

Inari Pilgrimage

Following One's Path on the Mountain

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This article provides an example of contemporary pilgrimage practices in Japan by focusing on the Inari pilgrimage on Inari Mountain in Fushimi, Kyoto. Inari Mountain provides the most popular venue for Inari pilgrimage, offering a multitude of Inari shrines and the opportunity to establish one's own pilgrimage path. After a brief survey of historical pilgrimage records on the mountain, this study focuses on two groups observed by the author, in order to illustrate how the pilgrimage is individualized, giving the pilgrims an opportunity to express their own personalized Inari beliefs. The individualization modeled by these Inari pilgrimages calls into question generalizations regarding the sense of "communitas" that is often identified with the liminality of the pilgrimage.

UNLIKE HISTORICAL PILGRIMAGE ROUTES that in some way connect to the life and death of the founder of the religion (TURNER and TURNER 1978, p. 33), or those that transport the pilgrim "by the mimesis of symbolic action" through the realms of existence and states of spiritual death and rebirth (BLACKER 1975, p. 208), the pilgrimage that centers on Inari Mountain 稲荷山 in Fushimi 伏見, Kyoto, has neither an historical nor a symbolic narrative that gives it shape.¹ It takes shape differently for each pilgrim, depending on the particular route followed through the dense mountain of symbols. It may be that there was in the past one or more coherent narrative, which has eroded over time from a rich rite of spiritual passage to a test of physical stamina in which the doing is emphasized more than the meaning.² Or, it may be that there never was a prescribed format, and the pilgrimage tradition developed in similar fashion to that of the rock altar tradition—

¹ This article is based on fieldwork conducted from September 1980 to June 1991.

² See BLACKER's description of this process in the Shugendo mountain pilgrimages of Omine and Haguro (1975, pp. 217-18, 233-34).

through spontaneous popular practice.³

Additionally, unlike Buddhist pilgrimage in Japan to temples of Kannon 観音, Fudō Myōō 不動, or Kōbō 弘法 Daishi involving routes that form a circuit between a set number of temples, Inari pilgrimage takes place *within* rather than *between* Inari shrines. Although there are 40,000 registered Inari shrines, none seem to be linked by (specifically Inari) pilgrimage routes.⁴ This perhaps may signify (as I argued earlier; see SMYERS 1996) that the personalization of Inari has obviated the more general form of this kami. That is, because people tend to worship their own individualized form of Inari, they have little reason to worship some other form in another place, which may even be seen as someone else's Inari. The point that each pilgrim participates in somewhat set features of the pilgrimage but brings to it highly personal understandings seems to be a given in pilgrimage studies;⁵ this needs to be emphasized in the context of the study of Japanese religions, which has tended until recently to focus on shared rather than personal levels of description.⁶

This article will describe the key features of Inari pilgrimage, focusing on practices at the oldest site of Inari worship, Fushimi Inari Mountain in Kyoto. After a brief survey of early pilgrimage records, we will focus on contemporary pilgrimage traditions and the particular ways the sacred mountain and its sacra are interpreted by different individuals and groups performing the pilgrimage. The reproduction of Inari Mountain itself or some combination of its sacra at other Inari shrines and temples is described. Finally, I argue that the liminality of pilgrimage need not take the form of "communitas," perhaps particularly in societies that stress the ideal of group cooperation as normative, where pilgrimage may instead provide the time and space for solitude and individual needs.

³ I think the latter possibility is more likely. The rock altars, *otsuka* お塚, are stones with various individualized names of Inari carved into the front at which devotees worship. They began to be secretly set up on the mountain in the early Meiji period and finally became an accepted part of Inari worship after a decade of priestly resistance proved futile. See SMYERS 1996 for additional details.

⁴ Tamatsukuri Inari Shrine 玉造稲荷神社 in Osaka is on a Kannon pilgrimage route (it previously had a Kannon *dō* 観音堂 mentioned in a play by Chikamatsu) and Toyokawa 豊川 Inari (the temple Myōgon-ji 妙嚴寺) is on both the *Tōkai Hyakkannon reijo* 東海百観音霊場 and *Tōkai Sanjūroku Fudōson reijo* 東海三十六不動尊霊場 pilgrimage routes.

⁵ See, for example, BARBER 1991, pp. 1-6 and 151, and CRUMRINE and MORINIS 1991, p. 16.

⁶ See Smyers (n.d.) for an extended discussion of this idea in the context of Inari worship. ANDERSON and MARTIN (1997) have contributed significantly to this theme by detailing the great diversity that underlay the reasons for participation in a monthly *mizuko kuyō* 水子供養, though these reasons were never discussed among the women themselves.

The Pilgrimage

The following is a brief description of the main features of the sacred mountain at Fushimi, a kind of generic Inari pilgrimage. I will subsequently give two examples of the particular ways two groups did this pilgrimage, and the meanings they associated with particular places.

The pilgrim starts at the foot of the mountain, in the midst of elegant red buildings housing the five kami of Fushimi Inari Shrine and a number of other deities. Most visitors to the shrine wash their hands and rinse out their mouths in the stone basin just outside the main gate, a symbolic purification before approaching the kami. People usually worship at the main sanctuary, and may request a formal prayer service (*gokitō* 御祈祷) from the priests. This is the formal, institutionalized part of the Inari shrine, which some pilgrims ignore, while others chat with priests and feel quite at home. Next the pilgrim heads behind these buildings toward the mountain. Several huge red *torii* 鳥居 indicate that one is passing into still more sacred space. Suddenly, at *Senbon-dorii* 千本鳥居, the path is covered with so many red *torii* that it is like a tunnel, a kind of birth canal from which the pilgrim is reborn onto the sacred space of the kami's mountain. The first opening in the tunnel is at the *Okusha* 奥社, a subshrine already



1925 map of Fushimi Inari Mountain showing the pilgrimage paths and major sacra.

much different in appearance from the more carefully controlled symbols at the main shrine below. Here is a rich array of several varieties of votive plaques with fox pictures, miniature banners, the “heavy-light rocks” (*omo-karu ishi* 重軽石) for divination, and a billboard with a stylized map of the rest of the mountain. The pilgrim turns left and heads up the mountain path, not a tunnel now, though still covered by numerous *torii*, which leads upward and deeper into the kami’s world.

As the path winds upward, various rock altar (*otsuka*) clusters begin to appear on the right, and at the end of a long stairway is a pond and the first tea-

house. The path continues upward through the dense cedar forest, passing various altar clusters perched on the steep hillside. At “Four Crossroads” (*Yotsutsuji* 四つ辻), the pilgrim suddenly sees a panorama of the secular world below and far behind: Kyoto laid out in its Chinese-derived grid pattern of streets, intersected with train tracks and highways, full of high-rise buildings. The contrast between the gray grid below and the cool, green, quiet sacred mountain on which the pilgrim stands is striking.

Many people stop at this point, but the circumambulation of the three peaks takes place from here, in a loop that leads back to the Four Crossroads. People tend to walk in a counterclockwise direction, keeping the sacred peaks to their left side. Here, there are far fewer people on the path, and if the pilgrim is not in a group, she may walk for some distance before meeting another person. On this path are



The divinatory *omo-karu ishi* at Fushimi Inari, one of the “Seven Mysterious Traditions” of the mountain.

thousands of rock altars, the seven sacred spaces where Inari was first worshipped, and several small waterfalls in which people conduct austerities. The pilgrim reaches the Third Peak (Sannomine 三の峰), then the Second Peak (Ninomine 二の峰), and finally the First Peak (Ichinomine 一の峰), in some sense the climax of the pilgrimage: literally the high point. Then she passes the place associated with the miraculous assistance of Inari in forging the emperor's sword, and a series of rock altars associated with the healing functions of Inari: altars for coughs, sickness, and medicine. The pilgrim, if so inclined, can detour off to the right for austerities at the "Pure Bright Waterfall" (Seimeitaki 清明瀧), with its own large building for changing and eating.⁷ Finally, the path winds back past more rock altars and some large cedar trees, which symbolize Inari's manifestation in the grandeur of nature, and the pilgrim arrives back at the crossroads, having completed the sacred circle, austerities, and purification. Now the pilgrim returns to the world, usually in a rapid descent down the back road, past more sacred rock altars and people sweating on the way up. At the bottom, the last stop is often a brief prayer at Sanba 産婆 Inari, "Midwife Inari," where the devotee has spiritually come to term and is reborn into the mundane world.

Most of the pilgrimage traditions of Inari Mountain are not unique to Inari but can be found in folk practice in other settings. Divinatory rocks, traditions of seven mysteries, and customs based on unusual natural forms permeate the lore of other sacred sites. The sacred customs of the mountain traditionally included a number based on its natural features. Ceders (*sugi* 杉, see below) were used in divination and as a talisman. Clay from Inari Mountain was used to make some of the vessels for rituals such as the *mimidoki* 耳土器 used at the Ōyamasai 大山祭. The famous Fushimi *ningyō* 人形 were traditionally crafted of this clay, which provided part of their efficacy when used ritually. Water from a certain spring on the mountain (at the Chōja-sha 長者社) was used by blacksmiths because of its purity. Pilgrims also tend to engage in divination or special prayers based on one or more of the "Seven Mysterious Traditions of Inari Yama" (*Inari yama no nana fushigi* 稲荷山の七不思議), three of which are based on natural features of the mountain. These traditions are:⁸

⁷ It is also equipped with *futon* bedding, and people can make arrangements with the shrine to stay here overnight for weeks at a time, depending on the extent of their austerities.

⁸ It should be noted that priests were of varying opinions about the legitimacy of such traditions. Some were completely negative and disparaging, others respected the historical importance of the traditions, and still others seemed to regard them as still viable. Most pilgrims knew some, but not all, of the traditions.

1. Omo-karu ishi. At Inari Mountain this form of rock divination is performed at the Okusha. The pilgrim faces two stone lanterns with removable top portions, makes a small monetary offering, and poses a question. He then rubs his hands all over the jewel-shaped stone, and lifts the top of the lantern three times, rubbing it between liftings. If it feels light, the answer is favorable, but if heavy, negative. This element from Inari Mountain is found at many other Inari sites.
2. *Neagari (no) matsu* 根上り松. The meaning of the “Raised Root Pine” comes from wordplay. The tree received this name because its roots (*ne* 根) rise up (*agaru* 上がる) about three feet out of the earth. *Ne-agari* is a homonym for “request (*negai* 願い) goes up” and also “prices (*nedan* 値段) go up,” so prayer here is seen as particularly efficacious, especially for business people. A different interpretation has it that this site is beneficial for those with sore lower backs. Pilgrims may light a candle and place it in a rack; many make a small monetary offering before rubbing the root vigorously and passing under it, sometimes several times. The origin of this site demonstrates the power of popular worship. According to a priest, in the mid-1940s or 1950s, it was already a dead tree that a worker was sent to cut down. He cut off the top half, but when he came back to complete the job, someone had placed a small red *torii* in front of the tree, thus rendering it sacred and preventing its further destruction. The shrine later added cement to the root to keep it from disintegrating altogether.
3. *Kodama ga ike* 小玉ヶ池. The mysterious property of Echo Pond is that if one has lost someone dear and comes here and claps loudly, the echo will return from the direction in which the lost person can be found.
4. *Oseki san* おせきさん. This form of Inari is said to be able to cure coughs, and at his rock altar is a mailbox. People send requests to have coughs cured on postcards from all over Japan addressed to “Oseki Inari, Inari Mountain, Fushimi,” and the priests deliver them to this mailbox. Another tradition is to take a votive bib from here when a request is made, and to make and return a new one when it is granted.
5. *Ninaigi* 担い木. This is also a natural tree on Inari’s mountain, fallen over at an angle. People who have stiff shoulders from carrying (*ninau* 担う) things come and rub them under this inclined tree (*ki* 木), which is polished smooth as a result.



Neagari matsu, the “Raised Root Pine” on Inari Mountain, Kyoto. Pilgrims vigorously rub the root, then pass under it several times as a form of prayer.

6. *Osamba san no rōsoku* お産婆さんの蠟燭. The tradition at Midwife Inari is to light a candle and pray until it is burned down to a stub. If this stub is lit when a woman is giving birth, the baby will be born in the time it takes the candle to burn out.
7. *Ohitaki no moeato* お火焚の燃え後. The charred remains of the cedar boughs and wood from the sacred fires in November are believed to work as strong medicine that can cure colds and even cancer.

Other traditions of worship on Inari’s mountain (again, also found at other places) are tying votive bibs on the fox (and other) statues, offering food, dedicating large or small *torii*, lighting candles, making *segyō* 施行 offerings (sometimes for the foxes) during the coldest season, and offering *nobori* 幟 banners with the kami’s name. Offering small banners (*konobori* 小幟) in large numbers was also practiced; each small prayer flag made of paper had the name of the kami (i.e., Suehiro ōkami 末広大神), the name and age of the petitioner, and the request (e.g., complete recovery from sickness).

Historical Records

Since all shrine records were lost during the Ōnin War (1467–1477) there are few sources to provide us with information about pilgrimage to Fushimi Inari in earlier times. However, it is clear from references in various literary sources that pilgrimages of various types have been made to Inari Mountain since at least the middle of the Heian period. The earliest record appears in the *Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記 written by the year 995, covering the years 959–974 in the life of a Fujiwara noblewoman of unknown name (SEIDENSTICKER 1964, pp. 8–9).

In the Ninth Month, taking advantage of the autumn weather and scenery, I made a secret pilgrimage to bring my situation to the attention of the gods. I left an offering of cloth with a poem attached at each of three branch shrines. First at the lower: “If their power extends even here to the base, let us have a favorable sign from the gods of the mountain.” At the middle: “I look to these cedars for the profit of my trip, for a sign that my long years of prayer to Inari have been heard.” And at the upper: “I have climbed with great effort from god to god, but I do not think that my fortunes have climbed the heights with me.” (SEIDENSTICKER 1964, p. 61)

This text shows that the cedar was particularly associated with Inari by now, and that even court ladies (usually hidden behind screens in the palace) climbed the mountain here on pilgrimage.

Sei Shōnagon mentions an even more rigorous form of pilgrimage in her *Makura no sōshi* 枕の草子 (c. 1000). She describes meeting a fervent believer, a court lady who made the trip to the top of the mountain seven times in one day, a remarkable feat even today, almost unthinkable for a delicate court lady in the eleventh century. This practice was known as the “Seven Times Worship” (*shichido mōde* 七度詣で) (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1977, p. 37).

Once on the day of the Horse in the Second Month I decided to visit Inari. By the time I had reached the Middle Shrine I was already worn out; yet I kept going and was on my way to the Upper Shrine when a group of people passed me. Though they had evidently started after I did, they strode briskly up the hill without the slightest look of discomfort—very enviable.

I had made haste to leave at dawn, but by the Hour of the Snake [10 a.m.] I was still only halfway to the top. To make matters worse, it was gradually becoming hot, and I felt really wretched. When I stopped to rest, I began crying from exhaustion and wondered why I had come on this pilgrimage when there were so many people who had never even thought of making

the effort. Just then I saw a woman in her thirties walking down the hill. She was not wearing a travelling costume, but had simply tucked up the bottom of her skirts. "I am making the pilgrimage seven times today," she declared to the people she met on her way. "I've been up three times already and there won't be any trouble about the other four times. I have to be back by the Hour of the Sheep [2 p.m.]." She was a woman I could hardly have noticed if I had met her anywhere else; but at that moment I wished I could change places with her.

(MORRIS 1991, p. 172; brackets added)

A custom that developed during the Heian period was the "souvenir cedar" (*shirushi no sugi* 験の杉), a term so popular it became a conventional allusion (*makura kotoba* 枕詞) that immediately called to mind an association with the Inari Shrine. The custom was to take a small branch from one of the cedar trees on Inari's mountain, and attach it to one's person as a kind of talisman; it was especially popular to do this on the first horse day in the second month (*nigatsu no hatsuuma* 二月の初午), traditionally the day of Inari's first worship. It is seen as an extension of an earlier custom mentioned in the *Yamashiro fudoki* 山城風土記 (eighth century) of transplanting tree seedlings from the Inari Shrine precincts to one's own yard as a kind of divination—if the sapling took root, the household would prosper, but if it withered, bad times were presaged (NKBT 2, pp. 419–20). In similar fashion, "the longer the sugi remained unwithered, the more efficacious the pilgrimage was supposed to have been" (MORRIS 1971, p. 151). From the mid-Heian period, it became a part of the Kumano pilgrimage to stop for a branch on the way out of Kyoto, and again after completing the pilgrimage before returning to the capital. The *Heiji monogatari* 平治物語 records Kiyomori's visit in 1159: he stopped at the Inari shrine on his way back into Kyoto after his Kumano pilgrimage was interrupted by news of a night attack in the capital (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1977, pp. 37–38). He and his party broke off cedar twigs and "stuck them in the sleeves of their armor" (REISCHAUER and YAMAGIWA 1951, p. 322; NKBT 31.2130).⁹

In the *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語 (twelfth century) and the *Ōkagami* 大鏡 (eleventh–twelfth century), mention is made of the great numbers of people who flocked to this shrine to worship on the first day of the horse in the second month. Not only were the numbers of

⁹ Alternately, this cedar branch was called "deity manifestation cedar" (*eikō sugi* 影向杉), "riches tree" (*tomi no ki* 富の木), or simply "riches" (*tomi* 富) (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1969, p. 15). The custom was so popular that one humorous poem describes the shrine's trees all stripped bare at the Hatsuumma festival (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1977, p. 38).

people great, but it was noted that they included men, women, and children who came from all classes (HIGO 1983, p. 13; FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1977, pp. 31-37). The story in the former work gives a vivid picture of one side of pilgrimage in Japan: the sense of lighthearted adventure that accompanies all but the most ascetic of pilgrims. A Konoe guard and his friends, while climbing up the paths on Inari's mountain, meet a beautifully dressed, but heavily veiled noblewoman also making the pilgrimage. The guard begins to flirt with her in a most obvious way. She asks him if he isn't married, and he replies that he is, to a dull woman with a face like a monkey and a vulgar heart. He employs all his charms to seduce this woman, and finally persuades her to remove her veil. He looks at her face—only to discover his monkey-faced wife! (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1977, pp. 32-35).¹⁰

The *Ōkagami* mentions the Inari Shrine twice. In the first, the daughter of Kanemichi was seen making the Inari pilgrimage when she was young. Knowing she was not her father's favorite, she "was apparently very diligent about making pilgrimages and offering prayers" (McCULLOUGH 1980, pp. 154-55); these were successful, for her father did establish her in the palace, where she was known as "the Horikawa Empress" (McCULLOUGH 1980, p. 154). As in the earlier description by Sei Shōnagon, we have a woman making the pilgrimage. "My wife once saw her toiling up the Inari Hill. She was gazing toward the top with her veil pushed aside, and there was something uncommonly distinguished about her appearance—the shape of her waist where the trousers began, for instance" (McCULLOUGH 1980, p. 155). Evidence that children were taken along comes from the same text, in a recollection by Yotsugi of his ninth year, in 884.

The first Day of the Horse fell on the Third of the Second Month, which chanced to be the lucky *kinoe uma* day. Everybody made an even greater point of going to the Inari Festival than usual, and my father took me with him. The steep climb was exhausting for a child, so we were not able to go home on the same day. Father arranged for us to spend the night at the lodgings of one of the shrine priests, a man of the Fifth Court Rank whom he had often helped out, and whom he knew well.

(McCULLOUGH 1980, p. 215)

Beginning in the Heian period, the Inari Shrine was a place for popular pilgrimage that included elements of play, for rigorous pilgrimage such as that of the court lady who performed the *shichidō*

¹⁰ Episode 28.1 (NKBT 5:52-54); translation in BROWER 1952, pp. 646-50; 1009-12).

mōde, and, after 1072, for imperial pilgrimage as well. The first emperor to make an official pilgrimage here was Gō-sanjō, in the third month of 1072 (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1977, p. 42; 1962, p. 58). Five years later, in 1077, Emperor Gō-shirakawa made a double pilgrimage to the Inari Shrine and the Gion Shrine (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1962, p. 59); in 1091, the Horikawa emperor did the same thing (FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA, 1962, p. 62).

Contemporary Pilgrimage

These Heian period records indicate the early popularity of pilgrimage on Inari Mountain and some of the customs of that time. Although the practices of leaving poems, climbing to the top seven times, and the souvenir cedar¹¹ have mostly died out, the notions of the inclusiveness and accessibility of Inari pilgrimage remain important ideas. In the same way that Inari worship has been characterized as open to all—not restricted to some class, locale, gender, or profession—part of the appeal of pilgrimage on Inari Mountain may be its manageable form. Unlike ascetic regimens that take weeks, months, or even years to complete, the Inari pilgrimage can easily be completed in a few hours. But unlike religious sites with no mountain, or sacred mountains now accessible by a cable-car up to the summit, it still takes some effort to climb up the mountain, circumambulate the three peaks, and make one's way to the bottom.¹² A person in good shape can cover the basic worship route in an hour, but it usually takes from several hours to all day, as people stop and pray often along the way at the rock altars and subshrines along the path. Ordinary human beings, not only devout ascetics or the religiously "musical" (WEBER 1963, pp. 162–23), can undertake the mountain pilgrimage at Inari Mountain in a physically and spiritually meaningful way.

Also contributing to the manageable form of this pilgrimage is the location of the mountain. Unlike pilgrimage sites in remote locales,

¹¹ The specific custom of *shirushi no sugi* seems to be unknown to most contemporary pilgrims, but cedar itself is still an important symbol. It is Inari's sacred tree (*shinboku* 神木), and it covers the mountain. Cedar boughs decorate shrine buildings on the Hatsuuma festival, line the fireplaces during the *Ohitaki* お火焚 fire ritual in November, and adorn the headdresses of the *kagura-me* 神楽女 when they dance. Priests recently designed a new *omamori* お守り consisting of a plastic replica of a cedar sprig inside a plastic pouch because they felt the cedar was being forgotten.

¹² No road goes all the way to the top, although some trails on which a small vehicle or motorcycle can pass go about halfway up. The people who live at the teahouses must carry on their backs all of their daily supplies.



Members of a lay worship group begin their monthly pilgrimage around the mountain at Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto.

Inari Mountain was accessible to people from the capital even during the Heian period, and in more recent years it has remained easily accessible. Because two major train lines pass directly in front of the shrine's *sandō* 参道, priests and pilgrims have not needed to forge creative ties with bus or tour companies, as has been the case in the Shikoku pilgrimage (READER 1993). The Inari Station of the National Railways (now JR) was built in 1880 (Meiji 13) on the Tōkaidō Line between Yokohama and Kobe, and it seems that including the image of "Inari's red *torii*" in an advertising jingle helped spread this association throughout the country (TORIIMINAMI 1988, p. 149).¹³ At present, the shrine has a mutually beneficial arrangement with the Keihan Line. To advertise seven major festivals (*Hatsumōde* 初詣, *Hatsuuma* 初午, *Inari Matsuri* 稲荷祭, *Motomiya-sai* 本宮祭, *Taue-sai* 田植祭, *Kōintaisai* 講員大祭, *Ohitaki-sai* お火焚祭), the shrine makes up posters and affixes the Keihan Company's name and logo to them, and the posters then get wide distribution from the company without cost to either side.

¹³ This may have contributed to the custom of offering red *torii* on Inari's mountain, for at the beginning of the Meiji period, there seem to have been only six *torii* on the mountain, and none were red (TORIIMINAMI 1988, p. 149). However, the *torii* in front of the shrine, visible from the train, was red.

Again, perhaps because pilgrimage to Inari Mountain remains a flourishing tradition, to my knowledge there are no guidebooks detailing the pilgrimage or the various sacred spots on the mountain.¹⁴

Contrary to popular assumption, the Inari Shrine does not own the entire mountain, and a number of the religious establishments on the mountain are totally independent from the Fushimi shrine. The shrine owns the main paths, but some of the land bordering the paths is privately owned. It is impossible to tell, merely by looking, which belong to the shrine, for the sacra are generally identical: *otsuka* rock altars, fox statues, red *torii* and banners, prolific jewel motifs.¹⁵ Most pilgrims were not aware of the division between shrine and private areas, and their worship, as in the two examples below, included a mixture of both kinds of sites. A number of establishments are registered as religious corporations (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人) and have a resident priest, usually trained in Shinto rather than Buddhist traditions (although practices tend to be eclectic). The teahouses (*chamise*) sell items for worship (candles, trays of offerings, small *torii*, prayer books) as well as food and drink for the pilgrims, and maintain the path, altars, and often a waterfall and changing area. Although the teahouse family members tend not to have priestly training, they have a long association with Inari worship, and some were proud to associate with the descendants of pilgrims their parents or grandparents had known.

To “do the mountain” (*oyama o suru* お山をする) is an important practice for devotees, and frequency of circumambulation is roughly equated with fervency of belief and desire for spiritual development. The mountain pilgrimage, with or without waterfall austerity (*taki-gyō* 滝行), is undertaken as a way to develop spiritual powers when done frequently, or in petition or gratitude to Inari for some personal matter. Pilgrimage around the mountain at the hottest and coldest times of year are held to be particularly efficacious. Shamans often perform the pilgrimage daily, or daily during the period of some vow. One woman I encountered often commuted by train to do this daily for the benefit of her clients. Another shamaness who lived on the mountain circumambulated and performed the waterfall austerity every night between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. This was both to pray for her clients and also to purify herself from the many unhappy spirits that attached

¹⁴ Some *kō* leaders possess older publications by the shrine that describe the sacra of Inari Mountain, but nothing of this nature seems to be distributed currently. Most traditions are passed down by the pilgrims themselves, learned from people at the teahouses, or independently “invented.”

¹⁵ See SMYERS 1996 and n.d. for additional details concerning religious establishments on Inari Mountain.

themselves to her during her work. Other people making the pilgrimage gave reasons similar to those cited for Inari worship in general: to express gratitude for present happiness and blessings, to pray for health or recovery from illness, to pray for personal requests and world peace; because they respect the *kō* leader, because they enjoy the trip, for the success and safety of their business; worship, friendship, and recreation; to pass entrance exams; because Inari is the kami enshrined in their home and company. Fushimi Inari's pilgrimage, like most pilgrimages in Japan, except for the most ascetic extreme, contains elements of play and entertainment. On the mountain, I saw, for example, families worshipping and then having a picnic lunch, ladies praying then having tea and noodles, lay worship groups standing in the icy waterfall after a big communal lunch. Not everyone who climbed the sacred mountain did it for religious reasons: it was the jogging route for sports clubs as well as lone athletes. One overweight man told me he climbed the mountain daily for his health—at a teahouse at the top he lit a cigarette, ordered an enormous lunch, and told me he was an atheist.

Trips to Inari Mountain may be done in secret or in a solitary manner, as we saw in the *Kagerō nikki*, and Sei Shōnagon seems to have been alone when she passed the other court lady bounding up and down the mountain. My first exposure to secret Inari worship was when I was sitting around the kitchen table with a Japanese family in Kyoto with whom I was very close. The grandparents, in their late seventies, their son and his wife in their late forties, and one of the children were there, eating and chatting. I brought up the topic of Inari, for I was just beginning my study then, and the grandfather suddenly said, "I have been making a monthly visit to Fushimi Inari for the last fifty years to pray for the prosperity of our family business." His wife's jaw dropped; she stared at him in amazement. She said, "I never knew you did that." He said, "Oh yes, every month for fifty years."

Even when pilgrimage occurs in groups, there is usually a great deal of individualization, either played out during the pilgrimage itself or in the individual understandings of what each participant is doing. As with so many activities in Japan, the outward form is emphasized, while the symbolic content is unspecified. There is no fixed route one must take through the thousands of sacred sites on the mountain, and pilgrims and groups tend to develop their own sacred histories, worshipping at sites that are invested with particular meanings for them.

I saw many groups and individuals perform this pilgrimage: groups in traditional white pilgrim's garb, a group instructed by a leader

shouting instructions through a megaphone, families with children, groups of elderly making their way very slowly up the mountain with the aid of pilgrim's staffs, individuals mumbling prayers as they walked, a possessed person writhing before a rock altar. I accompanied many individuals and groups on their circuit, and never experienced the pilgrimage the same way twice.

Particular Pilgrimages

The following two examples of pilgrimage styles at Inari Mountain show how varied the forms in which the pilgrimage may be done. Although both lay worship groups (*kō* 講) were considered exemplary (*majime*) from the shrine's point of view, they performed the circuit of the mountain in very different ways.

EXAMPLE NO. 1: MONTHLY PILGRIMAGE GROUP

In this group, the leader has assigned a particular rock altar to each member, as designated by the kami.¹⁶ About fifty people join the female leader and her assistants each month for a pilgrimage to Inari Mountain. Some people come every month, others come from time to time, so while the number remains fairly constant, the faces change from month to month. The majority of people come from the area where the shamaness lives, in a series of train rides that take about three and a half hours, but others come from entirely different locales. All meet in the Pilgrim's Inn (Sanshūden 参集殿) at the Fushimi Inari Shrine at 9:00 a.m., usually on the fourth Sunday of each month.

The basic route remains constant, but, depending on who attends, the personal rock altars worshipped at vary. The pilgrimage begins as soon as everyone arrives. Most people in this *kō* have a loose-fitting blue *happi* coat inscribed with the name of this group, which they wear during the pilgrimage. First they all wash their hands in the stone basin and pray to the kami enshrined in the main sanctuary. This group has a very close connection with the shrine and always has a prayer service before beginning the pilgrimage proper. They are usually invited by the priests in the Office of Lay Worship Groups (*Kōmuhonchō* 講務本庁) to come in for a cup of tea and rice cake while

¹⁶ I accompanied this group four times on this pilgrimage: 19 November and 17 December 1989; 28 January and 25 February 1990. I also visited their *kō* three times for various rituals, and watched the leader purify the new shop of a member of her group. On my first pilgrimage with this group, the *kō* leader taught me the Seven Mysterious Traditions and took me to the one I had not seen.

the arrangements are made for the service. Sometimes at this service a divided spirit (*wakemitama* 分靈) of Inari is requested for a new member of the group, and when this happens, the kami, newly enshrined in a brocade box, is carefully carried to a car and immediately driven to its new home (they said it would be quite rude to leave Inari sitting in a car in the parking lot all day). The group files into the main sanctuary and waits its turn, seated upon rows of benches, as the priests conclude the prayers for those ahead of them in the Sunday morning rush. After the formal prayers are concluded, each member of the *kō* receives a tiny cup of sake and exits the building.

Now the ascent begins. A special custom of this group is to pray at the Divine Horse Shrine (Shinmesha 神馬社) at the start and conclusion of their circumambulation. This subshrine contains a life-sized wooden statue of a horse, painted white, fitted out with elaborate harness and saddle. Most large Shinto shrines have a horse statue or even a live horse, which represents both the quintessential offering given to a kami, as well as the kami's vehicle, for traditionally they were thought to ride on horses. Here, in a charming interpretation, the believers all pray to the horse statue for strength in their legs during the pilgrimage. Some even bring a carrot and leave it as an offering to the divine horse, and once I saw an expensive bottle of White Horse Whisky left here as an offering.

On the way up the mountain, the group usually divides into three pre-selected smaller groups, so that the *otsuka* of each person may be visited. The rock altars have been chosen among the main clusters; this group never veers off onto one of the little-used paths to the remoter altar locations on non-shrine land on the mountain. Each person brings offerings for his own worship service, and sets them out on the surface of the rock altar. Offerings vary, but the most common are sake, fried tofu (*abura-age*), rice with red beans (*sekihan*), rice crackers (*sembei*), pounded rice cakes (*mochi*). After the bottles and packages have been opened up for the kami, candles are usually placed in the metal holder and lit. The principal worshipper stands directly in front of the altar; the rest of the group cluster around. Either the *kō* leader or one of her assistants leads the group in the series of four prayers that they chant at each altar. These were printed in a small prayer book and were the standard Shinto Prayer of Purification (*Harae kotoba* 祓詞) and Great Purification (*Ōharae kotoba* 大祓詞), the Inari Incantation (*Inari ōkami himon* 稻荷大神秘文, literally "secret text"), and Prayer for Inari Worship (*Inari shinpai kotoba* 稻荷神拝詞). The first two are prayers used in all Shinto shrines; the second two are specific to Inari but are not used by the priests at present. In the last prayer, the group inserts the specific name of the particular Inari they are worshipping,

and repeats it three times as they beseech this particular form of Inari to grant protection, blessings, and happiness. As the members of the small group chant these prayers in unison, the *kō* leader stands to the back, hands clasped, mumbling to herself and nodding. She is receiving communication from the kami about these believers, and after the service is completed, she tells them what the deity has revealed. Of course she can only be with one of the three groups at a time, but she tries to insure that all members get advice, especially those with special problems.

After each person has had an individual service at his *otsuka*, and prayers have been said at the altars at the three peaks, the group works its way around to the Seimeitaki waterfall. It has taken them four hours to get here, as they pray slowly and deliberately at many sites along the way. They all troop into the large building and sit around a long low table on the tatami mats, and pull lunch boxes out of their bags. Someone makes tea and everyone eats. Those members who plan to do the waterfall austerity change into the appropriate ritual clothing: a short white kimono for women and a white loincloth for men. The men wear a white jacket for modesty and warmth until they leave the building. All members move into the large altar room here, where they are purified by the assistant, pray together, and then move outside and down a steep path to the waterfall. The people who will do the austerity stand in front, the rest of the group to the back, and all go through a series of “warm-up exercises” that are both spiritual and physical. They swing their arms as they chant, and then sing a song, repeating each line after the leader.¹⁷ Finally, the pilgrims stand in the waterfall, one by one, hands clasped, water pounding on shoulders, chanting in unison with the group. After they dry off and get dressed, the group returns to the main path and makes its fairly rapid return to the bottom, praying at the “Midwife Inari” shrine at the bottom, and finally returning to the Shinmesha to thank the horse for the strength in their legs that enabled them to complete the pilgrimage.

In this pilgrimage, the group is fairly cohesive, although it is divided into three from the bottom until the waterfall. Nevertheless, there is great attention paid to the needs of each member of the group, and each person gets an opportunity to pray to her own version of Inari during the pilgrimage. If the leader is there, the devotee may also get direct advice from Inari about some specific problem. The circumam-

¹⁷ This style of waterfall austerity was taught to them by priests at the shrine. The singing warm-up routine was not followed by most other ascetics, some of whom made snide comments to me about it, saying it sounded more like something from summer camp than an austerity. But this group performs the singing routine very seriously.

bulation and the waterfall austerity provide the opportunity to develop one's own spiritual powers within the supportive framework of the group pilgrimage, and this may lead to personal contact with Inari, unmediated by the shamaness-leader of the group.

EXAMPLE NO. 2: SPECIAL ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO INARI MOUNTAIN

This group of people was led by a Shinto priest from a non-Inari shrine in Aichi Prefecture.¹⁸ In addition to his duties as shrine priest, he ran an Inari *kō* located in Mie Prefecture, which had been started by his grandmother, then passed to his mother, his father, and then to him. He visits the group in Mie at least twice a month for services, and takes a smaller group to Fushimi Inari every month for the pilgrimage and waterfall austerity. Today's group numbers one hundred and fifty people, traveling in three large tour buses with a 6:30 a.m. departure. Each person was given a red surplice (*oizuru*, *oizuri* 笈摺) to be worn around the neck; this identified us as members of the same group. At 9:30 a.m. all the buses had arrived at Fushimi Inari, and we walked up to the shrine, all first washing hands and mouths, praying privately at the main sanctuary, then sitting down inside to have a formal prayer service (many pilgrimage groups did not include this formal worship service in the main sanctuary but headed right up the mountain). After this, we started up the mountain, and in contrast to all other pilgrimage groups I accompanied, this one went in the *opposite* direction, up the back road, beginning with Midwife Inari. The priest's wife told me about the tradition at this subshrine of lighting a candle to hasten labor. In a custom unique to this group, an elderly woman went around the mountain ahead of the rest of us, and placed a red candle in the candle holders of the rock altars and subshrines at which we "should" worship. Because all the other candles were white, we could easily see this sign. She explained that there were too many sacred spots for us to worship at them all, so she indicated which ones were most important.

We climbed directly to Araki *ōkami* 荒木大神, the private shrine to "Rough Tree Inari" where this group's rock altar is located. As the priest and his assistants, all male in this group, changed into Shinto robes, the believers milled around the small precincts of this very eclectic establishment, buying offering trays, venerating Buddhist statues as well as the main kami, writing their names on offering sticks (*hitaki-gushi* 火焚串). Some male assistants set up a very elaborate

¹⁸ I accompanied this group on 20 January 1991 on their annual pilgrimage to Inari Mountain, traveling with them to Kyoto on the bus.

portable sound system with microphone, speakers, and tapes of ancient ritual music (*gagaku* 雅楽). The formal service began at 11:00 a.m., and followed standard Shinto procedures. Although people did not seem to have individual rock altars in this group, the priest read the name of every pilgrim in the group, including mine, and each person offered a bough of the sacred evergreen (*tamagushi* 玉串) as symbolic offering to the kami.¹⁹

Now the group splintered into many small groups; some people even went on alone. People continued the pilgrimage in their own fashion—they were simply told if they wanted to do the waterfall austerity to be at the falls between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m., and to be back at the Pilgrims' Inn by 4:30. I saw people, identifiable by their red surplices, going in all directions, literally following their own path on the mountain: some going clockwise, others counterclockwise, most stopping at the red candles, some at other altars as well. I made my way with the priest's wife around the mountain, to the waterfall called Kōbō Taki 弘法瀧, "Priest Kōbō's Falls," which is, like their *otsuka*, in an area not managed by the Fushimi Shrine. This falls is maintained privately by a family that also operates a small teahouse there. Unlike the group in example 1, the people in this group did the austerity as they arrived, not in a big group. They too did some of the warm-up exercises, but they did not sing the song. Some ate noodles and drank tea, others prayed, some stood in the falls. About half of the pilgrims participated in the waterfall austerity. Back down at the bottom, people drank tea and waited at the inn until the whole group reassembled, then boarded the buses to go on to the hotel for the evening.

This group was ritually led by priestly males, as opposed to the more charismatic females of the previous example, and did not seem to have a shamanic component whereby the kami communicated directly with them. But within both groups there was opportunity for each member to express himself in certain personalized ways. The two groups took opposite routes on the mountain; both were a mixture of shrine, popular, and personal traditions combined in unique ways. Each version of the pilgrimage is a kind of musical improvisation on the theme of Inari, with each pilgrim playing a solo part. There is no doctrinal or historical "melody," so great differences exist between the music of the various groups. But because these tunes can only be heard by the participants of each group, there is no resulting cacophony, no feeling of being "out of tune" with a specifically prescribed and set version of the sacred music.

¹⁹ In the main shrine, there is insufficient time for this kind of individual practice, so in a large group such as this one, a few representatives usually offer the boughs for all the others.

The Mountain Complex

Even when an Inari worship site does not physically include a large mountain, it often contains something I call the “mountain complex.” By this I mean a concentration of the kinds of sacra that are found on the mountain pilgrimage routes at Fushimi and other Inari mountains (such as Saijō 最上 and Yūtoku 祐徳): clusters of subshrines, rock altars, fox statues, red *torii*, rocks for folk divination, fox holes, Buddhist statues, sacred springs, and waterfalls.²⁰ These complexes of symbols, even in a tiny space, are interpreted in different ways, and it is this that gives Inari its characteristic personal flavor. Unlike the miniaturized replicas of the Shikoku pilgrimage found throughout Japan, the Inari “mountain complexes” do not specifically reproduce Fushimi’s Inari Mountain, but they do borrow certain of its traditions, into which “local” traditions are mixed.²¹

At Saijō Inari, the Nichiren temple Myōkyō-ji 妙教寺 outside Okayama City, there is a large mountain behind the temple named Inari Yama,²² but popular pilgrimage activity is concentrated in an area to the right of the main sanctuary and goes only partway up the mountain.²³ This area houses the seventy-seven subshrines (*Shichijūshichi massha* 七十七末社), seventy-seven assistants to Inari, here known as Saijō-sama 最上様. Each has a separate name, and many are known to have certain specialties such as averting fires, passing tests, and finding partners. In addition to the subshrines, there are many *otsuka* (here known as *hōtō* 宝塔) also dedicated to the seventy-seven assistants. The area is crammed with fox statues, the jewel motif, red and white banners, *torii*, and even a white horse. Just above this area a path bordered by six large boulders that spell out the *daimoku* 題目 leads to

²⁰ Examples of these mini-pilgrimage complexes within smaller Inari shrines are Ōji 王子, Anamori 穴守, Higashi Fushimi 東伏見, and Toyokawa 豊川 Inari in Tokyo, Ochobo お千代保 Inari in Gifu, Kazan 花山 Inari in Yamashina, the Takenaka 竹中 Inari directly behind Yoshida 吉田 Shrine in Kyoto, Hyōtan Yama 瓢箪山 Inari and Shinoda no Mori 信太の森 Inari in Osaka, Saijō 最上 Inari in Okayama, Yūtoku 祐徳 Inari in Saga, and Takahashi 高橋 Inari in Kumamoto.

²¹ One exception is a private religious establishment in Aichi Prefecture called Futagawa Fushimi 二川伏見 Inari, which replicates in miniature the Fushimi Inari pilgrimage route on the hill behind this shrine. On a small mountain, paths wind through red *torii* to Ichinomine, Ninomine, and Sannomine, the Chōja-sha, a pond, and other major sites. Square wooden posts in the ground serve as the *otsuka*. Curiously, there was not a single fox statue on the mountain, although there are two in the *honden*.

²² See SMYERS (n.d., Introduction) for a brief description of the relation of this temple to Inari worship and the deliberate “Buddhization” of certain customs as a result of *shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離 pressures.

²³ The *okuno-in* and other mountain temples were originally connected with Myōkyō-ji, but became independent during the Meiji period.



Worshippers make offerings at the rock altars at Saijō Inari in Okayama in the area containing the 77 subshrines.

a waterfall with several changing huts for those who want to perform the waterfall austerity.

On Sunday the 21st of April 1991, I observed the following activities in this concentrated pilgrimage site. People offered fried tofu, candles, incense, rice, and money. Two women in their fifties walked up the slope with the *hōtō*, chanting *Namu myōhō renga kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經 and offering one stick of incense at each rock altar. One explained to me that these rocks named all the helpers of Inari. An elderly couple were making the circuit of seventy-seven subshrines, the wife offering one-yen coins, the husband offering incense and sometimes a handful of rice. A father and his two children offering incense to “the kami of money” said they came monthly to worship here for their health and well-being. A family with two children and an infant strapped to the father’s back chanted a sutra in front of the shrine to Asahi Tennō 朝日天王 with great fervor, then had a picnic lunch at the rest area in front of the old *honden*. In addition to these worshippers, the grounds were crowded with many people of all ages, worshipping in a more desultory fashion. Every few minutes, someone would ring the large temple bell, which reverberated through the thick incense smoke, prayers, and chatter.

This Inari Mountain had many symbols and practices in common

with those at Fushimi. Pilgrims made food, candle, incense, and monetary offerings as they circumambulated the circuit of sacra. They could purchase *ema* 絵馬 and *hitaki-gushi* in order to send prayers; they could divine their fortune with *omikuji*. As at Fushimi, it is possible to begin the pilgrimage with a *gokitō* prayer service in the main sanctuary performed by priests. One form of devotion here not practiced at Fushimi is *kyōseki shinkō* 経石信仰—the copying of a sutra onto a number of smooth rocks of similar size, one character per rock. Under many of the subshrines were piles of these rocks, some still in plastic bags. Saijō Inari, the obvious sectarian differences notwithstanding, has a pilgrimage tradition similar to that at Fushimi Inari Mountain, but in reduced scale.²⁴ Some of the sacra have more “Buddhist” names, but are recognizable elements from the Inari mountain complex. Here too, people seemed to have very personal ways of performing and interpreting their circumambulation.

Conclusion

The pilgrimage tradition at Fushimi’s Inari Mountain (and other Inari sites), although not widely known, has been popular since the Heian period and is still thriving. It is likely that its continued viability contributes to its lower public profile in the contemporary period, for special advertising and cooperative ventures with tour companies have not been necessary to its continued success. One of the reasons for its popularity is that although it has the image of a “distant holy place renowned for miracles” (E. TURNER 1987, p. 328), it is actually quite easily accessible, located in the middle of the country on two major train lines. Inari pilgrimage combines the two prototypical forms of Japanese pilgrimage, circuit pilgrimage (as in the eighty-eight temples of Shikoku) and the journey to one particular holy site (Ise, Fuji san) (see HOSHINO 1987, p. 350, and Hoshino’s essay in this volume), for the goal is a particular Inari shrine or temple, but within that space, the pilgrim makes a circuit of numerous sacra. The distance is manageable: the route around Shikoku covers over thirteen-hundred kilometers, while at Fushimi it is about four kilometers. But, unlike other circuit pilgrimages, there is no particular order to be followed, no need to visit all the sacred sites. Inari pilgrimage is “improvisational,”

²⁴ Although this temple is a splendid Inari worship site with fine buildings and new facilities, the fewer numbers of worshippers was due to its remote location. Priests said that even *Hatsuuma*, Inari’s central *matsuri*, was not very well attended. This reinforces the notion that Fushimi’s location—seemingly remote, but actually easily accessible—contributes greatly to its continued success as a thriving pilgrimage center.

with individual pilgrims and groups following a particular route based on their own needs and experiences rather than imposed by a larger, shared tradition.

This latter feature requires us to reconsider the applicability of “*communitas*” to this type of pilgrimage experience. Victor TURNER (1974) developed this idea in relation to pilgrimage, and provided us with a rich study of historical and contemporary examples with Edith TURNER (1978), who then emphasizes this aspect of pilgrimage in her overview article (1987). She says, “The middle stage of a pilgrimage is marked by an awareness of temporary release from social ties and by a strong sense of *communitas* (“community, fellowship”), ...a special sense of bonding and of humankindness” (1987, p. 328). It seems to be a safe assumption that liminality (suspension of usual social norms) is a feature of most pilgrimage experience, but the assumption that one expression of liminality is necessarily “*communitas*” presupposes that this ideal is not part of the dominant cultural representations that shape everyday life. In Japan, where social expectations are for group cohesiveness and harmonious cooperation at the expense of individual desires, the liminal *release* may be not into shared fellowship but rather into the expression of particular individual needs and desires. I am not arguing that “*communitas*” is never a feature of Japanese pilgrimage—it certainly occurs to some extent in group pilgrimage that involves hardship and cooperative effort (see SWANSON 1981). However, in my experiences of Inari pilgrimage, I saw no contact between different groups of pilgrims—they basically ignored each other. Occasionally while one group was laying out their offerings, another pilgrim or group would quickly make an offering or pray at the same altar, and once I heard a woman say that her group could not pray at a particular altar because it was “full” (*man'in*).²⁵ I saw no conflicts or contests between pilgrimage groups, which appears to suggest that although the pilgrimage site provides an open space for different groups and individuals to pursue their own interpretations, and possesses what EADE and SALLNOW term “the capacity to absorb a multiplicity of religious discourses, to be able to offer a variety of clients what each of them desires” (1991, p. 15), the element of contest that they also attribute to pilgrimage is not present. Within the larger pilgrimage groups such as the two described above, people tended not to share their personal understandings or experiences, except, perhaps, with the leader (or sometimes me when I asked). There were

²⁵ As I describe elsewhere (SMYERS, n.d. Chapter 1), there is a great deal of factionalism within Inari worship, but most of it is uninformed and based on rather vague assumptions each faction holds about the other.

some interesting examples of status reversal, as when the leader was a shamaness and the men in the group made the tea and organized the food, but usually there were still obvious hierarchies within the groups. And many pilgrims were simply alone. Inari pilgrimage, like all pilgrimage, provides a “time out” from the usual social norms and expectations, and because of the way it has evolved, offers an opportunity for the pilgrim to “follow his own path,” if only for a short while.

ABBREVIATION

NKBT *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 日本古典文學大系. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957.

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