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Conclusions

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CONCLUSIONS

Some historical and current examples of religious practices from mountain religious sites have been used throughout this work with the aim of examining ways that religious practices have been sustained in mountain areas. In this endeavour attention has been paid to the impact of consumerism on this process.

As practices related to notions of the afterlife have lost their allure, the examples presented here confirm the current tendency to re-brand religious practices, promoting them in accordance with the current life-styles and values. Considering the current orientation of consumer society towards identification with products, another aim of the book had been to specify immaterial values associated with the examined religious practices.

These examples indicate that current thinking about cultural heritage as well as ecology figure as immaterial qualities associated with religious practices. Interestingly, the case of the Cloth Bridge rite illustrates that a discrepancy between the official rhetoric and the statements of participants may lead to a broadening of the immaterial qualities associated with a religious practice. As could be seen, immaterial qualities such as spirituality and healing have enriched the original characteristics of the rite. Furthermore, re-enactment of the Cloth Bridge rite in Paris and presentation of *shōjin ryōri* overseas indicate that immaterial qualities associated with religious practices are being adapted to the taste of spectators abroad.

Learning from the approaches which draw attention to the body, part of this work has attended to religious practices in the mountains as arenas without a specified creed, meaning, or belief and has recognized the observed religious practices as embodied, with attention to sensory experiences in religious practices. However, contrary to studies related to the concept of embodiment, the current work situates such sensory experiences in relation to consumerism. In this context, the world of Shugendō reveals some new strategies that providers of

Shugendō practices use to make them interesting for the current generation. It has been noted in this respect that the traditional benefit of acquiring of super-powers via ascetic practices has been reinterpreted in our time. Although bodily experience is still crucial in Shugendō, it is introduced in a new light. Shugendō providers argue that this bodily experience is in contrast with the everyday experiences of the typical contemporary, rationally thinking individual who lacks physical activity. In this way, the benefit of gaining super-powers appears as an unknown possibility of perceptions inherent to the human body. Moreover, arguments linking the bodily experiences during Shugendō with lack of physical activity point to yet another immaterial quality associated with religious practices – a healthy lifestyle.

The examples of the mobile operator advertising campaign and news reports about New Year ascetic practices demonstrate that motivations for performing religious practices, such as obtaining a variety of benefits including protection against disease and bad luck or securing success, have not diminished. However, at the same time, new values associated with religious practices indicate that the current generation, used to scientific explanations in the field of human health, reacts positively to the associations of religious practices with a healthy lifestyle. Hence, participation in a religious practice is not only about its supernatural effects resulting, for instance, in protection against disease, but also about its ‘natural’ effects (e.g., consuming healthy food or engaging in physical activity) resulting in a healthy physical condition.

Moreover, the examples of *taki gyō* practices give a broader perspective on the immaterial qualities associated with current religious practices. While traditional qualities including health benefits, sacrifice or reaching and attaining goal still exist, *taki gyō* has been portrayed through a wider variety of choices and experiences, including romance, amusement, power or energy spot, therapy, healing, relaxation and inspiration. Furthermore, the examples of promoting religious practices such as *taki gyō* illustrate new ways of medialization, as well as commoditization in the religious sphere. At the same time, these practices exemplify the expanding range of options for involvement in religious practices that participants may choose from.

The research also illustrates a trend of one-time, experience-oriented participants. A one-time experience stands in contrast to the declining prevalence of long-time affiliation of individuals with religious institutions. Since Japan is a country with falling active membership in religious institutions (Rowe, 2011; Covell, 2005), such observations interlock with academic debates on secularism, post-secularism (Gorski, 2012) and the resurgence of religion (Riesebrodt and Konieczny, 2005). My analysis, however, does not view this trend as either secularization or the opposite, an emergence of a more religious generation, but

rather as the emergence of consumer-like interactions between participants and providers of religious practices. Moreover, the new forms of interaction between participants and providers via the media indicates mediatization in this area.

I have considered the situation of mountain religious practices from the economic point of view with a focus on consumerism, as the book mainly builds on Gauthier and Martikainen (2013a). However, further analysis in future research could take into consideration the first volume of their work (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013b), which concentrates on religion in relation to the political sphere, specifically with ideas of neoliberalism and governance. Despite its limitations, I hope that this book can contribute to the understanding of the vibrant Japanese religion and that it succeeds in revealing more about the current transformation of society.

