 *Zainichi Korean no shūkyō to matsuri: Minzoku to shūkyō no shakaigaku* 在日コリアンの宗教と祭り—民族と宗教の社会学. Tokyo: Sekai Shisōsha.

ISEHARA SHISHI HENSHŪ I'INKAI 伊勢原市史編集委員会, eds.

- 1994 *Isehara shishi 5: Shiryō hen: Zoku Ōyama* 伊勢原市史5: 資料編—続大山. Isehara: Iseharashi.

Japan Times

- 2004a Majority back ban on women in sumo. May 8, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/sp20040508a1.html>. (Accessed 17 December 2007)
- 2004b Osaka Governor barred from dohyo. February 19, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ss20040219a1.html>. (Accessed 17 December 2007)
- 2004c Women, heritage and holy places. May 16., <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ed20040516a1.html>. (Accessed 17 December 2007)
- 2005 Barring Governor from “dohyo” not pro-sexism: Court. August 31, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20050831a3.html>. (Accessed 17 December 2007)

KELLY, William

- 1986 Rationalization and nostalgia: Cultural dynamics of new middle-class Japan. *American Ethnologist* 13/4: 603–18.

LANE, Belden

- 2001 Giving voice to place: Three models for understanding American sacred space. *Religion and American Culture* 11/1: 53–81.

LOWENTHAL, David

- 1989 Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't. In *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, 18–32. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

MATSUOKA Takashi 松岡 俊

- 1995 *Edo no sankeikō: Chōtō to kōchūfuda ni miru reijō shinkō* 江戸の参詣講—挑灯と講中札にみる霊場信仰. Hadano: Hadanoshi.

NOTEHELPER, Fred G.

- 2001 *Japan Through American Eyes: The Journal of Francis Hall, 1859–1866*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

READER, Ian

- 1987 Back to the future: Images of nostalgia and renewal in a Japanese religious context. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14: 287–303.
- 1991 *Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2003 Chance, fate, and undisciplined meanderings. In *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*, ed. Patricia G. Steinhoff, Victoria Lyon Bestor, and Theodore C. Bestor, 89–108. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

SCHNELL, Scott

- 2006 Conducting fieldwork on Japanese religions. In *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, ed. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson, 381–91. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

SUZUKI Masataka 鈴木正崇

- 2002 *Nyonin kinsei* 女人禁制. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.

SWYNGEDOUW, Jan

- 1993 Religion in contemporary Japanese society. In *Religion and Society in Modern Japan*, ed. Mark Mullins, Paul Swanson, and Shimazono Susumu, 49–72. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.

TENAKA Myōōtarō Kagemoto 手中明王太郎影元

- 1992 *Ōyama miyadaiku Myōōtarō nikki* 大山宮大工明王太郎日記, vol. 1. Yamato: Tenaka Tadashi.
- 1993 *Ōyama miyadaiku Myōōtarō nikki* 大山宮大工明王太郎日記, vol. 2. Yamato: Tenaka Tadashi.

TWEED, Thomas

- 2002 On moving across: Translocative religion and the interpreter's position. *Journal of the Academy of Religion* 70/2: 253–77.

VAPORIS, Constantine Nomikos

- 1994 *Breaking Barriers: Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

WANG Wei 王維

- 2001 Chūkagai ni okeru saishi, geinō no sōshutsu to kakyō esunishiti no saihen: Nagasaki. Kōbe, Yokohama o hikaku shite 中華街における祭祀・芸能の創出と華僑エスニシティの再編—長崎・神戸・横浜を比較して. In *Ajia imin no esunishiti to shūkyō* アジア移民のエスニシティと宗教, ed. Yoshihara Kazuo 吉原和男 and Peter Knecht, 101–35. Tokyo: Fūkyōsha.

WENGER, Beth

- 1997 Memory as identity: The reinvention of the Lower Eastside. *American Jewish History* 85/1: 3–27.

WILSON, Janelle

- 2005 *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.

WIJERS-HASEGAWA, Yumi.

- 2004 Kii mountain range gambit: UNESCO Heritage bid challenged over gender bias. *Japan Times*, May 1, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20040501fi.html>. (Accessed 17 December 2007)

YASUIKE Hiroyuki 安池尋幸

- 1992 Chūsei kinsei ni okeru Edo naikai tosen no tenkai 中世・近世における江戸内海渡船の展開. In *Ōyama shinkō* 大山信仰, ed. Tamamuro Fumio 圭室文雄, 252–65. Tokyo: Yūzankaku.