

Discussion Guide

SHUGENDŌ NOW

CLASSROOM EDITION

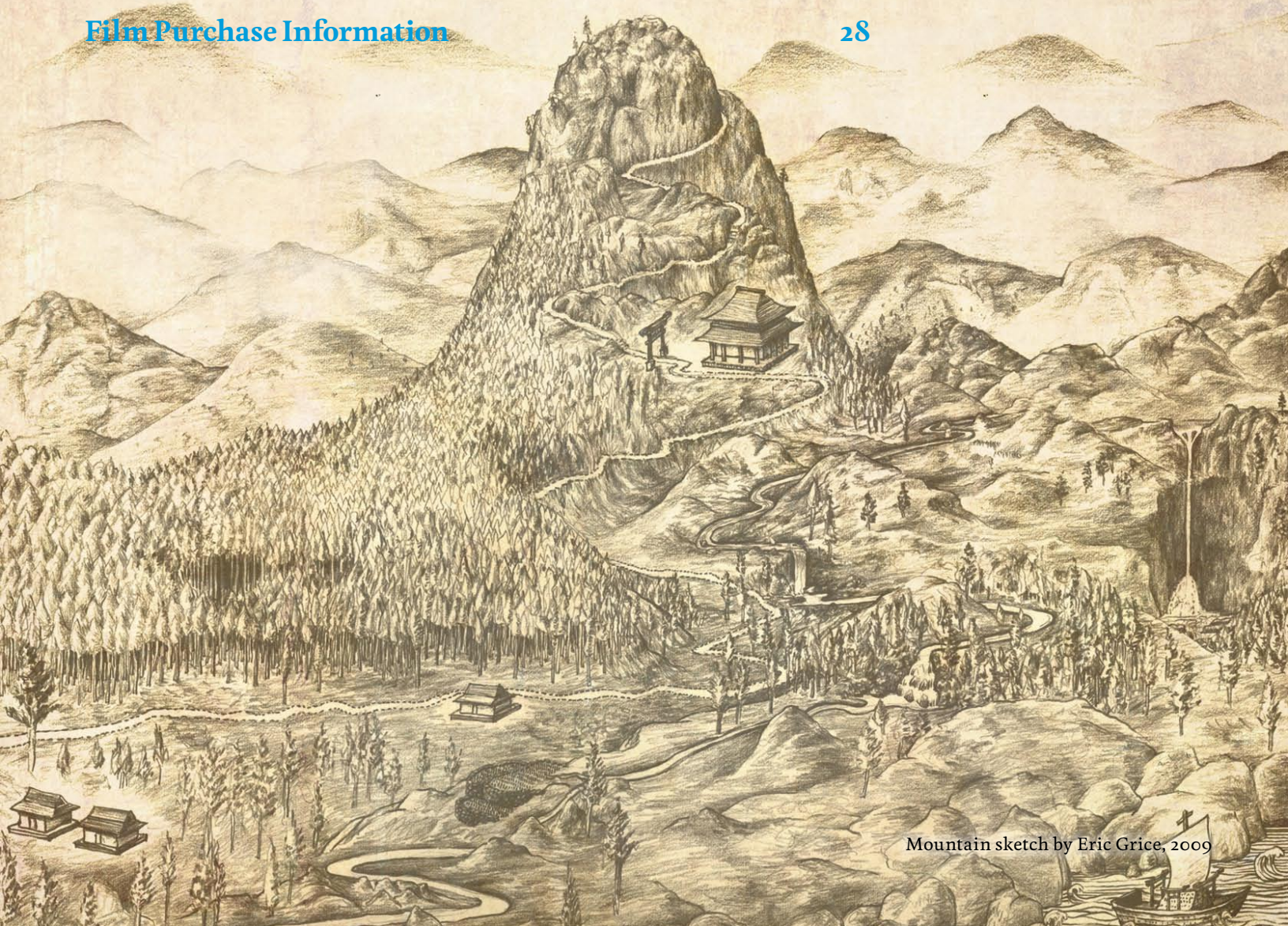


“A compelling story that links religious practice with ecological sensitivity, balanced living, and reconnecting with nature. The cinematography and sound design are both excellent, fluidly moving the audience through the story and capturing the essence of both rural and urban life.”

- Bryan Rill, *Asian Ethnology*

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PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This discussion guide and documentary film on which it is based are intended for diverse audiences and uses in and outside the classroom. Our approach is poetic and immersive, yet informed by ethnographic fieldwork and historical research conducted since 2002. We seek to engage the general public, educators, learners, practitioners and discussants at their own level of understanding. Questions and resources are separated into three levels: stream enterer (no background), twice-returner (some background in East Asia or Japan; religious or Buddhist studies; meditation practice), and non-returner (extensive background and/or experience gained from practice). Shugendô Now's relevance extends beyond Japan and East Asia to encompass global concerns about urbanization, ecological and social justice, strategies for balanced and sustainable living, and overcoming alienation from the natural world and human communities.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Lotus Ascent



In *The Lotus Ascent* we accompany 120 male pilgrims from all walks of life on a twenty-six kilometer climb to the peak of Japan's Mt Ômine. This sacred mountain, off limits to women, is regarded as the home of divinities and Immortals as well as the mother's womb: a site of rebirth, catharsis, and healing. Returning with them to the sprawling metropolises they call home, we learn what motivates pilgrims and how they integrate lessons learned from Nature in daily life. Our guide Tanaka Riten, a seasoned ascetic

with intellectual credentials, media savvy, and a keen sense of humor, has made the traditional practices more accessible to lay people, boosting participation considerably. Yet attendance by more experienced ascetics has dropped. Wagering that the only way for a religious tradition to survive is to have the broadest possible membership, Tanaka believes his efforts have not been unsuccessful.

Forest of Mountain Learning



Struggling to stay human, wishing to live "smelling the earth," and choosing between accounting or the artist's life: these are some of the motivations that attract visitors to *The Forest of Mountain Learning*. Charismatic priest Tateishi Kôshô has established this rustic temple and training site as a space for individuals at a crossroads in their lives to contemplate Nature and "know their heart-mind." Kôshô's musical and culinary virtuosity, colorful background, and wisdom gained from ascetic practices in rugged mountains make him an appealing conversation partner. But his disciplined practice and protection of the natural world from illegal dumping and gravel production earn him the respect and admiration of a global cohort of pilgrims.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



There is a chant you will hear several times throughout our documentary that I believe summarizes our intentions: “*Rokkon shojo*,” or “Purify the Six Roots of Perception.”

I believe we are living in times of over-saturated media. Be it intense reality television shows caked with advertising or the billions of Internet videos that showcase anything about everything or apocalyptic movies on the big screen that turn sacred knowledge to popcorn. Everywhere are attempts to divert get our attention to the next incredible whatever. I find this to be exciting and frightful at the same time. What are the opportunities to learn within this buzz of information? How do we integrate it all into our beings?



With this film we hope to offer something different. A film experience that cleanses the sensorial palate. Stories about individuals, families and institutions that highlight the extraordinary in the mundane. Through an esoteric tradition, we explore the universal and fundamental connection we all have with Nature. Like Henry David Thoreau once said: “All of Nature is doing her best each moment to make us well. She exists for no other end. Do not resist her.”

We present to you a film that doesn't explain it but embodies it. Although many ideas are shared by the participants in the film, for us the most important is the heart connection we want to establish with the viewer. We want people to come out with a sense of peace and an open heart, with a desire to bathe in a waterfall, walk on a mountain or cook a good meal with friends. It brings us pleasure to present a film that doesn't shock people with terrible news about our World, but a film that inspires the viewer to appreciate and be connected with the World that we're terribly destroying, despite ourselves.

I thank you for your interest and hope you get a chance to view this film.

- Jean-Marc Abela, Director

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

“What does a Japanese mountain have to do with us?”

There are vast areas of human life to which scientific methodology is inapt; ethnographic description must give way to the ethnopoetic: a series of concrete and luminous images, arranged by intuition rather than prescription, and whose shifting configurations, like the points of and between the constellations, map out a piece of the world (Weinberger 1992:52).

Shugendô Now represents the creative reinvention of Japanese mountain asceticism in Kumano and Yoshino (south of Kyoto) by two very different charismatic, media-savvy priests and the myriad ways diverse, urban pilgrims integrate lessons learned from nature in their daily lives in Tokyo and Osaka.

I first met many of the individuals who appear in our film in 2002-2003 during participant-observer fieldwork as a young graduate student seeking a subject for my Ph.D. thesis. Principal photography and post-production took place in 2007 and 2008-2009 respectively. I remember naively asking a priest at Kimpusen-ji temple, “Are there any more ‘real’ mountain ascetics around here?” Monographs written in the 1960s and 70s decried *Shugendô*’s commodification. Ascetics riding air-conditioned tour buses to travel between training sites paved over in the post-war era was cited as evidence, as were abbreviated retreats to accommodate modern work schedules. I soon realized things were more complex.

During Japan’s so-called “Lost Decades” (late 1980s through early 21st Century), a revival led in part by priest Tanaka Riten began via the Internet and culminated in UNESCO World Heritage designation of the region in 2004. In 2002 Priest Tateishi Kôshô invited me to his temple *The Forest of Mountain Learning* in Wakayama. His environmental and social activism, culinary and musical virtuosity impressed me. I learned to stop asking questions and instead walk the mountains, weed rice fields, and scrub toilets. To listen and observe. Tateishi’s “eco-pilgrimage” to re-mediated natural sites made me wonder, “Could this inspire busy, urban audience members to reconnect with nature?”

Fieldwork put me into contact with publishers, greens-keepers, semi-retired electricians, schoolteachers, nightclub owners, day labourers and factory workers. These gentlemen confided in me their motivations for climbing Mount Ômine. Only men may ascend to Mount Ômine’s peak—to find out why see the FAQs on the DVD’s “Special Features” menu. Escape from boredom, sense of homecoming and rejuvenation in nature, combining austerities with a soak in nearby hot springs, and curiosity about the UNESCO World Heritage status of the region are found at the lighter end of a spectrum. At the heavier end of things, joblessness, depression, inability to settle down and move forward in life, lack of fulfilment in career and family life, substance abuse, infertility, anxiety, and trauma are some of the most common motivations lay practitioners report. Participants’ goals are not always explicit or transparent, however, even to themselves. Some come looking for a chance to reconnect with nature, for spiritual and practical guidance, for assurances in whatever form available that they will hit upon the means of participating in social and economic life. Some have more clear objectives—that is, to dislodge blockages in the flow of their lives and/or offer gratitude for the intercession of powerful deities in their lives.



Although none may express it in these terms, the crises many of them face stem from the complex interplay of personal life circumstances, societal dividing practices, and the low-grade anxiety and turmoil accompanying the dwindling prospects for future happiness, satiety, and well-being that is becoming more commonplace in contemporary recessionary, zero-growth Japan.

In July 2007 self-taught filmmaker Jean-Marc Abela and I found ourselves in Japan with a video camera and sound recording gear. We had met on a Montréal rooftop garden in 2005 and shortly thereafter discussed the idea of collaborating. Our aim was to raise questions about asceticism in an age of plenty: “Why do Shugendô?” “What meaning and value did a rural mountain ascetic tradition have for city people?” We eschewed on-camera interviews and exposition, opting instead for a minimalist, subjective narration. Our approach was informed by theory, practice, and insights gained from training our senses to become more acute. We took cues from the embodied experience of chanting “Repent. Purify the Six Roots of Perception.” Elsewhere I describe how this practice permitted me to interject a subjective interpretation of mono-cultural cedar plantations as landscapes burdened by war memories (McGuire 2011:304).

Tateishi’s admonition against “eco-fanaticism” and creation of an eco-pilgrimage as a “space of hope” are important moments in the film but also in our growth as filmmakers and environmentalists. He raised both topics during a casual lunch with devotees after I thoughtlessly complained about all the driving we were doing to get our footage.

“Not very ascetic,” I rushed to judge.

Tateishi’s ecological dharma talk comes across on film as a spontaneous communication to devotees. But it seems more likely now that it was my lack of gratitude and carbon emissions angst that provoked Tateishi to raise this subject on camera. It’s a great moment in the film, but one that requires further context and reveals how non-fiction documentaries are highly constructed artifacts that arise from the agency and interaction of filmmakers and participants, and not the gods, as visual anthropologist Da-

vid MacDougall reminds us. The challenge for future work will be to reveal in subtle, non-gratuitous ways how our “intertwined subjectivities” (Norma Joseph, personal communication) shape the film.

Shugendô Now is as an attempt at collaborative and “ethnopoetic” filmmaking (Weinberger 1992:52). We are gratified audiences savor moments where we slide with co-participants toward rebirth down a waterfall imagined as the Tantric Womb. It was one of the most fun and meaningful moments for us, too. We hope viewers see that Shugendô practitioners do ritual ascetic practices in the 21st Century not because they are “superstitious,” or “group-oriented,” nor out of love of nation or emperor. They do them because it is enjoyable, challenging, and keeps them connected and human.

We you enjoy the film and share it and the discussion guide widely.

- Mark Patrick McGuire
John Abbott College (Montréal)

FILM REFERENCE MAP FOR SHUGENDÔ NOW



MAP COURTESY OF ASIAN EDUCATIONAL MEDIA SERVICE

CONTEXTUALIZING ESSAY

Prepared by Waunita Kinoshita
and Takuo Kinoshita, Parkland College



As many non-Japanese visit Japan or become acquainted with Japanese visitors, various traditions, customs or daily life practices often become a part of their discussions. In these discussions young Japanese sometimes say they are not religious or do not have a religion, even though Buddhism and Kami worship (now called “Shintô”) have been part of everyday life in Japan for at least 1,500 years. What do they mean when they say they don’t have a religion yet so much of what they do, festivals, funerals, marriages, daily honoring of their ancestors at the family altar, placement of the furniture in a room, is influenced by religious traditions or beliefs? Many Japanese go to shrines or temples to pray for a good marriage, a successful business, a pregnancy, or success in passing exams and admission into a prestigious school. How does this square with their contention of not having a religion?

One distinction may be helpful in understanding the statement, “I don’t have a religion”: Most typically, the person means that he or she does not “belong” to a particular organized religious institution or is exclusively affiliated with one religion. This is why a large number of people say they’re not religious but go on to tell pollsters that they believe in Kami and/or Buddhas. The word “religion” (shūkyō) in Japanese is associated with belief in or affiliation

with a particular sect or religious body, so it is associated with both Western religion and the new religious movements of 19th to 21st century Japan, which commonly feature this characteristic. So although people in Japan typically have beliefs and perform practices that are religious in nature, they say at the same time that they don’t have a “religion.” Moreover, if you asked if they’re atheist, they would almost invariably deny it; they do have religious beliefs and practices but, typically, not those like those found in Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Let us look at one example of Japanese people’s religious activity to get a better understanding. For example, they may go to a Shintô shrine at New Years to turn in their old arrows from the past year and receive new arrows as symbols of protection from evil spirits for the New Year. They may feel that it is a good thing to write a wish and attach it to a branch in the shrine asking for success on their upcoming university exams. These acts imply that they believe that there is some power that may respond to their requests even though they are not members of that particular sect or religion.

Although there are many different theories of religion, it can be said that religion is associated with beliefs about our relationship with the cosmos and, often, in connection with the afterlife. In some cultures such beliefs have developed into organized institutions with hierarchies of leaders, doctrines, rituals, etc. But in other situations beliefs are held by individuals and groups but have not developed into formal organizations. It is important that individuals do not look at the beliefs and practices of another culture and assume that a word in their own vocabulary has the same exact meaning as in the target culture. To say that Shintô or Buddhism are religions does not mean they have the same or similar structure as, say, the Catholic religion.



There has been Kami worship throughout all of Japanese history, but it was only when Buddhist monks began to theorize about Kami that the word Shintô began to be commonly used (in the 14th c.). In the larger population it was only in the early modern period that Shintô became associated with any kind of organized religious structure. Buddhism, on the other hand, had an extensive ecclesiastical structure but did not demand the exclusive affiliation of its lay believers, so any Japanese person could readily go to a shrine to worship a Kami and then go to a Buddhist temple to venerate Buddhas or Bodhisattvas.

In fact, most Buddhists in early Japan believed that the Kami, sentient beings like us, were subject to karmic or moral-causal retribution, so temples commonly housed a shrine on their grounds, where Buddhist scriptures would be recited regularly to help enable the Kami on-site to understand Buddhist teachings and attain Buddhist enlightenment. For example, even today, a temple like the famous Kiyomizudera temple in Kyoto features this kind of shrine on its grounds, as is the case with many other temples. Also, keep in mind that in looking at a religion one cannot assume that it has been static from the time of its beginning. All religions, and their beliefs and practices, have changed over time and to understand a religion one must know something of its particular historical context.

In viewing the film, *Shugendô Now: The Lotus Ascent*, the question arises of why these businessmen in contemporary Japan are going on this “pilgrimage” up Mt. Ômine? Why are they enduring this physically demanding climb up this particular mountain? Many are involved in the contemporary

business world so what compels them to undertake such an action?

In order to understand their motivations, it is important to consider the influence of Japanese cultural traditions, which draw upon a broad range of beliefs and practices of the Japanese isles and continental East Asia. A number of Japanese cultural traditions emphasize sacred sites, which we often associate with nature. Just as in continental East Asian traditions (also influenced by Buddhism and Daoism) included natural features within their art and an emphasis on sites associated with the sacred, Japanese art forms often depict features such as mountains, waterfalls, and trees. And, as with other cultures of East Asia, they also transport the cosmic and its sacred spaces into their most intimate spaces by creating miniature gardens that include features such as Bonsai trees. Tea traditions bring together a nostalgia for a lost simplicity in Japanese life with an admiration for objects evoking that simplicity—along with the aesthetic cachet associated with elites who have the means to study in tea lineages and hold tea parties. Moreover, just as absolute beauty might be associated with God or the good in Western traditions, it has been common to associate the numinous, the sacred, with our surroundings in general in connection with practices of Kami worship. These associations predate even Japanese Buddhist traditions and venerate the mysterious (sacred) forces at sacred sites throughout the landscape.

This landscape, i.e. the geography of Japan, seems to have played a significant role in the development of Japanese religious beliefs. Japan is a country of more than 4000 islands, many with mountains from which rivers flow and waterfalls cascade. About 85% of the land area of Japan is mountainous, so mountains understandably have a special place in the Japanese admiration of natural beauty. Many mountains are considered sacred, and most Japanese have historically believed that Kami and Buddhist divinities (i.e., Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and protective deities) reside in or descend to them. Mt. Ômine, on which this film’s pilgrimage takes place, is located on the Kii peninsula in the southern part of Nara Prefecture. There are other sacred mountains on this peninsula that stretches east into the Pacific Ocean from just northeast of Osaka on Honshu, the main island of Japan.



The islands of Japanese have been plagued by disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes throughout recorded history. Just as the ancient Hebrews believed God influenced such events, the people in the Japanese isles also associated them with sacred or related powers. Their rice harvests, for example, depended upon the presumed good will of divine forces such as those related to what we now call the natural world. Their dependence on fishing as one source of food, in their belief, was related to the gods (Kami) of the seas and winds that make the supply of fish available. Many major festivals in Japan center on the seasons and the success of the rice harvest or fishing expeditions.

An important factor in the religion and religious institutions in Japan was the opening up of Japan to the world beyond continental East Asia, to industrialization, modernization and more recently globalization. In the early centuries, much of Japan's interaction with the world was with China and Korea, but as Japan became more open during and after the Meiji period, new influences and ideas were introduced. With the industrialization of Japan and the great impact of technology, daily life has changed significantly. New religions and religious ideas have been introduced. A number of new "religions" or sects have developed out of the traditional Shintô and Buddhist beliefs and practices.

BACKGROUND ESSAY: SHUGENDŌ

Prepared by Waunita Kinoshita
and Takuo Kinoshita, Parkland College

To understand religious practices in Japan it is necessary to have some basic knowledge of Shintō (historically known as Kami worship, or *jingi sūhai*), Buddhism, and Daoism. Many religious groups that have developed out of these and out of Christianity, which was introduced by the Portuguese in the 16th century, add to the blend of contemporary religious thought and practices in Japan.

Although Shintō is sometimes said to be indigenous to Japan, the term Shin is the Japanese pronunciation of a term for spirits (*shen*) in Chinese, so it is important to understand Kami worship in its East Asian context. In fact, the most influential scholar of medieval Japanese history of the past half century, Kuroda Toshio, argued that it is accurate to see Kami worship as a form of Daoism; such a claim is questionable, since it would be presumptive to assume that Japanese practices simply grew out of Chinese ones. However, there was clearly an integral connection between Kami worship and religious practices throughout East Asia. The word Shintō, composed of the two Chinese characters *Shen* (spirits, or Kami) and *Dao* (way of), means “the way of the kami.” It emphasizes the close relationship between the natural world and human beings. However, it is important to bear in mind that while Kami worship has existed for thousands of years, the introduction of a religious organization is a recent phenomenon; it was only with the theorization by Buddhist monks that discussions of “Shintō” and its meaning became prominent, and only with the advent of so-called “National Learning” (*kokugaku*) scholars in the 18th century that the term became associated with a national or otherwise organized movement.

Buddhism grew out of the search for answers to the question why there is suffering by Siddhartha Gautama as he wandered around India in the fifth century BCE. He found the answer to this problem through perfecting a way of life that was comprised of the cultivation of wisdom together with the practices of virtue (ethics) and meditation (one-pointed concentration, followed by deeper insight). It spread to China, then Korea and was introduced into Japan



in the 6th Century from Korea. Buddhists, through the way of life outlined above, attempt to understand life’s basic truths and thus the way to liberation from suffering; by understanding and penetrating the truth that karma causes rebirth and repeated suffering based on ignorant selfishness, they either improve their rebirth or overcome any further rebirth, becoming “awake” (Buddha) to the cosmic truth.

An awake, or “enlightened,” person can become a Buddha. Buddhism does feature gods, but they are ignorant beings like the rest of us, who must also turn to the Buddhist path of wisdom, ethics, and meditation to realize liberation from rebirth; they, like us, ultimately suffer and die, so they are in need of the Buddhist teaching (Dharma) just as much as we are. Neither they nor we need to learn a creed affiliated exclusively with a Buddhist temple or sect; all any of us needs to do is to follow the example established by the historical Buddha and by other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Buddhas in training) over aeons of time. We may appropriately, in other words, worship Kami too for very different ends, although it is important to remember that it was the Buddha who taught the highest of teachings to us, from the Buddhist standpoint.

Daoism is often said to have emerged from the writings of a Chinese thinker commonly known as Lao Tzu (Laozi) and his followers, although it is not even clear if such a single individual lived. Moreover, the tradition attributable to someone called Laozi is a textual tradition quite different from the vast set of organizations and local practices also referred to as “Daoist.” The latter may have, indeed, influenced the development of Kami worship, but it is impossible to verify precisely what the connection may have been.

The Dao, whether as described in the name of Laozi or by Daoist priests since the 2nd century CE, is seen as an indescribable and mysterious force that controls the universe and all of nature at the same time that it is identifiable with them. The goal is to live in accordance with the Dao, which was variously understood as following a hermit's life of contemplating the Dao in a natural setting or learning specific techniques by which to become an immortal—or learning specific practices for improving one's lot in this and all worlds.

The establishment of a Shugendō organization occurred when this group of so-called mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*, *shugenja*), became officially affiliated with the Tendai Buddhist temple Onjōji (Kyoto) in the second half of the 13th century, and only became prominent from the thirteenth century onward. These mountain ascetics were clearly influenced by everpresent mountain beliefs (including Kami worship)—which we saw above—but they were also influenced directly by esoteric Buddhism, a system of Buddhist beliefs and practicing using secret initiation into the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind to attain enlightenment in this very body.



The mountain ascetics had their own unique interpretation of esoteric Buddhism, which in this case applied the initiation of the three mysteries to the landscape of sacred sites. In other words, such sites came to “mandalized,” seen as directly embodying the two great mandalas of esoteric Buddhism, the Diamond and Womb mandalas, which represent two fundamental aspects of the universe (these are the mandalas used as transitions in the film). In other words, the mountain ascetics “entered” the mountains in just the same way as esoteric practitioners

were initiated into diagrams of reality, mandalas. They also used the proper hand gestures and mantras (verbal invocations or chants) to realize their identity with the mountains and residing divinities. Climbing and thus “entering” the mountain was seen as conferring sacred powers—and, presumably, enlightenment—on the mountain ascetics. It is this ritual of entering a site like Ōmine that constitutes the most important practice in what is now called Shugendō. Historically, depending on the mountain, women were often banned from participating in such rites, although their participation has been restored at most sites in the post-war period.

In Japan women were forbidden to join in certain other religious rituals as well. For example, a woman could not enter a shrine through the Torii gate of a shrine for at least one year after the birth of a baby because she was considered unclean. Still today women are seen in shrines as helping (*Miko*) but not in leadership roles. In Buddhism, there are nuns. These practices may reflect the traditional position of women in Japanese society in general, which seems to have been closely associated with trends in larger East Asia beginning a millennium ago, when Chinese texts like the *Blood Bowl scripture* were newly created and taught of women's sinfulness and uncleanness, introduced to Japan by the 14th century. The development of the homestead family structure in medieval Japan, was particularly influenced by warrior culture and related misogyny also contributed to the exclusion of women from important ritual practices.

Understanding the religious climate of Japan requires an understanding of how religious beliefs and religions have developed over centuries in Japan. One has to understand how these beliefs are reflected in the daily activities and thinking of people there. And, one must reflect on the nature of each human to search for meaning in his or her own life. This helps us to understand the religion called “Shugendō.”

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND EXISTENTIAL CONTEXT: CONTEMPORARY SHUGENDÔ PRACTITIONERS

Mark Patrick McGuire

Cultural anthropologist Miyazaki Hirokazu has called the period following the bursting of Japan's economic bubble "the temporality of no hope."¹ Shut out from any means of obtaining full-time, secure employment or the means to participate fully in economic, political and social life, increasingly younger and younger Japanese men and women simply opt of education, training, and employment rather than face the prospects of disappointment that many feel will be their lot even after decades of hard work, study, and struggle to make it in the current climate of neoliberal economic and social reforms. Known as "NEET" (Not in Education, Employment or Training), "Freeters," (Free, part-time workers) and "parasite singles" (unmarried adult children who remain in the family home with special disdain for unmarried women who do not bear children), these renunciates, like Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, respond to pressures to conform in the neoliberal climate with a calm refusal: "I would prefer not to."

It must also be made clear that NEET and *freeters* are neither monolithic categories nor characterized by the same degree of personal choice and mobility. There are important social, educational, and class distinctions to be noted. Scholars of Japan's political and moral economy differentiate between the different types of NEET and *freeters* who have appeared at different stages of Japan's economic crisis beginning in the late 1980s. The first wave, according to Reiko Kosugi, were creative and cultural workers who refused to accept full-time (office) work in anticipation of one day making it in the cultural sphere.² Later in the mid to late nineties, according to Kosugi, increasing numbers of young people could no longer find full-time employment of any category—it was not out of personal choice—yet they were lumped into the group of so-called labor renunciates. Public (mis)perceptions of FREETERS are fraught due to false media representations of them as "troubled youth" in general unwilling to work, according to Kuniko

Ishiguro.³ In fact, Ishiguro argues, this group of young workers are willing to work yet, because they come from less privileged backgrounds and lower educational backgrounds, cannot find employment. I have met such unemployed or underemployed pilgrims during Shugendô retreats on Mt Ômine or at Tateishi's *Forest of Mountain Learning*.

In 2006 Japan's National Broadcasting Company (NHK) presented a special investigation entitled "Working Poor: No Matter How Hard We Work, We Can Never Attain Prosperity." This broadcast exploded the neoliberal myth of the lazy, shiftless *freeter*.⁴ The second-wave (mid-1990s onward) *freeter's* inability to find work, according to Yuki Honda (cited in Ishiguro), highlight the inefficiency of Japanese educational policy responses to the growing numbers of NEET and *freeters*, including insufficient vocational training opportunities in public and private schools.⁵

When I was an assistant English teacher on the JET Program (Japan Exchange and Teaching) in rural, Northeastern Ibaraki prefecture, during the late 1990s I was impressed by the work-based learning and trial employment practices in the local junior and high schools that enabled students to try their hand at delivering mail, working in a factory, producing shiitake mushrooms and other regional manufactured and agri-forestry products. I had the good fortune of shadowing several students in diverse occupations and was impressed by the refreshing pragmatism of such programs. Fourteen-year old middle school students (middle school graduation marks the completion of compulsory education in Japan) could have lunch with factory or postal workers and talk frankly about what life was like on the job. They found out about its annoying and enjoyable aspects. I remember a student being impressed that one of the factory workers he met said the boss and all co-workers treated him with respect, the pay wasn't half bad, and he enjoyed playing on the factory softball team. Although at that time the village school board still supported such vocational training opportunities, federal funding for programs of this nature

3 Ishiguro Kuniko, "Japanese Employment in Transition," *Electronic Journal Japanese Studies* (2008). p. 7

4 NHK, "ワーキングプー働いても働いても豊かにならない Working Poor: No Matter How Hard We Work, We Can Never Attain Prosperity," (Japan2006).

5 Yuki Honda, "The Formation and Transformation of the Japanese System of Transition from School to Work," *Social Science Japan Journal* 7, no. 1 (2004).p. 111-113. Cited in Ishiguro Kuniko, "Japanese Employment in Transition." p. 7.

1 Hirokazu Miyazaki, "The Temporality of No Hope" in *Personhood, Politics, Publics: New Ethnographies at the Limits of Neoliberalism*, ed. Carol Greenhouse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press., 2009).

2 Reiko Kosugi, "Youth Employment in Japan's Economic Recovery: 'Freeters' and 'Neets,'" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (2006). p. 7.

has been cut during the recession. Kosugi also highlights the urgent need for greater vocational and life skills training for those outside of the work force and access to professional development and minimum pay and benefits on par with permanent workers for those who have landed non-permanent and day labor contracts.

*Those who enter with the intellect,
those who enter with the body.*

But not all those who participate in contemporary Shugendô practices are as precarious as the NEET or *freeters* discussed above. Excess disposable income and increased leisure opportunities coupled with middle-class desires for travel and new sensory experiences account for a substantial portion of those who pursue Shugendô austerities. Priest-guides at Kimpusenji temple reported that the majority of such middle-class curiosity seekers enter the mountains “by their intellects” (頭で入る *atama de hairu*). They come once and return satisfied with a first-level encounter with an “exotic” traditional practice. These individuals are contrasted with those who “enter with their bodies” (体で入る *karada de hairu*). These more persistent and searching individuals who engage at a more existential level cannot stop coming back year after year after year.

The experience of finding oneself on the losing end of late capitalism in Japan’s post-bubble years are manifest in many of the reported motivations and triggers discussed above, but certainly more timeless and existential triggers not directly traceable to or associated with the recession and zero-growth period are also present and equally valid. And it should also be noted that a substantial portion of pilgrims return annually to see old friends and make new ones, see familiar mountain peaks, and offer gratitude for blessings received (academic or business success, good health, birth of a child, and so on). These pilgrims’ experiences shed light upon the transformative and integrating capacity of shugyô and participation within the broader ascetic community.

*Simple enjoyment and friendship also
motivate Shugendô practices*

One should not assume all pilgrims’ come with heavy hearts or fragmented selves. But as a gen-



eral principle, if all is going smoothly in one’s home, work and community relationships, it is difficult to imagine why temporary ascetics would repeatedly spend considerable time and money to travel long distances and subject themselves to grueling and intentionally dangerous mountain paths. At the same time, I have also been surprised by examples of individuals who challenge such overhasty assumptions. In 2004 while doing the Lotus Ascent of Mount Ômine for the second time I was reminded that simple enjoyment and friendship often motivate participation in shugyô. An elderly professional ascetic from Fukuoka named Ishihara⁶ disturbed the austere discussion that ordinarily takes place on the summit the evening of our ritual climb with the following refreshing counter-narrative:

*Every year for the last thirty I have heard the Head Abbott discuss how arduous shugyô is, that we should subject ourselves to the harshest of training. But for me, I find it all so enjoyable (楽しい *tanoshii*). You ought to see me the night before departure. I’m like a kindergartner on the night before a field trip: can’t sleep...too nervous to eat anything...endlessly packing, repacking my bags...excited about returning to the mountain to see old friends.⁷*

In an evocative and memorable illustration of the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings (sentient and otherwise), Ishihara indicated that he counted his fellow ascetics as well as the mountains, trees, rivers, rocks and waterfalls among his friends.

⁶ A pseudonym.

⁷ Personal communication, Yoshino, 2004.

RECALL AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Timothy Lehmann & Mark Patrick McGuire

“Stream-enterers”

I. Recall Questions

- What is the purpose of bathing in waterfalls, lakes and streams? (Purification and rebirth)
- When the individual “pilgrim” joins the group climbing the mountain, what should he throw away? (“All those attachments you bring from the world of desires and illusions.”)
- Often the word “austerity” is used to describe the experience and practice of the pilgrims. What is one example of austerity on this pilgrimage? (The pilgrims only carry two rice cakes, they arise at 2am to walk twenty-six kilometers to the top of the mountain at times facing intentional physical danger and exhaustion.)
- What instrument was used throughout the pilgrimage? What is its significance? (the *hora* conch shell, symbolizes the Buddha’s dharma (teachings or law). By blowing the conch, practitioners effectively spread the dharma. It also serves a practical purpose: the blast can be heard over several kilometers in the mountains, therefore it is a useful communication device between fellow pilgrims. At the same time, it also signals to wild animals like bears, deer, snakes and so on that human beings will pass through the area. Human and animals can thus avoid a potentially dangerous encounter.)
- Where did you see shrines or altars in the film? (Statues along the mountain path, altar in a company office, altar in a home, altar at the home of a family of beekeepers, any particularly large or otherwise impressive tree, stone, waterfall could also potentially have a modest altar or place to make offerings.)
- In several scenes the participants were fingering beads. What do you think the purpose/meaning is? Are you familiar with other religions that use beads while praying or worshipping? What part do these beads play in helping them to pray or meditate?
- Based on what you see in the film, what are some of the motivations that inspire these urban pilgrims to participate in Shugendō?

II. Discussion Questions

- What do you think the reference to the “Triple World” means? Does it seem positive or negative, and why do you think that?
- Why do you think that Shugendō pilgrims and practitioners wear mostly white clothing?
- A Shugendō pilgrimage is considered by many to be an austere and difficult religious undertaking. Based on the film, do you find this to be true? Were there any instances in the film where engaging in Shugendō did not seem difficult?
- The Japanese emphasize the close relationship of human beings to their natural environment. From your knowledge of other religions of the world and other cultures, what examples can you find that hold a similar emphasis on this relationship? After seeing the film, what differences or similarities have you



found between the Japanese take on nature and your own culture's view of nature?

• Most of the “pilgrims” on this journey are wearing white robes and have similar adornments. Describe their costumes and discuss why it may be important for all of them to be dressed alike? What might be the purpose of everyone doing the same thing? Can you think of other religious groups who dress in particular clothing or have adornments that indicate what religious group they belong to?

• Why do you think their robes are white? Why not red or black? On what occasions is “white” clothing used in Japanese culture? Does your culture have certain colors that are appropriate for specific occasions?

• What is the appeal of Shugendō to busy, urban pilgrims? Do you see anything in the tradition that seemed attractive to you?

• At one point in the film, Shinsei describes Shugendō as “a physical spiritual practice...Shugendō engages body, heart and mind.” Based on what you’ve seen in the film, do you find that to be the case? Do you know of any other religious traditions that engage the body, heart, and mind?

• In one scene, the participants of the pilgrimage take turns being suspended upside down over a cliff face and interrogated with questions. What do you think is the purpose of this exercise?

• What do you do when you experience stress, boredom, frustration, emptiness, and alienation? Are your responses similar to or different from those of the individuals who appear in the film?

• What are some ways to understand the meaning and value of participation in ritual activities in a modern, globalized Japan? How about in your own society or community? Do you see examples of ritualized behavior? Are people your age or in your neighborhood attracted or repulsed by ritual activities?

• Which character(s), if any, did you mostly closely identify with? Why? If none, what prevented you?

• What for you was the most memorable scene? What struck you most about it?

• If you were to represent a culture or group in a documentary film, what activities would you highlight and why? What messages and impacts would you hope to deliver?

• Much of the movie focuses on the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Based on the film, what do you think is the ideal professed by Shugendō practitioners with regards to humans interacting with nature? Do you think humans are considered natural in the world of Shugendō?



- Do you think that Shugendō, a religious practice rooted in Japanese culture and situated on Japanese mountainsides, could be practiced outside of Japan? Why or why not?

“Twice-returners”

I. Recall Questions

- As the pilgrims walk, what phrase do they chant in unison over and over again? What is its meaning and significance? (“Sange, Sange. Rokkon Shojo” – Repent, Repent. Purify the Six Roots of Perception.” Attachments and suffering often arise from faulty sensory data; e.g. our senses can deceive us. By Purifying the Six Roots of Perception (sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste, consciousness) pilgrims’ sense become more acute, offering possibility of fewer delusions and attachment.)
- What flower is carried on the pilgrimage and laid on various altars as they move up the mountain? What is the significance of the flower? (Lotus flower, a symbol of the Buddha’s Enlightenment, grows in thick mud [dust of the world] but is strikingly beautiful and rises above the mud; the lotus can be seen as a metaphor for human beings who are called to transcend the muck of mundane existence.)
- Why will the leader not allow the one man to walk more slowly and not stay with the other pilgrims but rather tells him to go back down the mountain and wait for them there? (He has injured himself and cannot keep the vigorous pace of the climb. The leader is concerned he will “disrupt the unity of the group,” so he sends him back down the mountain. The view is that if the gentleman is not physically fit enough to complete the climb he should never have come in the first place and risk his and others’ safety. Evidence of the stern discipline of the tradition and its guides. From a practical standpoint, the temple Kimpusen-ji must take out liability insurance should pilgrims get injured or even die during the retreat. They are literally taking these laymen’s lives into their hands, thus the strict discipline and order can be justified.)
- Based on what you see in the film, what are some of the motivations that inspire these urban pilgrims to participate in Shugendō?

II. Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the producers of this film show in one scene the man running up a stairs in a building then in the next scene the pilgrims walking along the mountain path? Does the use of these scenes give you a message about the characteristics of the beliefs being portrayed? Why do we see images of concrete juxtaposed with natural mountain formations, the forest juxtaposed with a modern cityscape, trees along the pilgrimage path intercut with trees reflected in a skyscraper’s glass windows? What patterns might be deduced from this use of imagery? How does it match the content of the film?
- Shugendō has historically developed closely with Buddhism after it arrived in Japan, and has been greatly impacted by Buddhism. What elements, rituals, or discussions in the film reflect aspects of Buddhism that you are familiar with? Are there any moments when you see Shugendō significantly deviating from what you know about Buddhism?
- The film contains persistent, though subtle concerns for the natural world and humans’ place in it. How do you understand the relationship between the various practitioners, the natural world, and everyday realities and contradictions of living and consuming in a modern city? Give evi-

dence from the film to support your responses.

- Early in the film, there is a large gathering of Shugendō practitioners who perform a goma fire ritual on temple grounds. What aspects of this ritual struck you? What do you think was the purpose of this ritual?
- Tateishi Kosho-san when talking about practicing Shugendō says: “It’s said a Shugendō practitioner’s job is walking the mountains, maintaining a dojo, having a favorite mountain and so on. But I think our responsibility is observing and protecting nature, so that in the next life we’re connected...Above all, we contemplate nature. It’s not simply walking alone in the mountains, but making connections with nature for the next generation.” Do you find this sentiment echoed by the accounts of participants on the pilgrimage? Here Tateishi Kosho-san is talking about a nearly full-time practitioner’s job. Do you think that this goal could apply to any practitioner of Shugendō?
- Near the end of the film, Tateishi Kosho-san says about colors: “Rivers are blue, frogs are green, trees too are green. Don’t let this be kept from you. Trees, so that we may see them, appear ‘tree’ colored. But even if they appear ‘tree’ colored, the reality is different. Each of these is actually the same color, the color that is no color. There’s nothing. They’re empty. These colors are teaching us awareness. Only this. So we must never forget: In our world, colors appear to make us aware of our being.” How do you make sense of this in light of what you know about Buddhism? Do his remarks deviate from what you know about Buddhism?
- Do you think that Shugendō, a religious practice rooted in Japanese culture and situated on Japanese mountainsides, could be practiced outside of Japan? Why or why not?



“Non-returners”

I. Discussion Questions

- Early in the film, Tateishi Kosho-san makes several references to eco-tourism and what he calls “eco-pilgrimage.” For him, Shugendō is positioned within a radical environmentalism, where one’s purpose is to live and feel within the natural world. Do you feel that this sentiment is present within the accounts of other characters featured in the film? Is there another side to Shugendō besides its emphasis on one’s relationship with the natural world?
- During the waterfall-slide scene, Tateishi Kosho-san says: “Most people relax and think it’s a fun place to slide down a waterfall. But there’s more to it. In the world of Shugendō, it’s a practice of transcending the body caught up by social conventions, exhausted by them...This waterfall pilgrimage, is the world of the Womb Realm Mandala. You re-enter the mother’s womb through this experience. And with you sense this. This feeling is exactly what I want people to experience.” Here, Kosho-san presents two alternative readings to the same event—sliding down a waterfall. Based on your experience of the film, do you feel that Shugendō is a matter of training oneself to feel the Womb Realm Mandala and its gift of rebirth, or that it should come naturally—so to speak—without mention of the Womb Realm? Or are there other possibilities?
- Participants in the pilgrimage and regular practitioners voice different motivations for participating in Shugendō. Do you find a common thread that leads these individuals to Shugendō? If so, do you find it indicative of anything in modern Japanese society and religion?
- The film continually contrasts the urban and mountain environments of Tokyo and Kumano. Since Shugendō traditions have for hundreds of years typically been centered on sacred mountains, it would seem that growing urbanization in Japan could threaten the territory of Shugendō practitioners. Yet in the film, Ozaki-san, a gentleman who works in the financial sector in Tokyo, makes the following comments: “At first I thought mountain austerities and city life were absolutely separate things. Like “on” and “off.” But more recently I realized such thinking is misguided. In fact the two must be considered one and the same. The pleasure I feel in the mountains I have to feel in the city. And the tension I feel in the city, I have to feel in the mountains. I shouldn’t treat these experiences as two separate things. Shouldn’t I consider them as one?” How do you interpret these comments with respect to the urban and natural divide in Japan? Is there a divide? Should Shugendō lose its practicing grounds, do you think Shugendō could be practiced in urban environments?
- Women occupy an ambiguous place in Shugendō traditions and within the film. In one instance, there are clear markers where women are not allowed to pass up the mountain because of their impurity. In another instance, we hear the remarkable story of Rika who recounts a 20-day journey of shugyō practice where she endured a terrifying fall and struggle to find meaning in her life. We witness a pilgrimage with only men, yet we hear them refer to parts of the mountain as their mother, as a womb. How do you interpret the ambiguous position of women, motherhood, and femininity in Shugendō?

Notes:



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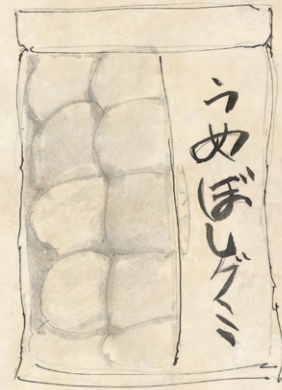
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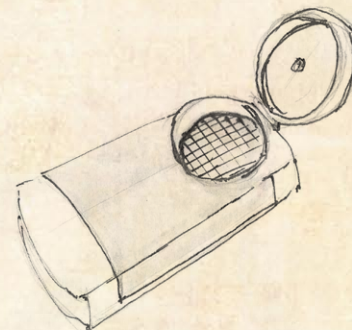
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GLOSSARY

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100-Day Ascetic: In the film, the pilgrims performing the 26-kilometer overnight hike in the mountains make space for an ascetic who is described as having to do such a journey every day for 100 days. In some esoteric Buddhist traditions in Japan—such as the Tendai Buddhist sect situated on Mt. Hiei—a 100-day trek is prerequisite for becoming an officiating monk at a temple. These “Marathon Monks” undertaking the trek are accorded a great deal of respect, and complete the journey with more intensity than the Shugendô pilgrims in the film while keeping a constant pace throughout the day and a restricted diet. In some traditions, a rarely seen but still documented 1000-day trek is undertaken as a means and process for becoming a living Buddha in this body.

Appeasement (供養): Often used in reference to rituals intended to appease, honor, and/or express gratitude for the sacrifices of the deceased, “gods,” spirits, or “hungry ghosts” who met an untimely, accidental, or violent death. Appeasement rites are commissioned by individuals and groups to show respect but also as a precaution against any danger, damage, punishment, and so on that might be visited upon them in retribution by the deceased. In the film we see Tateishi Kôshô perform an appeasement rite for bees accidentally killed during transport or gathering honey by the Nakamura family. This way, the Nakamura family can express their gratitude and appreciation for blessings received (honey) while also ensuring that any disquieted bees will not cause them harm to the health, well-being, economic livelihood, and so on. This traditional practice has been revived in recent years owing perhaps to greater regional competition among beekeepers in a global economy and the phenomenon of “hive collapse disorder” whose causes are not widely understood or discussed.

Ascetic (行者): A person who lives a life of contemplation and rigorous self-denial for religious, social justice, political or other purposes. Ascetic practices featured in the film include hiking on the mountain with little food, standing under freezing waterfalls, and being suspended over cliffs. Ascetics divest energy from one set of mundane activities (sleeping, eating, drinking, hygiene practices, sexual

relations, for example) with the hope of re-investing their energy in more noble or transcendent activities (mastery over pain and bodily appetites, acquisition of special knowledge, social, economic or legal justice outcomes, immunity from political or economic corruption, spiritual enlightenment, etc.)

Bodhisattva (菩薩): In the Buddhist canon the historical Buddha Shakymuni Gautama referred to his previous lives prior to becoming fully Enlightened as being the “Bodhisattva Gautama.” Term comes from Sanskrit and means “enlightened existence” or “wise being.” The term refers to someone at a high level of attainment on the path to Enlightenment. There are a number of technical categories and levels discussed in various Buddhist traditions, not to mention a diverse literature on traditions of Boddhissatvas and their benevolent actions throughout the Buddhist world. Boddhissatvas take a vow to dedicate their lives to the attainment of enlightenment by all sentient beings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is considered to be a reincarnation of the boddhissatva Avilokitesvara (Japanese: Kannon).

Buddhas(仏): Enlightened beings. In Japan, buddhas and kami have historically held nearly equivalent positions, though at different periods—including the present—buddhas and kami hold distinct and sometimes hierarchical positions to each other, with kami at times being subjugated to buddhas and vice-versa.

Diamond Realm Mandala (金剛界曼荼羅): The ritual diagram in esoteric Japanese Buddhism which has a sense of completeness and perfection. This mandala, along with the Womb Realm Mandala, is thought to be projected onto the landscape of certain areas of the Yoshino-Kumano Range. (See *Womb Realm*, and *Mandala*)

Esoteric Buddhism (密教仏教): Coming originally out of India, esoteric, or “secret” Buddhism arrived and developed in Japan in the 7th-8th century CE. In Japan, the two main sects of esoteric Buddhism are Tendai and Shingon. Features of esoteric Buddhism include the use of powerful *mudras*, or ritual movements made with the hands, the burning of charms and talismans, the use of Sanskrit characters as objects of power, and intensive meditative states. These features are esoteric in the sense that they must be taught only to sincere students and they contain secret knowledge only comprehensible to the accom-

plished adept. Teachers then transmit secret knowledge, teachings, ritual practices, and even reveal hidden statuary or architecture that are for initiates only. These are matters which typically cannot be found in a book, library, or on the Internet accessible to the general public. There is a catch, however, in that esoteric traditions claim to place a high value on secrecy while often performing very public ritual events for all to see. This is a tension or contradiction between what is hidden and what is displayed that is worth exploring in your research and class discussions. If Shugendô priests were committed to absolute secrecy, would they permit two North American filmmakers to document their ritual ascent of Mt Ômine and screen the film globally?

Goma (護摩): Coming from the Sanskrit, 'homa,' this fire ritual originates in Hindu India and spread to Japan via Buddhism. In the film, the ritual is explained as being a means of burning away the flames of attachment and passion, and is featured prior to the pilgrims' trip up the mountain. Chanting, as well as the playing of drums and ringed staffs, typically accompany the ritual and into the fire are often thrown prayers to the Buddha.

Horagai (法螺貝): Conch shell trumpet that Tateishi Kôshô is seen making in his small workshop at the opening of the film by fitting a special mouthpiece onto a natural shell. The conch shell is an early musical instrument used for sacred functions worldwide. In this particular context it symbolizes the Buddha's dharma (teachings or law). By blowing the conch, practitioners effectively spread the dharma and purify the area prior to the start of any ritual event. Its characteristic blast is said to resemble a lion's roar or elephant's call. Hearing it focuses the mind and indicates to all within hearing: wake up! Something important is about to happen such as the start of a ritual or pilgrimage. It also serves several practical purposes: the blast can be heard over several kilometers in the mountains, therefore it is a useful communication device between fellow pilgrims (an early cell phone!). At the same time, it also signals to wild animals like bears, deer, snakes and so on that human beings will pass through the area. Human and animals can thus avoid a potentially dangerous encounter. A protected species, there are two exceptional circumstances that permit individuals to legally import conch shells into Japan from Micronesia, Taiwan and other countries: 1) Religious purposes

and, 2) Scientific research.

Hungry ghosts (餓鬼): warriors, political leaders, and other standout individuals who have met an untimely, accidental, or violent death before they could set their affairs in order. Frequently they are individuals who may have been killed or died during an inglorious or shameful moment in what was otherwise an exemplary life. They are often imagined as skulking around in society enraged, frustrated and ravenous until someone performs the appropriate rituals and enshrines them properly according to their standing and accomplishments. The conception of hungry ghosts and rituals aimed at appeasing them is common throughout the South, Southeast and East Asian Buddhist communities and their diaspora.

Lotus Ascent (蓮華峯入): The name given to the 26-km, day-long pilgrimage featured in the film.

Lotus Flower (蓮華 or 蓮の花): A flower seen being carried along and offered at altars at various points in the film. The lotus flower holds great symbolic and ritual significance in Buddhism and other religious traditions throughout Asia. In Buddhism, the lotus flower symbolizes the enlightenment of the Buddha, which was accomplished even amongst the mundane dust of the world. The lotus flower grows in thick mud [dust of the world] but is strikingly beautiful and rises above the mud. In this way it can be seen as a metaphor for human beings who are called to transcend the muck of mundane existence.

Kami (神): Often translated as "god" in western dictionaries, has a much different meaning from the western concept of a "God" or the Hindu "gods." Originates from the Ainu (indigenous community of Northern Japan) word "kamuy," or human being. Kami are thought to reside in this-world and are considered to be intermediaries between human beings and supernatural or transcendent forces. Refers also to the constructive and destructive powers that reside in all things. In the kami venerating tradition often called "Shintô," a grain of rice, waterfall, or magnificent tree can be a kami. Joseph Kitagawa's category of "non-symbolic understanding of symbols" is relevant here.¹ The tree or waterfall that inspires awe or

¹ Joseph Kitagawa's classic essay "A Past of Things Present" in *Understanding Japanese Religion* is a helpful resource as is John Nelson's *A Year in the Life of a Shintô Shrine*.

gratitude does not stand in for, or represent, the kami, it is a kami.

Karma (縁): An Indian Sanskrit term originally meaning “action” or “deed” and referring the progression of cause and effect for actions, thoughts, emotions, and states of being. Though there are considered to be two forms of karma in most traditions of Buddhism—good and bad—ideally a spiritual adept in Buddhism seeks to eliminate all production of karma. Those who find themselves with good lives and status are considered to have been rewarded for their benevolent actions. Those who suffer from poverty, disease, or loss are thought to have been punished for past inglorious actions. Karma is considered inescapable.

Kimpusen-ji (sometimes **Kinbusen-ji**) (金峯山寺): In the film, this is temple where Shinsei is invited to begin practicing austerities. This temple has historically had a strong affiliation with various Buddhist and Shugendō groups, with Shugendō’s supposed founder, En-no-Gyōja, even founding it. In 2004, this temple and the outlying region were accorded UNESCO World Heritage status.

Kumano: (See *Yoshino-Kumano Range*)

Kumano Gongen: (See *Zaō Gongen*)

Mandala (曼荼羅): An Indian Sanskrit term which refers to a ritual diagram that serves as a guide or map for practitioners passing through various graduated stages of meditation or realms of being. In Japanese Buddhism—including Shugendō—these diagrams were projected onto the natural landscape, so that the physical journey along a sacred route held simultaneous significance as a spiritual or meditative journey through a mandala which included a communion or identification with various deities. Represented in two and three dimensions, often as paintings, monumental architecture, or sand sculptures. Entire geographical landscapes such as the Kii Peninsula depicted in the documentary and through which Shugendō practitioners traverse during their time in the mountains are also considered mandalas. The elaborate paintings that appear in the film are the complementary Diamond and Womb mandalas, often called the Dual Realm Mandala. They originate from the esoteric or Tantric Buddhist tradition. In the 10th C. CE Japanese monk Kūkai returned from Tang Chi-

na with two painted scrolls of these mandalas as part of a cache of texts, artworks, and ritual implements given as gifts by his Chinese master and teacher and intended to be used for the establishment of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan. Kūkai later ritually superimposed the Diamond and Womb Mandalas onto the landscape of the mountain monastic compound he established on Mt Kōya in Wakayama prefecture. Mt Ōmine depicted in the film is considered to be the intersection of the Diamond and Womb Mandalas. Kumano is considered the Womb Mandala. When Shugendō practitioners walk the mountains they are literally traversing through the mandalas and coming into contact with the various divinities, bodhisattvas, buddhas, demons and so on who reside within the mandala. (View the FAQs on the DVD for further context for understanding the Dual Realm Mandala)

Middle Path: The historical Buddha Shakyamuni Gautama made this insight from his own life experiences as a prince and forest ascetic: neither extremes of luxury or deprivation would enable him achieve his goal of Enlightenment. A simple yet profound teaching valued throughout the Buddhist world, it has been taken up by Shugendō practitioners as well. One must ask, however, whether performing 100 days of intense mountain ascetic practice or suspending oneself over a high ravine is in keeping with the teaching of the Middle Path?

Numinous: Referring to anything from an image to a mountain that emits and bestows power and sacrality. Numinous places and objects are sought for purposes ranging from salvation to self-transformation to the exorcism of malevolent influences.

Shizendō (自然道): Literally “the Way of Nature,” this term is used by Tateishi Kosho-san in the film to refer to his brand of Shugendō blended with environmentalism, or more advanced realization of one’s interdependence with the ecology of one’s environment.

Shugendō (修験道): Literally meaning, “the way of acquiring/cultivating power/endurance,” the term typically refers to the religious traditions which developed in Japanese history through the combination of elements derived from Shamanism, the kami tradition, Esoteric Buddhism, and Daoism. Perhaps Shugendō’s most defining trait is its emphasis on

the ritual of “entering the mountain” for the purpose of personal purification and being bestowed with religious efficacy by the various deities and forces which reside on the mountain.

Shugenja (修験者): Also known as “yamabushi” (山伏) (see below) they are the practitioners of Shugendō. Also see “ascetic” above.

Shugyō (修行): The practice of self-cultivation performed by the practitioners of Shugendō, including fasting and hiking through sacred mountains.

Six Roots of Perception (六根清浄): A Buddhist classification of the internal sensing organs, namely the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These are paralleled by the objects of perception (e.g. ears and their object, sound), and together determine the nature of experiencing the world. In the film, the pilgrims climbing up Mt. Ōmine chant a sutra calling for them to “purify the six roots of perception,” or to actively cleanse one’s formation of experience through the senses.

Sutra: A holy or sacred text in Buddhism, most of which are held to be the original words and accounts of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, including those about his life, past lives, and teachings. As is seen in the film, sutras are often chanted in East Asian Buddhism for various reasons, including those of purification and concentration.

Triple World: Referring to a traditional Buddhist classification of the world into a) “world of thinking,” b) “world of feeling,” and c) “world of action”, the term is used for the whole of reality, or this world here and now, which can be a source of suffering if it is formed and experienced unchecked.

Womb Realm Mandala (胎藏界曼荼羅): The ritual diagram in esoteric Buddhism which carries a sense of renewal and rebirth. As with the Diamond Realm Mandala, this mandala is thought to be projected onto the landscape of the Yoshino-Kumano Range, and as practitioners move through it ritually, gain a felt rebirth. (See also *Diamond Realm Mandala*, and *Mandala*)

Yamabushi (山伏): Japanese religious ascetics whose title literally means “(one who) lies down in the

mountain”. In the context of this film, *yamabushi* are “those who enter the mountain to seek experiential truth.” Mountains, being the residence of kami, Immortals, buddhas, bodhissatvas, and so on, are considered to be the source of sacred power and water sources critical for irrigating rice paddies. Yamabushi entered the mountain to come into contact with and potentially imbibe from that power to enable them to attend to the religious and spiritual needs of their communities. Their fierce practices were undertaken to receive future blessings and offer gratitude for blessings received. Yamabushi belong to a category of “non-ecclesiastical religious specialists,” this means they were not ordained or formally affiliated with religious institutions. This does not mean, however, they did not exercise power or authority, only that they were outside of institutional power.

Yoshino-Kumano (吉野熊野) **Range:** One of the most famous regions at which Shugendō traditions have been historically situated, even up to the present. In the film, the Lotus Ascent Pilgrimage takes place on the slopes of Mt. Ōmine (大峰山), which lies at the northern half of the Yoshino-Kumano Range.

Zaō Gongen (蔵王権現): During the scene when Tateishi Kosho-san is cooking, he chants “*Namu Zaō Dai Gongen*”, which means “Homage to the Great Zaō Gongen.” Zaō Gongen is the principle deity of Shugendō, especially for the Yoshino-Kumano region featured in the film. Zaō Gongen is a protector deity and is typically depicted in a wrathful pose, wreathed in flame, with a thunderbolt—or ritual *vajra*—in his hand.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND CREDITS

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* We are grateful to all participants in the film and especially wish to acknowledge Tanaka Riten, Tateishi Kôshô, Gojô Ryoki, Iwagishi Shinsei, Tateishi Rika, Ozaki Hitoshi, Suzuki Akiko, Miyamoto Kazuhiko and Fujie Noritoshi for their guidance, generosity, and eloquence during filmmaking in Kumano, Yoshino, Tokyo, and Osaka. In Ibaraki, the Fujita, Kawanishi, and Ozaki families provided sustenance, outstanding company, and a tatami room to begin initial editing.

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STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

Produced with financial and technical assistance and fiscal sponsorship from the US-Japan Foundation, Buddhist Film Foundation, Asian Educational Media Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Documentary Educational Resources. USJF grant director David Janes was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the project, as were Gaetano Kazuo Maida of the BFF. AEMS Director Nancy Jervis and her colleagues Jason Finkelmann and Susan Norris provided invaluable guidance and assistance in producing the first version of the study guide for the Digital Asia Database (www.digitalasia.illinois.edu). Waunita Kinoshita and Takuo Kinoshita composed the contextualizing and background essays. Professor Bryan Ruppert offered helpful feedback on early drafts of these essays. Timothy Lehmann provided the sketches of Shugendô gear, and co-wrote the questions, resources and glossary with Mark Patrick McGuire. Jean-Marc Abela and Mark Patrick McGuire made the photographs. DER's Frank Aveni created the graphic design and Kayla Hammond assisted with the layout. We thank you all for your help!

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Everywhere you go you can find a sacred mountain.