The Celebration of Haru-Yama (Spring Mountain):
An Example of Folk Religious Practices
in Contemporary Japan

By
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Introduction

Folk religion in Japan, though somewhat attenuated due to such modern developments as industrialization and urbanization, continues to be a major force in the life of rural people. Of the many aspects of Japanese folk religion, one of the historically important aspects has been the association of religious beliefs and activities with sacred mountains. Nor has the existence of sacred mountains and the performance of religious activities on mountains escaped Western notice. Jesuit missionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wrote back to Rome disparaging accounts of their Japanese rivals who carried out secret practices in the mountains.1 Kaempfer's early published account of Japan devoted a short section to the "mountain priests," called "Jammabos,"2 (or yamabushi in modern Japanese). In more re-


cent times such Westerners as the mountain-climber Weston and the student of religion Lowell have published accounts of pilgrimage and trance within Japanese sacred mountains. Although these earlier accounts are of lasting interest, the contemporary investigation of Japanese folk religion must proceed along different lines. In particular, close observation of the religious practices and utilization of Japanese publications are prerequisites. It is also essential that any folk practices be seen in the total context of Japanese religion. The present article is an attempt to document through direct observation and reference to Japanese publications one aspect of folk religion connected with Japanese mountains.

The Religious Background of the Haru-Yama Celebrated at Gas-san

In order to understand the celebration of Haru-yama (spring mountain) at one sacred mountain, we must first recognize: some general features of Japanese religion, some characteristics of Japanese "mountain religion" (sangaku shinkō), some specific features of the movement of Shugendō (the "religion" of austerities in the mountains), and the situation of folk religion in one district of Japan. In general, Japanese religion has a long history with a number of separate traditions blended into one religious heritage. This means that folk religion in Japan is not the religion outside the organized religions such as Shinto and Buddhism; on the contrary, it is the popular religion which has incorporated elements of all the major tradition. Within Japanese religion are a number of "sub-systems" which cut across the

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lines of organized religions. One of these sub-systems is the array of religious phenomena associated with sacred mountains. This includes not only the many sacred mountains, but also the "divinities" (kami) which descend or dwell there. This sub-system also includes rituals performed on mountains, pilgrimages to mountains, belief in mountains as the otherworld, and the mountain as a site of funeral memorials. When listed as separate items, these religious phenomena sound like so many unrelated "superstitions." However, when they appear in any concrete situation, they present an interrelated complex in which the believer lives out a coherent religious worldview. Japanese scholars have seen the implicit unity of these phenomena, calling them sangaku shinkō ("mountain creed," in the wide sense of all religious phenomena associated with mountains). The diverse phenomena of sangaku shinkō reach back into prehistory and color much of recent folk religion, too. One of the main vehicles for channelling most of these mountain practices into a continuous tradition was the movement called Shugendō. The word Shugendō means literally the "way" of mastering austerities, but it was understood that these austerities were practiced in the mountains. Historically, Shugendō arose out of the prehistoric tradition of sacred mountains, and mixed the Shinto reverence for Japanese soil with the Chinese Taoistic penchant for mountain wizards and the Buddhist practice of magico-religious austerities. The result was the legend of En no Gyoja, a Japanese mountain wizard who set the precedent of practicing (Buddhist) austerities in Japanese sacred mountains. Although he is supposed to have lived about the eighth century, the major organizing impetus for Shugendō came out of the ninth century Buddhist sects of Tendai and Shingon. The full-blown organizations of Shugendō sects dates probably from about the thirteenth century. By the fifteenth century there were several major ecclesiastical divisions of Shugendō with numerous local branches on the equally numerous sacred mountains of all areas of Japan.

The central headquarters of the Tendai and Shingon lines of Shugendō were near Kyoto, while there was another important sect on the island of Kyūshū and a rather independent sect in the Tōhoku region.

The Shugendō sect of the Tōhoku region in Tokugawa times centered around a triad of sacred mountains, Dewa Sanzan ("the three sacred mountains of Dewa"). Dewa was an ancient name for one of the northernmost sections of Honshū island. Of the three mountains—Haguro-san, Gas-san, and Yudono-san—eventually Haguro-san was the most influential and thus gave the sect its name of Haguro Shugendō. This sect is a complex subject in its own right, since it forms a unique organization of rites, symbolism, doctrine, priestly hierarchy, and a "parish" network with Haguro-san as its sacred headquarters.7 However, the "three sacred mountains of Dewa" were neither monolithic in ecclesiastical organization nor uniform in religious observances. Indeed, Yudono-san, within the Shingon tradition, developed a unique esoteric practice of self-mummification, and was also a bitter ecclesiastical foe of Haguro-san.8 Of the three mountains, Gas-san ("Moon-mountain") was the highest in elevation and the most revered. In traditional hanging scrolls depicting the three mountains, Gas-san always was at the top—at the apex of an imaginary triangle with Haguro-san and Yudono-san below to the right and left. In Buddhist symbolism Gas-san was the abode of Amida (Amitabha), Yudono-san the abode of Dainichi (Vairocana), and Haguro-san the abode of Kannon (Avalokitesvara). Probably Gas-san (also pronounced Tsuki-yama) was the site of a Shinto shrine mentioned in the tenth century Engi-shiki, and at any rate various Shinto kami also became associated with the three mountains. But Gas-san was primarily an object of

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7. This was the main topic of my "A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendō: An Example of Japanese Mountain Religion" (2 vols.; Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1965), which I am revising for publication. Documentation for many aspects of Shugendō and sangaku shinkō will be found in my dissertation. At present the only Western monograph on Shugendō is Gaston Renondeau, Le Shugendō. Histoire, doctrine et rites des anachorètes dits Yamabushi (Cahiers de la Société Asiatique, XVIII; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1965).

popular pilgrimage, rather than a monastic retreat or ecclesiastical center for parish control. Gas-san was so high that it was uninhabitable in winter; in the summer pilgrimage season priests from nearby headquarters took up temporary residence there to guide the pilgrims. Yudono-san and Haguro-san exerted their respective powers over the few pilgrim routes which led through their mountain territory to Gas-san. During Tokugawa times Haguro Shugendō was recognized as a rather independent Shugendō organization by the feudal government, free to carry out its own traditions so long as it was obedient to the Buddhist temples in charge of it. With the end of the feudal government in the Meiji Restoration of 1867 all this was overturned. In the religious policy of the Meiji Restoration was a general tendency to disestablish Buddhism and establish or “restore” Shinto, thereby purifying Shinto from Buddhist influence. In 1872 was handed down the order of proscription for Shugendō, with Shugendō headquarters split artificially into large Shinto establishments and relatively smaller Buddhist remnants. Shugendō priests, many of whom already had received orthodox Buddhist ordination, were forced either to become pure Buddhist priests or to become pure Shinto priests, or to return to a lay occupation. Nevertheless, in spite of the official manipulation of organized religion, the popular religious sentiments associated with these mountains lived on in the hearts and practices of the people. Some of these practices persevere to the present day, of which the haru-yama is one example.9

The haru-yama described in this article concerns the celebration of the religious relationship between these three sacred mountains, especially Gas-san, and the people of one village called Toge. The little village (mura) of Toge lies at the foot of Haguro-san and has a long history of intimate relationship to this mountain.10 During the Tokugawa period Toge was practical-

9. After World War II some of the Buddhist-oriented remnants from the 1872 official dissolution of Shugendō were able to organize once again as Shugendō sects. However, as will become obvious in the description of the haru-yama, its present form is not a part of the contemporary Shugendō organization.

10. The name itself indicates a religious history: “in Japan the word for mountain pass is tōge, originating from the word tamuke, ‘to offer,’ because travelers always had to offer something to the god of the pass as a prayer for safe journey,” Hori, “Mountains and Their Importance,” p. 6.
ly a Shugendō town, since it held over three hundred of the combination temple and lodging house (shukubō) for pilgrims on their way to Haguro-san and the two other sacred mountains. The priests and semi-priestly figures of this village were closely tied to the ritual and festival activities of Haguro-san, which maintained more monastic and ascetic traditions. Even after the Meiji Restoration the people of Tōge continued the close relationship with the main shrine of Haguro-san, which was renamed Dewa-jinja (Dewa-shrine). Formerly this had been the most important building on Haguro-san, and the dominance of Shinto in Meiji times dictated that “Dewa-shrine” be the most important shrine in the three mountains. Although the history of Shugendō, Shinto, and Buddhism in the three mountains is one of sudden ups and downs, the people of Tōge have kept alive their warm and natural appreciation for these three sacred mountains. Tōge is still a relatively small village with several hundred families. It is primarily a farming village large enough to have its little shops, own post office, and school system up through grade school. Wet rice and upland agriculture was traditionally the most important economic activity. In more recent times there has been some logging around the mountains but still there is no significant industry. The major nearby city is Tsuruoka, which features high schools and railway connections. There is regular bus service from Tōge to Tsuruoka. All the geographical references within this article fall within the present prefecture of Yamagata, which faces the Japan sea from the northern part of Honshū Island. While Tōge has experienced the general shift of young men from farms to the industrialized cities, its own traditions and customs have not been so severely undermined as the more urbanized and industrialized areas. Tōge is true to its rural setting by being relatively more traditional and conservative than urban Japan. It is worth mentioning that both Christianity and the highly successful “new religions” are inconspicuous at Tōge. In the past few decades the area surrounding the three mountains, especially Haguro-san, has become a rather important tourist site due to its historic significance and natural beauty. The people of Tōge, like many Japanese, are proud of their local history and customs whether or not it involves an explicit religious faith. To some extent there is commercial exploitation of this colorful local history, (though deplored by the revived Shugendō group), but it does not enter into the celebration of haru-yama.
Description of the Celebration of Haru-yama in 1964

In studying the history and surviving practices of Haguro Shugendō I became aware of the great importance of folk religious practices for understanding Shugendō and the contemporary tradition of the three sacred mountains of Dewa. Living in the city of Sendai, not too far from these three mountains, I took advantage of opportunities to observe both the activities of the revived sect of Haguro Shugendō and other folk religious practices in this area. This explains how I happened to participate in the haru-yama of 1964. And, although the haru-yama is an important illustration of how Shugendō had penetrated folk religion, the contemporary practice of haru-yama deserves to be described and interpreted in its own right as an interesting example of Japanese folk religion.11

The haru-yama is a spring festival performed by representatives of Tōge at the foot of Haguro-san. The actual festival consists of two representatives (or proxies) from each of the eight buraku or subdivisions of Tōge who make a round of the three mountains of Dewa Sanzan and bring back to their respective buraku some mountain plants.12 As noted above, it is obvious that this is a village festival, and not actually a festival of Haguro Shugendō, even though it is historically related to the yamabushi of Tōge. (Yamabushi, those who “lie down in the mountains,” is the traditional name for the priestly and semi-priestly leaders of Shugendō.) Scattered secondary references to the haru-yama will be made, but the following account is based mainly on the writer's observation.

The haru-yama of Tōge was performed on May third, fourth,

11. The first description of the haru-yama was included in my dissertation, II, 475-88. However, because this example of folk religion is not crucial to the interpretation of Haguro Shugendō, it has been omitted from the revised version of the dissertation for publication.
12. For a brief listing see Togawa Anshō, “Shugendō Haguro-ha Goi Ryakkai” (“A Concise Vocabulary of the Haguro Sect of Shugendō”), Kokugakuin Zasshi, XLVI, No. 11 (November, 1940), 143-69, the listing “haru-yama,” p. 163.
and fifth, in 1964. Early on the morning of May 3 the two people from each of the eight buraku who are proxies for that year’s festival climb from Tōge via the stone staircase several miles to the Dewa-jinja at the summit of Haguro-san. While climbing to the mountaintop shrine, respect is paid at the various smaller shrines along the way by a nod of the head and clap of hands. Wearing the Shinto style of “kesa” (surplice) they enter the main shrine and are led in a simple prayer by a kannushi (Shinto priest), after which they all drink a small cup of sake. Then they meet in a separate room and discuss the practical plans for carrying out the haru-yama. Since this is a village function, it is planned and carried out completely by the villagers and their buraku proxies. On this morning the villagers make some arrangements for lodging at the shrine’s building called Saikan (“purification hall”) the night of May 4, and decide to hire a truck to take everyone as far as the “sixth station” or roku-gōme of Gas-san. (In earlier times it was the custom to walk to Gas-san, but with the coming of modern transportation all forms of pilgrimage have changed drastically.) After all the

13. See Wakamori Taro, “Haru Yama-iri” (“Spring Mountain Entry”), Minkan Denshō, X, No. 4 (March, 1944), 23-32. The date is actually determined by the hachijūhachi-ya, the “eighty-eighth night” (or day) after the beginning of spring according to the lunar calendar. See also Nishitsunoi Masayoshi, ed., Nenjū Gyōji Jiten (“A Dictionary of Annual Festivals”) (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō, 1958), the listing “hachijūhachi-ya,” p. 631. Many proverbs celebrate this day as marking the end of the season of frost. After this day it is widely considered to be safe for planting, and thus various rites praying for the safety of plants are performed about this time.

14. During the ritual called the “fall peak” in late August and early September the procession of Haguro Shugendō also reverences various shrines and holy spots along this path. In former times Haguro Shugendō observed a full ritual year of four “peaks” named after the four seasons. See my “Four Ritual Periods of Haguro Shugendō in Northeastern Japan,” History of Religions, V (1965), 93-113.

15. Kesa is the formal term for the orthodox Buddhist surplice. The kesa apparently passed over into Shinto usage, and in the present case is worn even by laymen in the sense of special dedication or purification.

16. Many Japanese mountains, including sacred Fuji, came to be divided into ten “stations” or gō. Probably this symbolism came from the Buddhist scheme of ten stages between hell and heaven; climbing a sacred mountain was analogous to passing from hell to heaven, from profane to sacred.
plans have been made, cups of sake are passed around for a toast before breaking up the meeting. Then everyone descends the stone staircase to Tōge. (See Photo 1.) Although originally plants were picked during the climb of Gas-san, after the war a large tract of land including the three mountains was made into a national park. The rules of the national park prohibit the removal of any plants or animals, thus making it impossible to bring back these plants from Gas-san. Therefore the buraku proxies leave the stone pathway and pick leaves of tsuraki for members of their buraku. Tsukaki, they say, is the same as Shinto’s sacred plant, the sakaki. Then they return to their homes and await the truck ride to Gas-san early the next morning. (See Photo 2.) This has taken only several hours, and it is only 9:30 A.M. when they reach Tōge.

A clue to the whole ceremony of haru-yama is found in the name which all the proxies share. They are called gyōnin, a word similar to gyōja or ascetic, which means that they are carrying out a special religious duty. Formerly there were more severe restrictions, but even today they should observe religious abstinence, or shōjin. This means at least abstaining from meat and not cohabiting with one’s wife. The white clothes traditionally worn by the gyōnin, as well as the small white "kesa" indicate the “purity” of his religious task.

On the morning of May 4 everyone gathers at 4:30 for the truck ride to Gas-san. Men other than the proxies may participate voluntarily. A number of voluntary participants, an official ranger of the national forest (at the same time a member of the seventh buraku), and the writer increased the number of sixteen proxies to just over thirty persons. Crowded into two small trucks, all headed for Gas-san, passing the road leading to the summit of Haguro-san, but not stopping at Dewa-jinja. The first

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17. This is a popular usage, in contrast to the formal traditions of ascetics at Yudono-san and Haguro-san also called gyōnin. See the reference to "haru yama no gyōnin" in Togawa, “Uzen Tōge-mura no Monoimi” ("Religious Abstinence in Tōgemura, Yamagata Prefecture"), in Matsuri, No. 3, pp. 45-49, esp. p. 46.

18. The former procedures of restrictions or abstinence were called hi-agari. See the explanation of this in Togawa, “Shugendō Haguro-ha Goi Ryakkai," the listing “hi-agari,” p. 163. For one thing, they used a “separate fire” or bekka in a room of their home temporarily set aside for this purpose. In former times the bekka was used by the ascetic monks who never left Haguro-san.
stop is made about five o’clock at a small wayside shrine. This
spot is called Daiman, technically the second “station” of Gassan, or ni-gôme. (Even as late as Meiji times, Daiman was one
of the three spots for checking the pilgrims’ stamp of permission
to enter the mountains via Haguro-san.) Everyone gets out of
the truck and gathers around the shrine to recite a simple prayer
of purification. (See Photo 3.) Then they get back into the
trucks, which begin the rather steep ascent of Gassan. Already
the remains of snowdrifts are visible in the valleys.

At 5:30 A.M. the trucks reach the end of the road, at the
sixth “station” or roku-gôme. At this point the trucks are left
for the climb on foot, amidst increasingly deeper drifts of snow.
(See Photo 4.) About 6:15 the seventh station or nana-gôme is
reached after climbing up through branch and snow. The sixth
station seems to be past the tree line, and by the seventh station
there are no trees at all. The seventh station is marked simply
by piles of brush, with no sign of a shrine. After a well-deserved
rest they proceed.

At about 6:45 they reach the eighth station or hachi-gôme.
In passing from the seventh to the eighth station a number of
interesting sights appear. The area called Sai no Kawara is
traversed, featuring some statues of Jizo and memorial stones.
(See Photo 5) The Sai no Kawara is an important feature of
the “otherworld” at various sacred mountains, and Jizo is well-
known as the savior of the dead.19 From this point on there are
memorial stones and many examples of rock-piles built up by
passing pilgrims. But the gyônin pass this area without stopping
until they reach hachi-gôme, also known as Midagahara, the
plain of Mida or Amida. The prayer of purification is repeated
at a small wooden shrine here, which is protected from wind
and snow by eight foot stone walls. Then breakfast is eaten,
topped off with tea from a skiers’ hut. Even from the seventh
station the scenery is quite beautiful, with a view of Chôkaisan
to the north, Tôhoku’s highest mountain. Other mountains,
such as the famous skiing mountain Zao-san to the west, come
into view near the summit of Gassan. From below the eighth
station skiers are seen. Gassan is one of the mountains famous
for late skiing, but of course skiing is a modern innovation which
disregards the historically earlier, religious “mountain-opening”

19. For a general interpretation see Matthias Eder, “Totenseelen
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or yama-biraki. To the Westerner, the view of parka-clad skier and white-clad gyōnin together certainly presents an interesting contrast. There appears to be a contrast of West and East, new and old, secular and religious. But as the two groups drink tea together, it is difficult to draw any sharp line dividing them.

From this station the climbing becomes more difficult, and since the distance between the eighth and ninth stations is extraordinarily great, a rest is called in the snow about 7:45 A.M. At 8:10 the ninth station or kyū-gōme is reached. Here there is a shrine called Manai-jinja next to a pond called Busshō-ike, literally the pond where Buddhas live. The reference to Buddhas may mean hotoke, dead people who have become Buddhas, and surrounding the pond are various memorial stones. It is said that the people bring cremation ashes here. Midway between the ninth station and the summit another rest is taken at 8:30, and at 9:00 the summit of Gas-san is reached. (See Photo 6.)

At the very summit is a small shrine entirely surrounded by an eight foot wall of stone. Even though it is early May, heavy ice is on the nearby bushes. The gyōnin and others gather inside the stone enclosure before the very small shrine, Gas-san-jinja. As the prayer of purification is repeated, several bottles of sake brought along are offered and candles are lit. (See Photo 7.) Later the writer was told that one feature of this ceremony was to divine the next year’s crop or fortune by whether or not the candles stayed lit or went out.

In years of inclement weather this is the point of return for the haru-yama. However, in 1964, the weather was remarkably clear, so the sixteen proxies or gyōnin, several voluntary participants, and the writer made the round trip between Gas-san-jinja and Yudono-san-jinja before descending Gas-san via the route of ascent. Because there is little time, all set out at once. A very rapid descent is made down the steep slopes of snow, part of the time by turning up one’s toes and “skiing” on one’s heels. One steep cliff is traversed by means of a steel ladder. (See Photo 8.) By 10:30 the shintai, or object of worship of Yudono-san-jinja is reached. This is the site where photographs are not permitted, but a rough sketch can be found in one guide

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20. Busshō can mean the birth of Buddha, but as this is a site of memorial stones, it probably means hotoke (dead people) who are reborn as Buddhas.
As others have remarked, the natural formation of outcropping rock resembles the torso of a nude woman. It is stained red by the hot springs which gush forth even in winter. Again the participants gather before the stone to recite the simple prayer of purification. While resting and eating, various people drink the distasteful water, supposedly for a healing cure. Others dip the tip of their white "kesa" in the water, or soak their feet by standing in the running hot water. (Since they are wearing waraji or straw sandals, the water passes right through.) Several bottles are filled to take home. Some of the men pay respects to their ancestors' spirits in a spot next to the shintai, which is still hidden in the snow.

The ascent from Yudono-san-jinja is quite arduous and slow. The height of Gas-san is quoted at 1,980 meters (about 6,494 feet), and 1,504 meters (about 4,933 feet) for Yudono-san. Since the shrine at Yudono-san is below the summit, this means a rather sharp ascent of more than 1,500 feet up slippery snow. The writer, unaccustomed to such exercise, was barely able to make it back to Gas-san after many rests. Finally the summit of Gas-san is reached about 1:30 P.M., where everyone is congratulated with sake. Before 2:00 P.M. the quick descent of Gas-san starts. Only one rest is taken, about 3:00 at the eighth station or hachigóme, and no religious activity is seen during the descent.

The trucks, boarded at the sixth station or roku-góme about 4:00, go directly to Dewa-jinja, arriving about 5:00 P.M. Everyone goes immediately to the Saikan ("purification hall") in their white clothes. Individually the participants pay their respects at the altar inside the Saikan. (This is the same altar where the ascetics called matsu hijiri, "pine saints," worship during the ritual period called winter peak.) Until 1962 it was the custom to spend this final night of the haru-yama in the rough shelter called shitsuraeya, but in 1962 it was moved to the Sai-


kan. As the name gyōnin indicates, these people supposedly perform gyō or asceticism in their tour around the mountain. This is why they must observe “abstinence.” The shitsuraeya is a special building set apart from other shrine structures, used only at this time and during the winter peak. Thus, moving from the shitsuraeya to the Saikan marks another weakening or relaxing of “gyō.” The Saikan (in pre-Meiji times a temple known as Kezō-in) is a fine, spacious shrine structure with kitchen and sleeping facilities for the shrine’s “pilgrims” and general visitors. After a hot bath, a meal of celebration (with no meat or fish) is brought from the respective homes in the village. Much sake is exchanged, a common village banquet the next night is discussed but not agreed on, and after more drinking and singing, everyone retires after 9:00 P.M. In previous times there was no bath, and they went to sleep with their clothes on in the shitsuraeya. Apparently to retain the idea of gyō, they are limited to two blankets for two people, sleeping on the tatami or straw mats found in all Japanese homes.

May fifth, the final day of the haru-yama, begins early. By 4:00 A.M. everyone is rising, exchanging cups of sake, and finishing the remainder of the previous night’s meal. About 5:30 A.M. the children of these men come from the village via the stone staircase to pick up the lunch boxes and excess baggage. Then at 6:30 everyone walks to the Tenyū-sha near the shitsuraeya. The Tenyū-sha is the small shrine which honors Tenyū, the most illustrious bettō (leader) in the mountain’s history, even though the present shrine was founded during the Meiji period. After repeating the prayer of purification, they move on to Dewa-jinja (see Photo 9) to listen to the kannushi (Shintō priests) recite a shrine prayer. Then the priests swing a nusa (a pole with paper tassels) over the heads of the participants, and pour sake for everyone. They then revere the shrine of the founder,

23. The shitsuraeya is an unfloored building near Dewa-jinja which is prominent in the celebration of the “winter peak.” In the memory of the present participants the contrast is between the present custom of lodging at the Saikan, and the “former” custom of lodging at the shitsuraeya. However, according to the historical research of Togawa, the pre-Meiji custom was to climb Gas-san, revere Yudono-san, and go back to Daiman to confine themselves for the night there at the temple Kokūzō-dō. On the next morning they proceeded to Haguro-san and returned to the village. See “Shugendō-Haguro-ha Goi Ryakkai,” the listing “haru-yama,” p. 163.
Hachiko-jinja, named after Prince Hachiko. Next the stone staircase is taken to the village, where they are greeted and congratulated by villagers. (See Photo 10.) The last group recital of the prayer of purification is at the present shrine office just above the entrance to the stone staircase. Leaving the shrine office, the proxies or gyōnin gradually go their own ways, paying their respects at their own buraku’s shrine. This is the shrine of the ubusuna-gami, where they were first brought to a shrine as a baby. Then they return to their respective buraku where a reception party is waiting.

The writer was able to witness the reception party of the seventh buraku, which retains the older traditional form. The “reception party,” in Japanese, is saka-mukae. Mukae clearly means a greeting or welcome, but many half-joking meanings have been attached to “saka.” It is said to mean the saka or three steep sections in the stone staircase leading to Haguro-san; or it is treated as sake, since sake is a part of every welcome or party.24 But the real meaning surely goes back to sakai or boundary, that is, a welcome at the boundary of the village or buraku. Sakurai has analyzed this celebration of saka-mukae, which is widely observed to welcome back kō (pilgrim association) members from their visit to a distant shrine or temple.25 Sakurai says the most common practice is to go to the village boundary both to see off and also to welcome back the pilgrim proxies (daisansha). The former is called detachi or o-miokuri, but only the rite of return is called saka-mukae. Sakurai discusses mainly the kō which visit the famous Shinto shrines of Ise, but the saka-mukae always features food and drink shared by villagers and pilgrims outside the village boundaries. Sakurai says the folk etymology of sake (“rice wine”) as the first part of saka-mukae originated among those who saw the celebration as a waste of money spent on sake. He gives a number of examples to show that the returning person was regarded either as sacred or as an actual kami. He concludes, “As for the saka-

24. Ibid., “saka-mukae,” p. 154; Togawa notes that although the proper way of writing saka should probably use the character for “slope,” even the ancient literature at Haguro employs the character for sake or “rice wine.”

mukae, originally it was a religious rite in which they saw off and welcomed back the person who left the village and traveled to the world of the kami."26 In general the saka-mukae represents a meeting between the sacred world which the gyōnin has visited (or the sacred state he represents), and the profane world of the village. The saka-mukae at Tōge has some peculiar features, and illustrates more concretely the contemporary situation of sangaku shinkō surrounding Dewa Sanzan and Haguro-san.

Formerly, each of the eight buraku of Tōge held the saka-mukae on separate small hills or knolls outside the village. This hill or knoll was known as the o-yama (mountain) of that buraku, or saka-mukae-yama.27 At present only the seventh buraku retains the older custom, all other buraku gathering inside a house of that buraku. When the two gyōnin of the seventh buraku enter the village, they do not stop at any house, but go on to their o-yama about ten minutes' walk from the village. The knoll is not even fifty feet higher than the surrounding fields; it is covered with low brush and one taller tree at the top. Perhaps twenty men are waiting on top of the knoll, sitting on reed mats before a celebration meal. It is now past 8:30 A.M. The fuda or paper charms acquired from Dewa-jinja are placed beside a rock under the tree, and after a short greeting, all face the snowy form of Gas-san on the horizon and chant the familiar prayer. (See Photo 11.) This is followed by the final feast of the haru-yama, when the fuda (in place of mountain plants) are distributed to the buraku members. The "red rice" which is served on special occasions such as weddings and funerals is served, along with a special skewer of vegetables.28 (See Photo 12.) The gyōnin excuse themselves after eating a little, and return to the village. That night there are additional feasts, but the haru-yama is at an end.


27. Togawa, “Shugendō Haguro-ha Gōi Ryakkai,” the listing “saka-mukae-yama,” p. 154. On each of these separate mountains or knolls is a "Gas-san memorial stone," which is mentioned in the text above.

28. The special skewer is called gorin no zashi or gorin no gushi, and imitates the Shingon stupa of five shapes by inserting a skewer through five different vegetables.
Interpretation of the *Haru-yama*

The foregoing is a brief sketch of the actual *haru-yama* as carried out in 1964. It is obvious that this festival has to do with spring or the growing season, especially since it is performed on the *hachijūhachi-ya*, the eighty-eighth day of spring. Some follow Yanagita's interpretation of the *yama no kami* and *ta no kami* alternation, saying the plants traditionally brought back from Gas-san represented the means by which the *yama no kami* descended the mountain. Togawa is of this opinion, saying that the folk rite of greeting the *yama no kami* in the fields became a *Shugendō* rite when it was performed by the Haguro *yamabushi*. At any rate, even today it is a festival of Tōge which concentrates the faith of all villagers in the three mountains, especially Gas-san. The *haru-yama* focuses on Gas-san not only conceptually, but also by the physical act of climbing Gas-san.

Now we may review the high points of this celebration. The religious focus is on the abstinence and climbing to the top of Gas-san. As suggested earlier, climbing the ten “stations” of a mountain seems to lead to a point of religious culmination at the top. In the performance of the *haru-yama* of 1964, the visit to Yudono-san-jinja was something of a side trip. Actually, once one has attained Gas-san's summit, the descent is quick and uninterrupted with no religious acts of any kind. The second high point is the night spent at the Saikan, formerly at the *shitshuraeyaa*. Sakurai has mentioned that usually pilgrims do not re-

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29. For example, see Yanagita Kunio, comp., *Minzokugaku Jiten* (“Dictionary of Japanese Folklore”) (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō, 1951), “*ta no kami,*” pp. 357-60; “*yama no kami,*” pp. 642-44. See also the comprehensive study of Nelly Naumann, “*Yama no Kami—die japanische Berggottheit,*” *Folklore Studies*, XXII (1963), 133-366; XXIII (1964), 48-199.

30. Togawa, “*Shugendō to Minzoku*” ("Shugendō and Folklore"), in *Nihon Minzokugaku Taikai*, VIII, 357. *Haru-yama* is also called *haru-yama no gyo* or *haru-gyō*. The idea of *yama no kami*, expanded by Yanagita to interpret many spring rites, has been faithfully followed by many of his disciples in describing spring rites. In fact, the idea has been used so widely that it has tended to become rather vague and ambiguous. See also Togawa's book, *Haguro Yamabushi to Minkan Shinkō* (“The Yamabushi at Haguro and Folk Religion”) (Tsuruoka: Fumiya Shoten, 1950), p. 149, and a small article, “*Yama no Kami to Ta no Kami*” (“The Mountain Kami and the Rice Field Kami”), *Shōnai Minzoku*, No. 22, pp. 7-8.
turn directly to their village homes, but spend one or more nights at a shrine or special confinement building. Togawa says formerly at Haguro they spent as many as ten days of abstinence both preceding and following the haru-yama. The third high point is the saka-mukae, where the sacred pilgrims transfer their accumulated religious merit to the villagers in the form of the juda. The exact nature of this religious merit is difficult to define, but it forms a direct connection between the mountain and the individual families, for—be it juda or the earlier plants which are brought back—the families place them on the family altar.

The haru-yama is no exception to the general tendency for contemporary Japanese folk practices to become abbreviated in form and weaker in religious content. On the other hand, the haru-yama continues as a religious practice which links the people of Tóge and these mountains, especially Gas-san. The elements of gyó or asceticism are weak, but there remains the clear idea of carrying out a religious practice. Modern Japan boasts one of the largest and most active group of mountain-climbers and skiers in the world, but the haru-yama is clearly distinguished from such recent sports. The date, route, and activity of the haru-yama are still defined by religious traditions rather than the arbitrary motive of recreation. The seasoned mountain-climber may look down upon the course of the haru-yama as not involving any real skills or scaling unconquered peaks. On the other hand, the haru-yama demands not only considerable time, but also a great deal of energy and perseverance. This effort is expanded to express and celebrate the religious relationship of the people to their land. It is a warm and natural bond of the people to the landscape in which they live and to the land which they till. The sacred mountain of Gas-san, which

31. Togawa, Haguro Yamabushi to Minkan Shinkó, p. 149. Okada Shigekio has given a brief analysis of the abstinence or “taboo” in the confinement of the haru-yama, but this procedure is quite similar to the abstinence practiced by the matsu hijiri during the hundred days of the confinement of the winter peak (fuyu no mine). See Okada Shigekio, “Haguro-san Gyóji ni okeru Tabú’ no Kósatsu” (English title provided as “Survey of taboo in the religious observances at the Mount Haguro”), in Shukyo Kenkyú, No. 127 (October, 1951), pp. 78-80.

32. Formerly the plants picked at Gas-san were said to be placed in the water inlet of the family rice fields. According to Togawa this demonstrates the spring descent of the yama no kami.
oversees their valley and harbors their dead, in this new moment of spring grants them fertility and blessing for the growing season. This is not an unusual worldview for an agricultural people, but in our present age of urbanization and industrialization it is a pleasant reminder that man can conceive of and participate in his cosmos with harmony and devotion. This mutual penetration of agricultural rhythms, on the one hand, and the forms of organized Buddhism and Shinto, on the other hand, defines an essential aspect of Japanese folk religion in particular and Japanese religion in general. The haru-yama also affords an interesting case for the connection between folk religion and sacred mountains, but this calls for a larger comparative study of sacred mountains which is outside the scope of the present paper.

Addenda.

When the article was already in press pertinent new information came to the knowledge of this author.


To footnote 7, p. 4, should be added: See also the recent publication by Hartmut O. Rotermund, Die Yamabushi, Aspekte ihres Glaubens, Lebens und ihrer sozialen Funktion im japanischen Mittelalter, Hamburg, 1968, Monographien zur Völkerkunde, V.
Village proxies back in Tõge, seen arranging for the truck ride to Gas-san the next day. Note the plants or “flowers” picked along the stone staircase, and traditionally placed on the kamidana (Shinto house altar).
On the way to Gas-san early May 4, the proxies leave the trucks briefly to pray at the second "station" (ni-gōme) called Daiman.

Leaving the trucks at the sixth "station" (roku-gōme), the proxies start climbing through the lower snowdrifts toward the peak of Gas-san.
The area called Sai no Kawara, where the dead, especially the souls of dead children, reside. Typical of such areas, which are found throughout Japan, are the heaps of natural stone, the memorial stones, and the inevitable status of Jizō (seen at the far right with cloth over and around the head).

Approaching the summit of Gas-san, with the small shrine (Gas-san-jinja) barely visible behind the proxies. The ice-covered bushes testify to the cool temperatures that still prevail in early May.
The proxies reciting a prayer and clapping hands (as a gesture of reverence) within the stone enclosure, facing the small Gas-san-jinja on the summit of Gas-san.

Descending a steep cliff by means of a steel ladder, on the way to Yudono-san-jinja. Note the straw sandals, which are traditional footwear for all forms of "pilgrimage" in Japan.
The *haru-yama* participants of 1964 assembled before Dewa-jinja on May 5.

Villagers of Tōge greeting the returning *haru-yama* participants, May 5.
The *saka-mukae* ("boundary-welcoming") of the seventh *buraku* outside Ōgajō village. The two pilgrim proxies of the seventh *buraku* are at the head of the group (with white head bands). Between the proxies and the pine tree to the right is the "Gas-san sone" with *fuda* (paper blessings) resting on it. All are facing Gas-san, faintly visible on the horizon.

The meal of the *saka-mukae*: to the left are ordinary dishes such as rice wine (*sake*) and bean curd; on the newspaper to the right are the especially festive dishes. The red beans with rice or red rice (*seki-han*) is common to festive occasions such as weddings. The *gorin-zashi* ("five-circle-skewer") is said to be an imitation of the five-leveled stupa found in Shingon Buddhism.