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Religious practices in the consumer society

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CHAPTER V: **RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN THE CONSUMER SOCIETY**

To approach the current visitors and consumers, mementos of the Tateyama cult have been used in producing goods such as printed shirts with motifs from the Tateyama Mandala and table cloths with the same patterns, while legends about the opening of Tateyama introducing the story of Ariyori, Ariwaka and Uba were published in the form of a comic book (Figure 30). These products are sold in hotels and transportation stops such as stations of the cable car – reminders of the past pilgrimage path.

The use of these commodities as souvenirs is an example of how aspects of a once popular religious cult became reshaped. Although commodities such as talismans, amulets or medicaments were part of the Tateyama cult already in the Edo period, the current form of making available commodities linked to the Tateyama cult is different. They are no longer associated with any protection or benefits. They have been reshaped in accordance with the current trends of consumerism and as such they serve as useful tools in regional promotion.

As was mentioned above, the commercial aspects of pilgrimages were identified by authors already in the 19th century. Studies have also demonstrated that actors from the Japanese pilgrimage sites were involved in promotional and mercantile activities. In the same fashion as pilgrims in the Edo period, the present pilgrims to mountain sites are charged for their participation in religious practices. The expenses for taking part at the Cloth Bridge rite, for example, were 20,000 yen and price of the retreat in the village of Tōge was up to 27,000 yen.[1]

In their book *Religion in the consumer society*, Gauthier and Martikainen (2013a) illustrate the presence of consumption in religion and also explain the nature

1 The given information about prices is as of the year 2014.

Fig. 30: Products designed with images from Tateyama Mandala. The comic book inspired by the Tateyama legends (in the bottom part). Photograph by author.

of consumption, situating it within economic and marketing theories. Like the above-mentioned studies considering mercantile and commercial aspects of Japanese pilgrimage sites (Tsushima, 2012; Ambros, 2008; Hur, 2007; Formanek, 1998), Gauthier and Martikainen have situated consumption and the phenomenon of the consumer society within the process of modernization in around the late 19th century. They identify consumption as one of the means of modernization: 'the world was to be modernized partly through consumption' (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 9). Moreover, they criticize the approach of authors for whom 'pointing to economics and using economic terminology end the discussion, as if the very mention of the market and its automatic adjustment of supply and demand were self-explanatory' (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 16). The reason for their criticism is that such a simplified approach leads most authors to regard commoditization of religion as a degradation or devaluation of religion. Gauthier and Martikainen also warn about disassociating the economic aspects of religion from the social context. They demonstrate the social aspects of consumption using the example of brands and branding of products, stressing that 'consumerism is about identification, not satisfaction' (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 18). Seeing consumerism as satisfaction of customers' demands is an approach of the classical economic model which they criticize. Furthermore, they add criticism of rational choice theory arguing that 'products are not made to compete in rational terms' (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 9).[2] While other authors (Matsui, 2012; Reader, 2014; Askew, 2008; Carrette and King, 2005) have considered the commodification or branding of religion, Gauthier and Martikainen have touched the topic of commoditization in the religious area. In this context, they have explained 'the turn towards marketing techniques which were increasingly oriented toward brand image management and lifestyle advertising which associated products to certain immaterial qualities such as attitudes, values, feelings and meanings' (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 10). In this view offered by Gauthier and Martikainen, Japanese mountain sites appear as an area where various identity makers, ideals, experiences, authenticity or values and lifestyles are marketized and consumed.

From the perspective of marketization related to consumption or consumerism, it becomes interesting to ask what image of religious practice is offered to potential participants. More specifically, what kind of immaterial qualities are religious practices associated with in order to appeal to current

2 This trend is observable in marketing theories, which moved from the traditional model towards the experiential model of consumer behaviour. See Schmitt (1999). In the view of the traditional model, customers consider the benefits of a product or service. Contrary to such a simplistic view, Schmitt (1999) has proposed to extend the view of purchasing decisions to include the emotional and irrational aspects.

generations? The previous chapter already touched on some social realities which associated religious practices with new immaterial qualities. As could be seen in the aforementioned examples, among such values are cultural heritage and the sustainability of religious practices. The following section extends these observations.

Culinary curiosity and healthy lifestyle

The Japanese law for the protection of cultural properties[3] includes folk-cultural properties which can be intangible – such as manners and customs related to food. *Washoku* 和食 – Japanese traditional dietary cultures – were inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013 based on the following argument:

> 'The element is a diverse dietary culture that remains localized. It contributes to promotion of good health, reinforcement of social cohesion and the building of a sustainable society based on knowledge and practices related to nature.'
>
> 'In daily life, WASHOKU has important social functions for the Japanese to reaffirm identity, to foster familial and community cohesion, and to contribute to healthy life, through sharing traditional and well-balanced meals.'[4]

The interweaving of culture with practices related to nature is a recurrent theme applied in this case to gastronomy. In accord with the idea expressed by Gauthier and Martikainen (2013a: 18), aspects of social life are being re-branded, in this case according to the taste of UNESCO standards.[5]

Hence, along these lines Japanese food has been introduced at the food exposition in Milan.[6] According to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the introduction of Japanese food in Milan was based on the thought that:

> '"Japanese food" and "Japanese culture" represent an original dietary culture which is healthy and which values co-existence with nature as well as Japanese tradition, while enjoyment of this food does not end with the sense of taste but extends to the

3 The law defines categories of cultural properties. It was established in 1950 and originated in 1897 (Inaba, 2005:49).

4 This information can be found in the Nomination file no. 00869: 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year'.

5 A similar tendency has been noted by Reader (2014) and McGuire (2013) in their studies of localities related to the Shugendō tradition.

6 The exposition was titled 'Expo Milano 2015: Feeding the planet, energy for life!'. More information is available at Expo Milano (2015).

Fig. 31: Sacred cedar tree called Jiji Sugi at the precincts of Mount Haguro. Photograph by author.

Fig. 32: Dietary lunch served during the retreat. Photograph by author.

> pleasure of sight or smell. Its deliciousness, beauty and pleasure can be tasted through the five senses'.[7] [Translated by author] (Appendix 1, note 6)

Visitors to the food exposition in Milan could enjoy the *shōjin ryōri* 精進料理 – a vegetarian dish which does not contain fish or meat – prepared personally by a chef from Dewa Sanzan. While preparing the food, the chef was video-recorded by a cameraman dressed in the *yamabushi* attire.[8] It has been introduced as a part of the tradition and culture of the Tsuruoka region to European markets.[9] According to a representative of the Japanese gastronomy promoted in Milan, the exhibitors assumed that the taste of *shōjin ryōri* would satisfy the taste of the Europeans who are interested in spiritual culture.[10]

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7 The plan for the Expo in Milano 2015 (page 7) is available online at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (2013).

8 Video from the Milan expo is available online at Milano Expo All Japan Media Distribution Services (2015).

9 Tsuruoka is the administrative centre of the Yamagata Prefecture and the closest city to the Dewa Sanzan mountain area. Before 2015 the *shōjin ryōri* from Tsuruoka had already been introduced, for example, in Paris and Budapest.

10 Source: Milano Expo All Japan Media Distribution Services (2015).

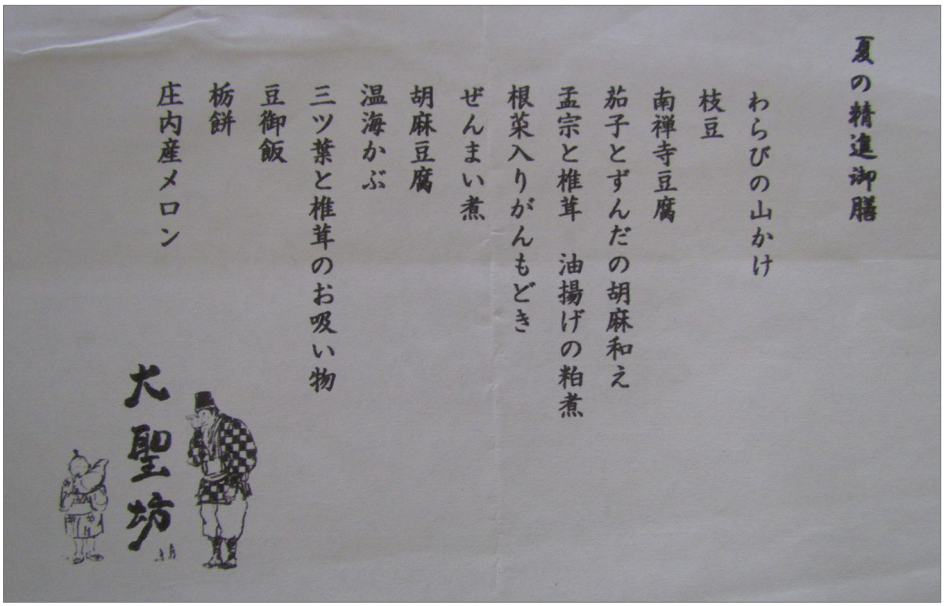

Fig. 33: Description of the dietary lunch menu. Photograph by author.

In Dewa Sanzan this food is viewed as yet another aspect of local *yamabushi* culture. Indeed, the tradition of keeping the precepts regarding food was strictly kept at Dewa Sanzan. According to a record from 1873, priests in this area have never eaten fish, fowl or even eggs.[11]

As I was informed at the Dewa Sanzan Shrine:

> Y*amabushi* culture together with Japanese history are embedded in *shōjin ryōri*. It has been prepared for hundreds of years by *yamabushi*. It is through the food that Dewa Sanzan will be shown to the world – because food is not religion, it is something that everybody anywhere can feel in the same way. There are people who have not experienced such food, a typical experience of the Japanese food is sushi or tempura,[12] but *shōjin ryōri* also represents Japanese culture. According to a representative of the shrine it was surprising food for the foreigners who had an opportunity to taste it at world exhibitions. As he pointed out, it is healthy because it is made of vegetables. Furthermore, each piece has a different taste. When foreigners taste such food, they taste Dewa Sanzan and maybe they would like to come to visit the site. He expressed

11 See the record from the diary of Nishikawa (1836 – 1906), translated to English in Sekimori (2005: 218–219). According to the record, even though the priests were laicized they kept these precepts because they were afraid of breaking the admonishment of the *kami*.

12 Japanese food prepared from vegetables, fish or other seafood that has been buttered and deep fried.

Fig. 34: Dewa Sanzan brochure.

his wish to have visitors from abroad who would make their own experience of the place and feel it.[13]

With the idea that exchange of knowledge on preparation of *shōjin ryōri* would help represent the typical food within and outside of the prefecture, a '*shōjin ryōri* project' began in 2012 in the village of Tōge.[14] On this occasion, family recipes were exchanged between wives who otherwise kept them only within the family.

An interesting point in the presentation of the *shōjin ryōri* at the European market is that it has been introduced, in accordance with the current trend, as a healthy product of high quality, balanced and nutritious as well as traditional. Linking this traditional food to a healthy lifestyle and co-existence with nature shows that the traditional dietary food has been redefined according to the modern mentality.[15] Moreover, in a similar way to the presentation of the Tateyama ritual in Paris, in this case the food related to local religious practices has become an exported item adapted to the imagination (in Appadurai's sense) of expected European spiritual tastes.

Another notable point in the presentation of *shōjin ryōri* abroad was the stress which was put on sensory perception. The use of such tactics coincides with the point made by Thrift (2008: 39) about the importance of the senses in new ways of producting commodities, as well as the remark made by Gauthier and Martikainen about marketing techniques associating products with immaterial qualities, namely to feelings.

Continuing with the view of religious practices from the perspective of the human body, the next section looks at the role of the body and sensory interactions in religious activities.

Importance of body and senses

In localities where I observed and participated in religious activities the body and senses played an important role. The common constituent of both the Shugendō retreat and the re-enactment of the ritual in Tateyama was a suppression of visual attention. In Tateyama, the participants of the ritual crossed the

13 This part is paraphrased from an interview with a representative of the Dewa Sanzan Shrine.

14 Information available at: Cradle (unknown year).

15 The focus on eating habits resembles the case of the participant at the retreat in Dewa Sanzan. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, she was motivated by her desire to change her eating habits. The dietary motivation for participating in *shugendō* has also been mentioned by a *sendatsu* from a different mountain site whom I interviewed. It also figures in the promotion of some Shugendō *(shugyō)* sites, as will be demonstrated.

Cloth Bridge blindfolded. This was accompanied by acoustic sounds which were appealing to the auditory sense. It was an impressive part of the ritual.

The sense of smell was challenged at the Shugendō ritual *nanban ibushi* 南蛮燻し in which a sort of incense consisting of rice hulls and red peppers was burned in a small enclosed room. This incense produced a strong and heavy smell that affected breathing and irritated the eyes. At the end of the ritual, the participants were crying and coughing with a sharp sound. I talked to the participants who were near me during the practice. They were not aware of any meaning of this practice.[16]

Bodily experiences in Shugendō include walking and soaking in an extremely cold mountain river, standing under a waterfall, climbing in heavy rain, and walking on fire. Such interactions with nature are part of the embodied religious practices of Shugendō. Within the scholarly approach to Shugendō and other religious practices performed in the Japanese mountains, the body has been left somehow out of focus, with the exception of the work *Ascetic Practices in Japanese Religion* (2014) by Tullio Frederico Lobetti, in which he delineates ascetic practice as a bodily experience. In his approach, the body in these practices is the primary locus of transmission of the ascetic 'embodied tradition'.

Embodiment has become the central theme in recent anthropological, cultural and landscape studies. Debates have focused on the binary of the semiotic approach concerned with representation or meaning, and the phenomenological non-representational approach concerned with embodied performances, performativities or affects (e.g. Csordas, 1993; Ingold, 2011; Jackson, 2013; Kohn, 2013; Thrift, 2008; White, 2014; Wylie 2007). While the former views the body as a cultural text, the latter focuses on embodiment and 'being in the world'.

Ingold, for instance, criticizes 'a tendency to treat body praxis as a mere vehicle for the outward expression of meanings emanating from a higher source in culture' (Ingold, 2000: 169). Elsewhere Ingold (2001) describes a process of learning as 'guided rediscovery' through which novices gain an immediate experience.

Ingold's view of the perception of the environment is applicable to *shugyō* praxes in the mountains. Bodily praxis is an essential element of this tradition.

16 One of its Buddhist interpretations is to experience the Realm of Hell. See for example, Earhart (1970: 124). Practices enacted during the Shugendō pilgrimage bear complicated symbolic meaning reflecting the rebirth of the participants. The transformation of *yamabushi* is not restricted to a narrative but it is enacted in embodied practices such as simulating dwelling in a womb and being reborn in an actual space that represents this. According to Earhart 'there seems to be no end of the doctrines and symbols which can be applied to any specific ceremony' (Earhart, 1970: 129). Earhart himself relies in his interpretations of rituals on the explanations of Japanese scholars Shimazu, Togawa and Miyake, combining them with his own experience during the autumn fall peak. He admits that 'there is no single line of development from conception moving gradually through gestation to a final climax of birth. Rather a complex array of those symbolic actions is intermixed in separate rites. This complex symbolism continues until the end of the fall peak' (Earhart, 1970: 130).

It is not to say that participants do not want to know the meaning,[17] but rather that performances are not only secondary effects of some higher meanings. The bodily knowledge is not communicated via texts or words.

Sendatsu often say that they want people to experience Shugendō and that in order to gain an experience they need to feel it or taste it. A representative from Dewa Sanzan, for instance, talked about an endeavour of the shrine to attract the younger generation through *shugyō* performed in the mountains of Dewa Sanzan and to let the participants remember it and feel it. He explained that this cannot be learned via words but through bodily experience. It can be gained by climbing or getting splashed by a waterfall (Appendix 1, note 7). In addition, during the exhibition which was held in Milan, visitors had an opportunity to taste the *yamabushi* food, and also to try to blow a *horagai* – a large conch shell used during Shugendō rituals. Even the promotional poster depicting the precincts of Dewa Sanzan in the background said 'Experience Tsuruoka'.

Shugendō as a bodily experience has been emphasized by some *sendatsu* in order to attract the interest of the current generation whose lifestyle is viewed as not incorporating the body into everyday practices. The above-mentioned religious representative of the Kinpusenji temple, Tanaka Riten, notes that just as people can clean their minds and hearts through the practice of *zazen*[18] and meditation – which he claims is now popular – in the case of Shugendō it is possible to achieve the same effect by using one's body while walking (Tanaka, 2014: 10). He calls for people to try this practice of *shugyō*. He adds that the reason why this practice of Shugendō is sought nowadays is that we only use our intellect in the modern lifestyle.

The pilgrim guide from the place where I joined the retreat seems to take a non-representational approach to Shugendō and its ascetic training.[19] Like Tanaka, he also appeals to the current generation which uses only the intellectual, rational way of thinking. He is convinced that people feel comfortable during the ascetic training in spite of its physical challenge, because they have to think physically. That is why it takes place in the middle of nature. The aim is to connect people with nature again. Participants are not allowed to speak during the three-day training, because they are required to understand what they can gain with their body.[20] He realized that it is impossible nowadays to fully return

17 I witnessed how they were trying to understand their experience by searching for information on the internet.

18 *Zazen* 座禅 is a form of seated meditation associated with Zen Buddhism.

19 The following information comes from an interview with the pilgrim guide, source: ©2013 LUXUREARTH. Available online at Luxurearth (2013).

20 The idea of learning through one's body is not solely specific to this pilgrim guide. A similar

to the ancient Japanese worldview; instead he aims for a 'new return' to what is a natural way of being in the world.

One of the participants who took part in the Shugendō retreat with me, described her bodily experience in her reaction on the social network:

> In this kind of experience of making my own way through the strong river current, I was paying more attention to the pleasure of being able to move freely my own body, then to struggle against bushes hanging in my way...It's a real pleasure to mingle with the rhythm of nature...I enjoyed the discoveries of using my body. I have never thought of how useful might be basic body exercise of usual ballet practice on a mountain. Both, muscle fever and pain were at zero level...since I think about 'me as a body', all the *shugyō* practice seems joyful and there was not a single thing I would call painful or hard. [Translated by author] (Appendix 1, note 8)

In her reaction above, the participant described how the hardship was eliminated for her when she let her body think, in accordance with the interpretation of the pilgrim guide. Her case is only one possibility among many. I met mostly with reactions that the *shugyō* experience was really a 'hardship'. Nevertheless, in spite of the danger and physical difficulties intrinsic to the character of the Shugendō pilgrimage, Japanese people have been interested in the experience of Shugendō.

Situating the tendency of pilgrim guides to stress bodily experience in Shugendō practice within the social context, in this case within consumer society, enables the researcher to see the appeal that religious practices gain from being 'isolated from the webs of meaning in which they were previously inscribed and integrated into new networks' (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013a: 16). Thus, Shugendō practice – a way to acquire super-powers, to gain afterlife-merits or this-worldly benefits – becomes a physical activity which is so important for the current generation. It is within the reality of everyday working life, in which bodily engagement is limited, that sensory perceptions and embodied practices became so important in presenting religious practices related to Shugendō to potential participants. In this manner, the bodily experience during Shugendō practices has been integrated into the context of the everyday experiences of the current generation.

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concept was described by Schattschneider (2003) in her study on ascetic practice at Mount Akakura.

Benefits – riyaku 利益

The bodily experience of the participant described above relates to the idea of hardship, which is an intrinsic trait of *shugyō*. The eradication or marginalization of hardships and dangers has been seen as an allure of the pilgrimage by some authors (Reader, 2014: 98). Indeed, such a development might be observed from the macro-level point of view, and the case of Tateyama illustrates such a tendency. Yet, my observation of *shugyō* practices suggests that people are interested in certain bodily engagements in religious practices, which are dangerous or hard.

The gaining of benefits is among the traditional values associated with the hardship of *shugyō* experience.[21] One of the reasons Japanese people accept the challenge of Shugendō might be to make a sacrifice of danger or hardship in order to receive some benefit in return, for example, a benefit of protection.[22]

To illustrate the sacrifice of hardship in order to gain a benefit, an example of the Shugendō ritual of walking on fire, which I joined in the Nikko area, will be given here.[23] In addition to members of a local Shugendō group, some non-members – three elderly people from a nearby village and four young people from Tokyo – also took part in the ritual in 2015. Among those who came from Tokyo was a young woman. She had heard about the ritual walking on fire from her friend, himself a member of the local Shugendō group, and she asked two male friends to accompany her. She explained to me the reason why she participated. It was her *yakudoshi* 厄年 – an unlucky year.[24] Walking on fire is one of the practices that could protect a person in her unlucky year. Participants from the nearby village were also walking on fire. They were given a charm known as *ofuda* after the ritual to gain the benefit of protection.

Another example is the practice of standing under the waterfall known as *taki gyō* 滝行. *Taki gyō* became a theme of an advertisement campaign. Posters and billboards depicting a famous pop star standing under a waterfall in a white robe with her hands in a praying gesture were used for the advertising

21 Gaining of benefits is one of the characteristic traits of Japanese religion according to Reader and Tanabe (1998).

22 Accepting the danger as a sacrifice in order to gain a benefit is also known among other religious cultures such as Catholics (see, for example, Eade and Sallnow, 2000: 21–23).

23 The Shugendō group performing the ritual is located in Kanuma (Tochigi Prefecture). It was founded 30 years ago and gathers at a temple called Sannōin. This group should not to be mistaken for another Shugendō group in Nikkō named Kōunritsuin located in Nikkō Rinnōji temple buildings.

24 An unlucky year is linked to a specific age. Information on risky ages can be found in Japanese shrines. Young women aged 19 or 33 or 37 are in danger, along with men who are 25, 42 and 61 years old. The ages of 33 in the case of women and 42 in the case of men are viewed as the riskiest. For more information on *yakudoshi* see, for example, Lewis (1986).

Fig. 35: Mobile operator campaign. Photograph by author.

campaign of a mobile operator in 2014. When I asked about the meaning of the images, I was told that after being unsuccessful to win in a competition, the pop star made a public commitment to undergo a *taki gyō* as a way to fulfil her desire. The images depicted her with the slogans: 'Making a vow to win the first place' and 'I don't like not being the first' (Figure 35). This example is given here because it demonstrates the general understanding among Japanese people that by (the hardship of) standing under a waterfall one can gain the benefit of reaching a goal.

Ritual ablutions related to the New Year celebration are yet more examples of the popularity of such austerities. These ablutions were broadcasted on television channels and covered in newspapers in January 2016. Zero Channel News 24, for instance, reported on about a hundred participants walking on fire in Hiroshima Prefecture. The news channel showed the participants, united in prayers, who were walking on fire barefoot to pray for health and family safety in the new year. The participants gave their impressions, describing an inner purification experience[25] (Appendix 1, note 9).

25 Available online at News24 (2016)

水温0.4度「エイッ」

滝に打たれ寒修行する人たち（21日午前、富山県上市町で）＝細野登撮影

大寒の21日、北アルプス・立山連峰の麓にある大岩山日石寺（富山県上市町大岩）で、滝に打たれて身を清める寒修行が行われた。

午前7時半の気温は0度で滝の水温は0.4度。白装束の男女約40人が雪を踏みしめ、本堂裏の6本の滝（高さ約6㍍）に入っていった。ホラ貝の音と般若心経を唱える声が響くなか、修行者らは滝に打たれながら「エイッ、エイッ」と気合を入れていた。

三重県四日市市から長女と参加した理容師小林美智子さん(64)は「身が引き締まる思い。また今年1年、頑張ろうという思いが強まった」と話した。

靖国爆発音で韓国人再逮捕

火薬取締法違反容疑

靖国神社のトイレで爆発音がした事件で、警視庁公安部は21日、韓国人の全旭漢（ジョン・ウクハン）被告(27)（建造物侵入罪で起訴）を火薬取締法違反（所持、消費）容疑で再逮捕した。

発表によると、全被告は昨年11月23日、東京都千代田区の靖国神社南門付近のトイレで黒色火薬を詰めた鉄パイプ4本を所持し、このうち3本の火薬を燃焼させた疑い。調べに対し、「逮捕された理由はわかるが、話したくない」と供述しているという。全被告は都内のホテルで時限式発火装置を組み立てたとみられる。

社長ら女2人を詐欺容疑で逮捕

花のレンタル事業への投資名目で現金をだまし取ったとして、警視庁が押し花教室運営会社「フラワーライフ」（東京都渋谷区）の

逮捕していたことが捜査関係者への取材でわかった。同庁は、同社が首都圏の主婦を中心に高配当をうたった投資話で会員を募り、50億円以上を集めていたとみて解明を進める。

捜査関係者によると、2人は2012～14年、実態

発注見通しが公表された2011年7月8日、工事の割り振り案を決定。幹事社は同年8～9月に実施された12件の入札の数日前に、シミュレーショ

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Fig. 36: The Article in Yomiuri Shinbun.

Iwate broadcast news IBC focused on a karate group performing *taki gyō* as a form of cold training in January 2016. Twenty participants begged in this way for an improvement of health. The same karate group was described by Morioka Times news in 2009, on this occasion depicting a schoolboy who was praying for academic improvement.[26]

Yomiuri Shinbun also published news of about forty participants soaking in cold water (0.4 degrees C) in a six-metre high waterfall located in the Tateyama Mountain Range. According to the news, the ascetic practitioners guided by the sound of *horagai* 法螺貝 (a conch shell) were chanting a sutra (*Hannya shin gyō* 般若心経) and entering the waterfall with the exclamation 'Ei!'(Figure 36).

These reports suggest the popularity of religious practices in which hardship is an intrinsic characteristic. Notable also is the fact that compared to the re-enactment of the *Nunohashi* rite, in these cases, the reports do not conceal the religious practice behind the veil of culture, probably because the above-mentioned New Year's ablutions were not government-related events. Moreover, via the comments of the participants, Japanese readers learned about various benefits that could be gained through the ablutions. Within the framework of this book it is these benefits that are viewed as immaterial values associated with religious practices.

Along with the values that have been attributed to these austerities, the variety of the styles in which these practices are performed has been extended and adjusted to trends in present-day society. In addition, internet communication has influenced the interaction between providers of religious practices and participants.

Mediatization

Mountain pilgrimage sites promote themselves at present through the internet. Even religious practices related to Shugendō, which have been considered a form of secret knowledge, are now included in promotional materials such as DVDs, documentaries and online videos posted by providers of *shugyō*. Interviews with Shugendō professionals confirmed that the internet and social media profiles have been initiated and are used to raise the number of participants in Shugendō.[27] The emergence of online communication has provided not only access to information about religious practices but also enabled new ways of creating or maintaining contacts between religious institutions and people.

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26 Available online at Morioka Times (2009).

27 Interviews were made with Shugendō professionals in Dewa Sanzan and in Nikkō. The Nikkō Shugendō group located in Kanuma, regularly updates information and pictures on the internet. Their social media profile gives information about events and also serves for communication between the members. However, information about upcoming events is distributed to members by the postal service.

For example, in the case of the *shugyō* retreat described above, the communication was done via social media. A communication group consisting of *shugyō* participants has been created on the social network. It serves for communication, sharing of impressions from the *shugyō*, and invitations to some events relevant to the topic of *shugyō*, such as presentations by the *shugyō* guide. According to my conversation with the representative from the Dewa Sanzan Shrine, the initiation and invitations for such presentations come from people who have experienced Dewa Sanzan, such as the participants at retreats, who want to share information about their experiences. This was also the case of the presentation given by the guide from Dewa Sanzan which I joined in Tokyo. The invitation came via the communication group created on the social network after the retreat. It was shared in this way by one of the participants at the retreat. It seems that this new style of communication between the religious institution and participants is replacing the former visits to supporters of the mountain cult by *sendatsu* during their journeys around the country. This process maybe viewed as an example of mediatization because it is the media that shapes the style of communication between providers of religious practices and participants.

This pattern of mutual relations between the hyper-mediatization of culture, consumption and consumerism has also been noted by Gauthier and Martikainen (2013a: 2). Yet another characteristic of the consumer society besides the mediatization is a tendency to bestow on people the power of choice.

Choose your experience

According to Gauthier and Martikainen, the tendency to present religion as a realm of multiple choices with which the potential participant may identify is typical for a consumer society. Indeed, this trend is observable in Japanese religion today. A Nichiren Buddhist temple in Chiba Prefecture, for example, came up with a smart idea to 'personalize' charms. The commercial for this product explains: 'In today's Japan modern lifestyles have diversified the peoples' wishes and concerns'.[28] In an attempt to respond to this situation, the temple priest decided to improve the traditional style of charms, which he felt, no longer responded to the present needs of the people. Traditional charms usually cover: business success, love, academic excellence, health and prosperity, road safety, household safety, physical strength, safe delivery or fertility. These however, are not sufficient anymore. Therefore, the personalized charm enables multiple combinations of wishes, each assigned a characteristic pattern in the

28 The video is available online in English; see Fujimoto (2015).

shape of a symbol or an ornament. New personalized charms cover wishes like: bed-wetting prevention, arousing sexual desire, not getting bald, stopping snoring, becoming popular or becoming super cute.[29]

The merits of Shugendō practices have also been attributed a variety of choices. According to Tanaka (2014), the benefits of Shugendō are variable: it can be touching (emotionally), healing or spiritual. It might also serve as a means of gaining religious experience which cannot be achieved in daily life. Furthermore, contrary to the persisting restrictions on women in Shugendō, there are also sites which now offer versions of the Shugendō practices exclusively to women, for example, in Yoshino and Dewa Sanzan. Information publicized on the internet about sites providing some type of *gyō* is widespread and does not end with groups devoted to Shugendō. Especially the *taki gyō* represents an abundant area of choices for those who are interested, or who simply wish to try something new.

Taki gyō can be found as a recommendation for people under stress, as a chance to have a new experience, and as a way of curing health problems, but also as a self-purification practice or a 'power spot'.[30] Providers offer to those who are interested in water ablution a choice of a night version of *taki gyō*, portraying the waterfall surrounded by candles.[31] Yet another variation is a group experience of *taki gyō*. Some sites that target female participants even recommend *taki gyō* for couples before marriage, or as a form of diet.

As an effect of these new trends, the concept of rebirth that historically played a crucial role in the rituals is being re-interpreted to conform to the current way of thinking. Thus, the recommendation of waterfall ablution for those who want to be *reborn* is listed in the same category that appeals to those who want to 'change themselves', 'to get to know the unknown part of oneself', 'crack out of one's shell', or 'those who seek more self-confidence'.

What follows are examples of offers from providers of *taki gyō* practices which serve as illustrations on a variety of choices that are offered to potential participants.

Ashigara shugen society *Ashigara shugen no kai* 足柄修験の会, for instance, recommends *taki gyō* for those who:

> Lack motivation
> Feel their everyday life is boring

29 The promotional video depicts a transvestite disclosing her wish to become super cute.

30 The 'power spot' is a Japanese expression which refers to a place with an unusual power, energy or blessing.

31 This experience is offered by Tsubaki ōjinja, located in the Nagano area. Here they refer to the *taki gyō* as *misogi* みそぎ, which is an equivalent term used by other sites as well for the same action.

Wish to make a surprise
Want to go on a diet
Want to play a *batsu* game 罰ゲーム.[32]

The price for first-timers is 9,000 yen, and from the second visit it declines to 6,000 yen.[33] In the case of a so-called 'wedding surprise *taki gyō*', the cleansing in the waterfall is recorded and the final video serves later as a proof of one's decision to propose. The video is meant as a surprise for the future bride. The price for purification in such cases rises to 18,000 yen per person.

Located high in the mountains to the west from the Chichibu pilgrimage site is a mountain shrine *Mitsumine jinja* 三峰神社. The shrine has a long tradition of wolf worship and at present it also provides the *taki gyō* experience. I participated in one of its waterfall rituals with my classmates in 2015 as part of our excursion to the Mitsumine and Chichibu mountain area – localities easily reachable from Tokyo. Guided by a local *sendatsu* we ascended from the Mitsumine shrine to the waterfall. After we changed into white robes (or, alternatively, for our male classmates into a piece of white cloth evoking the sumo outfit called *fundoshi*) we performed a series of chants for the local *kami*, accompanied by gestures and movements imitating the rowing of a boat. Exclaiming 'Ei!' and symbolically cutting the space with our hands, we could enter into the waterfall lake. We soaked in the cold water and echoed the chanting of the *sendatsu*. After the cleansing under the waterfall we walked out and made the same sets of movements and gestures again while repeating the chants of our guide.

In this example, the *taki gyō* was performed under the careful direction of our guide who explained to us that our gestures were imitating the rowing of a boat which is a vehicle used by the *kami* to descend from the heavens to mountain peaks. The *sendatsu* asked us before we started our *shugyō* to perform this religious practice solemnly according to his guidance. Even though our motivations might have been different from religious aims, everybody participated soulfully. In spite of the solemnity, we were allowed to take pictures.[34] The *sendatsu* even took a picture while we were inside the waterfall lake (Figure 38) and near the waterfall after we finished the chanting.

The perspective of 'The taki gyō society of Mitsumine' *Mitsumine taki gyō no kai* 三峰滝行の会 is different from the one described above in that they state

Fig. 37: Posters promoting Akame shijūhachi waterfalls.

32 This is a game in which the one who loses has to do something embarrassing. *Batsu* means a penalty.

33 Information from the Ashigara shugen society internet page is available at Geocities (unknown year).

34 Taking pictures during *shugyō* practices is usually forbidden.

Fig. 38: Taki gyō experience in the Mitsumine mountains. Courtesy of the sendatsu.

their clients are not standing under the waterfall for any specific religious purpose.[35] The profile of the society includes information about the proficiency of the *taki gyō* superviser in the field of psychology. The approach of this society is psychological. What they provide is mental support. The therapy is offered to those of the current generation who feel lost in the stressful society in which they are living. The society offers the *taki gyō* for those who:

- Want to have a new experience
- Want to be more resistant to stress
- Want to dispel a gloomy feeling
- Want to change themselves: which includes 'to be reborn', to be self-confident, to improve emotional strength, to get out of one's shell
- Want to know themselves better: including receiving the energy of nature, or drawing out a hidden talent, or want to feel the power of a waterfall
- Want to be healthy

However, it is also for those who:

35 Information from the internet page of the society, available online at Mental support room (1997 – 2013).

– Have an interest in *sangaku shinkō* (mountain worship)
– Wish to perform *shugyō* or self-purification
– Want to purify their minds and bodies

The internet page of the society informs readers that there is no single correct purpose for *taki gyō*. People have to try and find their own style. The waterfall accepts everything. It will reflect people the way they are in a way they do not notice in their everyday lives.

Taki gyō is also offered by a NPO as an 'eco tour' to the Akame shijūhachi waterfalls in Mie Prefecture.[36] The slogan of the campaign offers to 'calm one's mind and purify one's body' and 'clean yourself by getting splashed by the waterfall'. [Translated by author] (Figure 37) The campaign poster refers to the Akame shijūhachi waterfalls as a place sacred to Shugendō since ancient times and describes it as a power spot. Information about the tour on the internet includes a photo story depicting a group of young girls as they hike, change their clothes and enjoy the waterfall, and in a contemplative posture under the waterfall. Those who are interested may choose from several courses in various combinations of the *taki gyō* with meditation experience, outdoor yoga experience, lunch and bathing. Prices for the courses range from 8,000 to 11,000 yen.

A lodge located near Mount Mitake, which also focuses on *taki gyō* experiences, demands the participants keep a few rules connected with the waterfall experience (Roman, 2016). They are, for example, asked to avoid intercourse before the practice and asked not to look back on the way to the waterfall. As this place offers guidance in both the Japanese and English languages, and it is possible to make a reservation via booking.com (a provider of accommodation services for travellers), it has become popular among foreigners.[37]

The examples given here suggest an orientation towards the one-time experience type of client – those who respond to a trait of consumption which was noted by Appadurai: 'modern consumption seeks to replace aesthetics of duration with the aesthetics of ephemerality' (Appadurai, 2010: 85). Such representations of *taki gyō* also correspond to the view expressed by the representative from the Dewa Sanzan who noted that food and *shugyō* are not offered as religious items (in the sense that receiving of religious services may reflect a long-term relationship between participants and providers). They are both something to be experienced, something to try.

The aforementioned ways of presenting religious practices show that, as in the other areas of life in the current era, the religious area has been marked by con-

36 This information can be found online at Akame48taki (2008).

37 Information about the experience is available online at Roman (2016). More information about the lodging can be found at Komadori (unknown year).

sumerism. Moreover, those mountain sites, with their long uninterrupted historical tradition of Shugendō, are appreciated as more authentic among the professional *yamabushi*. Acquiring the professional status of *sendatsu* in such places is costly. Therefore, not everybody can afford to practice in such Shugendō sites, giving them an aura of exclusivity. It seems, then, that there is a parallel between the evaluation of sites providing religious practices and the concept of brands.

Conversations with participants at the rituals demonstrated that the 'appeal' for religious practices is still alive. The emergence of new values ascribed to religious practices, however, does not imply that their characteristics, such as interacting with the supernatural, have diminished. I learned from the personal stories of Shugendō practitioners that the decision to choose Shugendō as part of one's life is hard to narrow down and explain by a rational choice theory, to the appeal of self-realization or the desire for a catchy lifestyle. In my analysis, personal life stories and particularities can be viewed as additional determinants of engagement in religious practices. There are personal lifestories in which Shugendō practitioners were 'chosen', contrary to the idea of actively 'making a choice'. These cases involve spiritual experiences related to mediums, shamans or other spiritual mediators. Yet others might come to the life-path of religious practices in the mountains through social networking – for example, as a shared activity with one's best friend from high school. Other cases are those of engagement in religious practices related to activities such as a school's sports day or purchasing a new car that must be ritually purified. These aspects are important parts of contemporary religious practices in the mountains. However, they reach beyond the scope of this work.