

REVIEW ARTICLE

Religion, Society, and Environment in a Kyushu Village

Carina ROTH

Anne Bouchy, ed., *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 22 (2013): *Le vivre ensemble à Sasaguri, une commune de Kyūshū. Dans l'entrelacs des dynamiques du dedans et du dehors—Études d'ethnologie du Japon. Living together in a Kyūshū Town*. Kyoto: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 650 pages. Paperback, €40,00. ISBN 13-978-2-85539-174-8. ISSN 0766-1177.

THIS EXTENSIVE special issue of *Les Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, published by the Kyoto office of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFO), is the result of an impressive collective enterprise that spread over several years (2004 to 2010). It is entirely dedicated to the multilateral and transdisciplinary study of Sasaguri 篠栗, a municipality in northern Kyushu. Beyond a synthetic presentation at the beginning of the volume, the publication encloses eight in-depth essays, counting between fifty and one hundred pages each. Six of the eight articles are translated from the Japanese. The endeavor is as ambitious as it is innovative in many respects: it is the first such publication in French, and associates close French-Japanese scholarly collaboration with the population of Sasaguri and the local documentation center. In another aspect of the project—not yet implemented—a database comprising archives and other documents should be set up and made accessible on the EFO website.

As explained by Anne Bouchy, who took charge not only of the immense task of editing a research project on that scale but also of the quasi-totality of the translations, this volume is the result of a shared ethnological reflection. The project initially sprung forth from one of the quadrennial French-Japanese

Carina ROTH is a visiting scholar at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

research programs of the EFEO (“Between ‘Inside’ and ‘Outside’: Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Japan”). Based on six annual on-site investigations that lasted between ten days and three weeks, it included the participation of scholars, their students, and the population of Sasaguri. The choice of this location is based on a common denominator of interest among the scholars involved in the project: that it is focused on the religious aspects of a given place. Sasaguri, with its replicate circuit of the eighty-eight Shikoku temples and its aura of a “region of spiritual powers” (*reinō chitai* 靈能地帯) represented an ideal site for observation. The internal cohesion of the project, already firmly established through the fact that all articles address the same relatively small geographical area, is further enhanced by a reflection based on the relational dynamics taking place between the *inside* and the *outside* in a variety of aspects. Far from being considered as airtight categories, these two sides of the same coin are perceived as complementary, non exclusive, and indivisible entities (7). Moreover, their use as hermeneutical tools allows for widely differing objects of enquiry to be brought to a common measurement.

The volume is divided into three parts, each one of which corresponds to a different approach. The first two essays establish the “socio-cultural, historical and environmental context.” Suzuki Masataka, in the first of two articles, examines the strong sense of community-identity in Wakasugi 若杉, where one of the two main religious sites of Sasaguri, the Taiso Shrine 太祖宮, is located. Anne Bouchy, in the following essay, describes the mountain forests (*yama* 山) and the intercommunal relationships with regard to the environment in Sasaguri. The second part of the project is dedicated to the different and varied “textures of religious themes.” Mori Hiroko analyzes the history of the Taiso Shrine cult on Mount Wakasugi, whereas Nakayama Kazuhisa interrogates that of the replicate of the Shikoku pilgrimage and its eighty-eight temples route, which represents the main attraction of Sasaguri as a religious site. In his second of two articles in the volume, Suzuki Masataka examines Nanzōin 南藏院, the temple that opens up the Sasaguri pilgrimage circuit, and the various strategies its successive head priests devised to renew and expand their audience. Charlotte Lamotte concludes this section with an essay on the relationship between individuals and their religious concerns through the lens of the link between followers and the myriad statues that characterize the Sasaguri pilgrimage. The third and last part of the study delves into the “heart of social issues,” and is devoted to the history of houses (*ie*) and women in Sasaguri. First, Ishikawa Toshiko proposes a study of the evolution of the house both as a family home and as a place of generational transmission at both symbolic and religious levels. Then, Kanda Yoriko portrays a plurality of women, presented by way of a narrative ethnography that renders a vivid image of two different layers of the female population of Sasaguri. Kanda

describes on the one hand the lives of women linked to the universe of Buddhist temples, and on the other of women who lived in the world of coal mines.

Socio-cultural and Environmental Context

SUZUKI Masataka 鈴木正崇: Continuity and Transformation in Local Society: Customs and Traditions in the Village of Wakasugi [Continuités et transformations de la société locale – Le fait coutumier dans le village de Wakasugi] (Sasaguri, Fukuoka), 27–113 (trans., Anne Bouchy).

This first article traces the history of the village of Wakasugi from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology. Grounding his analysis on *engi* 縁起 (foundation narratives) written between the sixteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Suzuki starts by describing the “process of historicization, of transposing a fictive story into authentic history” (45) that operates in such texts. He highlights elements of continuity, such as the sacralization of mountains and water, the integration into Buddhism of places of origin, the description of relationships to external and foreign, as well as to local, society. As a counterpoint, he demonstrates the structural evolution that took place within the different religious institutions of the municipality in reaction to social and political changes, especially in the Meiji period, and until today. Through its examination of *engi* and chronicles, of the reconstruction of festivals and rituals after Meiji, and of the transformations that happened in the wake of the modernization of society, this study demonstrates the mobility and malleability of cultural transmission in a local community over an extended period of time.

Anne BOUCHY: Community-Based Relations in Forest Areas Between External Politics and Internal Strategies: Mountain-Forests in Sasaguri [Les rapports communautaires aux espaces forestiers entre politiques du dehors et stratégies du dedans: les montagnes-forêts de Sasaguri], 115–201.

The general scope of this study is a reflection on mountain and forest areas and their changing role in the village society of Sasaguri and beyond. The focal point of the essay is the notion of “village mountain” (*satoyama* 里山), and the use of “mountain forests” as resources. Over the course of a few decades, these areas, which were adjacent to inhabited communities, have lost their role as source and stock of raw material (fodder, manure, fuel, building timber, livelihood and subsistence products, pharmacopeia, and so forth). By deconstructing what is attributed to “nature” and to “cultural heritage” with regard to *satoyama*, Bouchy offers a viewpoint that integrates the economic, social, and cultural aspects of a community. She examines several local management options for forest areas (cooperatives and communal management). The essay concludes on a slightly different note, with the description of a new direction in the development

of forest areas, that of “forest therapy” (*foresuto serapii* フォレストセラピー), which Bouchy defines as the “most contemporary form taken by the socialization of forests” (191). Drawing on the local context of Sasaguri, this study demonstrates that forests, often considered as the very paradigm of “nature,” are in reality strongly anthropized spaces when in close relation to villages.

Textures of Religious Themes

MORI Hiroko 森 弘子: Mount Wakasugi, Its Shrine, and *Shugen* in the History of Kyushu and East Asia [Le mont Wakasugi, son sanctuaire et le shugen dans l'histoire de Kyūshū et de l'Asie de l'Est], 203–67 (trans., Anne Bouchy).

Mori's study is based on a meticulous search through the archives of the Ishii'bō 石井坊 temple. She uses this wealth of material both to retrace the cultic history of Wakasugi and to shed light on the role of Ishii'bō in a regional context. The first half of the essay centers on links between the cult of Mount Wakasugi and related cults situated in close geographical proximity (Munakata 宗像 and Hachiman 八幡), as well as on their relation with those of Kumano *shugen* 熊野修験, explaining their interaction and partial fusion. Most of the articles in this volume touch upon the tradition of Shugendō 修験道, the “Way to Powers through Practice,” as it is historically very present in Sasaguri. In the case of Mori's essay, this religious current centering on ascetic practices in the mountains represents the core of the analysis. The second half of the article is dedicated to the description and analysis of *shugen* rites and mountain entries, of the relationship between mountain- and village *yamabushi* 山伏 (one of the denominations given to *shugen* practitioners), as well as to the interactions between political authorities and *shugen* organization(s) at the local, regional, and supra-regional levels. The majority of sources are from the Edo period, before the Meiji Restoration. The wealth of the archives allows the author to give a vivid image of the balance of power between different social, political, and religious entities.

NAKAYAMA Kazuhisa 中山和久: The Dynamics of Creation, Replication and Decline of Pilgrimage Sites [La dynamique de création, réplique et déclin des lieux de pèlerinage – Le nouveau pèlerinage de Shikoku à Sasaguri], 269–350 (trans., Anne Bouchy).

Since its creation in the middle of the nineteenth century, the new Shikoku pilgrimage at Sasaguri is the main attraction of the site. Early replications of the Shikoku pilgrimage were attested already in the twelfth century, but the rising popularity of the Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師 cult in the nineteenth century triggered a dramatic increase in replicas of the eighty-eight stations of the Shikoku pilgrimage throughout Japan. The Sasaguri pilgrimage, founded in 1835 by nun Jinin 慈忍 and completed in 1855, developed in correlation with the economic

and commercial expansion of the region. The latter was due to the exponential boom in the coal industry within the context of the economic and military reinforcement of the country at the end of the nineteenth century. Nakayama's study examines the development of pilgrimage under four different dynamics: creation of the pilgrimage (genesis); genesis of the pilgrim (reception); transformation of the pilgrim through the pilgrimage site (action); and transformation of the pilgrimage site by the pilgrims (re-creation).

SUZUKI Masataka: *Modernization of Buddhist Temples and Local Society* [Modernisation des temples bouddhiques et société locale – Le Nanzō-in de Sasaguri], 351–421 (trans., Ignacio Quiros, Iyanaga Nobumi, and Anne Bouchy).

By charting the history of Nanzō'in through the successive generations of its head priests, Suzuki portrays not only the evolution of a given Buddhist temple and the spiritual needs it attends to, but also the way in which the personality of the monks leading a religious institution inflects its development. In the case of Nanzō'in, the four head priests who led it over the course of the twentieth century to this day are exceptionally dynamic figures, and have each induced solutions as ingenuous as they are varied in order to ensure the survival and development of their temple. Nanzō'in is the point of departure and head temple of the eighty-eight *fudasho* 札所 (lit. “places [to deposit] wooden [votive] slips”) that mark out the Sasaguri pilgrimage. In order to counter the decline of the pilgrimage in the 1990s, Hayashi Kakujō 林 覚乗, head priest of Nanzō'in since 1980, transformed the site from a temple specializing in on-demand rites (*kitō-dera* 祈禱寺, lit. “prayer-temple”) to a center for funerary and ancestor rites.

Charlotte LAMOTTE: *Living Stones: Birth and Death of Statues in a Pilgrimage Town* [La pierre qui vit – Naissance et mort des statues dans une ville de pèlerinage] (Sasaguri, Fukuoka, Japon), 427–72.

Lamotte explores the various modes through which a dialogue takes place between a material object seen as sacred and a person worshipping it. The primary interrogation of this study comes from an observation made to the author by one of her contact: “Even if these two statues were made by the same sculptor and on the same model, this one is beautiful, whereas the other one is ordinary” (424). Lamotte's goal is to examine the relationship between cult objects and the people who venerate them. Originally, each of the eighty-eight stations of the Sasaguri pilgrimage held one main icon, but over time, all grew to host a multitude of other statues, often groups of statues, so that the site is particularly well adapted to a reflection on the multiple modalities of interaction between statues and followers, sculptors, monks, officiants, and so forth. All have in common the transmission of an affective, or emotional, part of the person into the statue,

which becomes the receptacle both of a divine (or other-worldly) and a human presence. Beyond the detailed description and analysis of the “opening-the-eyes” (*kaigen* 開眼) and “soul-withdrawing” rites (*tama nuki* 霊抜き) through which a Buddhist statue, image, or object are transformed into icons, Lamotte also observes that part of the personality of an officiating monk is conveyed to the statue, just as does the devotees’ intention (*nen* 念): the statue is a transfer-object allowing or facilitating multivalent exchanges through the creation of a fusion between a subtle entity, the object itself, and the intentions of followers (464–65).

At the Heart of Social Issues

ISHIKAWA Toshiko 石川稔子: Annual Rites of Houses and Local Communities in Transformation [Les rites annuels de la maison et des communautés locales en transformation – Intérieur et extérieur des lieux de vie communautaires], 473–546 (trans., Anne Bouchy).

In contrast to the other articles of the volume, which all deal with exterior socio-religious space, this study examines the transformations in rituals within the house understood as family home (*ie* 家) over the course of the twentieth century. Demonstrating the passage from men to women as ritual actors after World War II, Ishikawa matches this phenomenon with the loss of an intrinsic link between houses and professional activity. Another corollary of this change is a growing tendency toward weaker religious and cultural dimensions of rites. Even when the context is clearly dedicated to the cult of a religious figure, such rites are more and more perceived by participants as an occasion for collective festivities (500): annual festival for the tutelary shrine, for the grain-god, for the *o-bon* festival honoring the dead (which was renamed “summer festival” at the end of the 1980s), and so forth. Finally, Ishikawa notes a strong displacement of rituals from inside of houses to external locations (restaurants, hot springs, and so forth). On the one hand, the interior of the house has become a place devoted to the realm of ordinary life (522). On the other hand, annual rites have turned into an occasion for festive reunions, which now represent their main attraction at the cost of most of their cultural aspects. The trivialization of festive activities (483) and their transformation into commonplace pursuits also entails the integration of “new festivities” (birthdays, mother and father’s day, and so forth) at the expense of traditional rites associating cult and community-based meals (523).

KANDA Yoriko 神田より子: Women in Sasaguri: In the Depth of Religiosity and Secularity [Femmes de Sasaguri – Au fond du religieux et à l’ubac du séculier], 547–606 (trans., Anne Bouchy).

The last essay of the collection is dedicated to a series of portraits of women

examined from two different approaches: the relationship of women to the Sasaguri pilgrimage and the role of women in coal mines. Kanda first discusses the four generations of Nanzō'in wives since the temple was transferred from Mount Kōya 高野山 to Sasaguri in 1899. Then she investigates the life of Shōzaki Ryōsei 庄崎良清, the charismatic head priest of Dainichiji 大日時 (who is mentioned in several of the articles in the volume), and of two other wives of head priests. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the world of coal mines, and in particular to the sulphurous personality of Fujita Kototome 藤田小女姫, a specialist in divination, and her link to prostitution. Kanda's spectrum is large, and the narrative follows the rhythm of the women's discourse, while complementing it with precise and detailed information on the historical context, especially when discussing life at the coal mines. This succession of portraits, as well as the inscription of these women in the local and regional community, is a beautiful and unexpected way to round off this vast panorama on Sasaguri as a reservoir, but also a laboratory, of religious activities situated at the junction of pilgrimage, funerary rites, charismatic practices, and eco-spirituality.

The avowed goal of this study is, on the one hand, to “shed light on the way in which social, political, and economical interweaving both format and upset the internal and external dimensions of a local community” (117), and on the other hand to “reflect upon the relationship between society and the natural environment” (119). At the end of the 650 pages of the volume, both objectives have been fully achieved. As a matter of fact, this special issue is a singular and pleasingly anachronistic publication in terms of its length, the profundity of treatment of its subject, and the great care with which a shared base for reflection has been set up. The tremendous tasks of translating and editing this very long volume were for their most part entrusted to one single person (Anne Bouchy), and thus the result is endowed with a rare degree of homogeneity and coherence.

The choice of the notions of “internal” and “external” as a common denominator may appear artificial, and discussion of this aspect has been omitted in the present review. However, through its role as a matrix of reflection, the choice of this conceptual horizon certainly contributed to the cohesion of the whole. Moreover, given the length of the project itself, the researchers were part and parcel of these inside/outside dynamics, as they became over time so-called “inside-foreigners” (17). The length of the chapters allows for exploration of the themes over a long period of time and authorizes a breadth in treatment that is rarely encountered within the frame of a collection of articles. Each essay may be compared to a medium-length film delving into one of the aspects of Sasaguri as a religious site of tremendous richness and variety. In the course of the essays, a kaleidoscopic image of the place creates itself, thanks to the fact that the various actors of the site—both persons and locations—often appear in more

than one chapter, and are each time represented under a different light. If I could express one regret it would be the absence of a truly complete map of the region, which could have acted as a common reference for the whole volume, and would have successfully complemented the more specific maps and diagrams included in each chapter. It is impossible to render justice to the richness of this volume within the frame of a review. Its length in itself is an obstacle that is more than rewarding to overcome. Finally, this special issue reflects the growing and welcome interest for Kyushu in a number of fields in the humanities.