FOR A RAINY DAY:
RAIN PRACTICES IN NORTHERN NAGANO PREFECTURE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWA'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
IN
RELIGION (ASIAN)

AUGUST 2008

By
Matthew Steven Mitchell

Thesis Committee:
Helen Baroni, Chairperson
Poul Andersen
Michel Mohr
Robert Huey
We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Religion (Asian).

THESIS COMMITTEE

[Signatures]

Chairperson
Acknowledgements

I have received much help on this journey. I only hope that in this limited space I can demonstrate even a portion of my gratitude.

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their support and suggestions. Special thanks go to Helen Baroni for her kindness and assistance throughout my time as her advisee. Her ability to befriend new graduate students and welcome them into the program (as well as Hawai‘i) made my time at UH comfortable. I will miss our talks.

I want to thank Faye Higa for the ways, both seen and unseen, that she helped me in my two years at UH. I really think she is a superhero in disguise.

The participants (both faculty and student) at the weekly Religion Department Papers in Progress Sessions deserve thanks for their acute observations, encouraging comments, and enlightening questions. Two people in particular, Matt McMullen and Jolyon Thomas, devoted a great deal of time and effort to helping me in innumerable ways. Thanks guys!

I also want to thank several people who helped during my brief visit to Japan for fieldwork during the summer of 2007. Sawayanagi Hiroshi and Takahashi Sayuri graciously opened their home to me and showed me around the old temples of Shioda Daira in Ueda. Okazawa Keichō endured my poor Japanese on two occasions as he showed me his temple and the festival that takes place there. And, to Kuroda Kazuyo and Katagiri Yoshie, I owe a large debt of gratitude for all of the assistance, encouragement, and friendship they’ve given me over the years, and for their work as impromptu camerawomen at the Sanjosan.
My parents and brother have always been supportive. Thanks go to them. I owe the largest debt to my wife, Pamela. In addition to doing her own class work, she kindly read, edited, and offered incredible suggestions on this thesis at every stage.

While many people helped with the completion of this project, I alone take responsibility for any errors contained within it.
Abstract
This thesis examines rainmaking, rain-stopping, and rain-thanking within northern Nagano Prefecture. It is based on the idea that the regional examination of a single type of religious practice, with detailed case studies, allows a deeper understanding of the ritual logic behind the practice, its function in communities, its change through time, and how it is reinforced by and reinforces legendary and physical landscapes. The examination begins with a broad view, surveying the cultic sites Mt. Togakushi and Mt. Hijiri, which draw large numbers of pilgrims for rain. The focus narrows to case studies of local practices, which demonstrate the variety, combinatory nature, and localization of rain practices in Japan. Finally, a cyclical rain-thanking festival in Nagano City demonstrates how one community organizes and performs a rain festival, the details and logic behind it, and how it has taken on new meaning for the community in recent years.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... iv
Abstract ............................................................................................................................ vi
List of Figures .................................................................................................................... ix
Chapter One: Introduction ................................................................................................ 1
  Rain Practices ................................................................................................................ 4
  Landscapes .................................................................................................................... 5
  Community .................................................................................................................... 8
  Organization of This Work ......................................................................................... 9
Chapter Two: Mountains of Rain: Geographies and Legends of Cultic Rain Sites .... 12
  Introduction ................................................................................................................ 12
  Geography and Cultic Sites ....................................................................................... 15
    Togakushi 戸隠 ........................................................................................................ 18
    Togakushi’s Engi .................................................................................................... 19
    Rain Practices on Togakushi ................................................................................. 23
    Mount Hijiri 聖山 ..................................................................................................... 29
    Mt. Hijiri’s Engi ..................................................................................................... 29
    Rain Practices on Mt. Hijiri ................................................................................... 35
  Cultic Rain Sites and Pilgrimages .............................................................................. 37
Chapter 3: Sundry Local Rain Practices in Northern Nagano .................................... 39
  Introduction ................................................................................................................ 39
  Case Studies ............................................................................................................... 41
    I. Narimono: The Drums of Ogawa Village .......................................................... 41
    II. Soaked Statues and Sodden Stones ................................................................... 44
    III. Sendataki: Fire on the mountain, fire near the shrine ..................................... 47
    IV. Pilgrimage ......................................................................................................... 50
    V. Others: When a picture of a dragon causes rain ............................................... 53
List of Figures
Figure 1: Togakushi Mountain from 1893 woodblock guide to Nagano............................ 6

Figure 2: Togakushi Mountain ...................................................................................... 6

Figure 3: A hyakudo ishi used for keeping track of the number of visits to the temple.
Jōkōji Temple, Suzaka City, Nagano ........................................................................... 51

Figure 4: Hase Temple's Kannon Hall ........................................................................... 57

Figure 5: Boy praying to Kannon .................................................................................. 58

Figure 6: Area representative with goma talisman ........................................................ 63

Figure 7: Hinawa spinners ........................................................................................... 64

Figure 8: The pole carriers climb the stairs .................................................................. 65

Figure 9: The mikoshi arrives ...................................................................................... 67

Figure 10: Raising the Pole ........................................................................................ 68

Figure 11: The pole and courtyard .............................................................................. 69

Figure 12: Spectators watch the Lion Dance and the pole ........................................... 71

Figure 13: The falling pole ......................................................................................... 72

Figure 14: Spectators take pieces of the lanterns ........................................................ 73

Figure 15: Lion dancing at the Upper Shrine .............................................................. 75

Figure 16: Agricultural cycle with rain practice ......................................................... 80
Chapter One: Introduction

Kobayashi Issa 小林一茶 (Yatarō 弥太郎 1763 – 1828) is one of Japan’s most well known *haikai* poets, alongside Bashō, Buson, and Shiki. Following the model of Bashō, Issa traveled throughout Japan before settling down in his family home in northern Shinano Province (now Nagano Prefecture 長野県). His hometown of Kashiwabara 柏原 was largely sustained by agriculture. As in other agricultural areas, the people of Kashiwabara and their crops depended on the weather. The poem above highlights the villagers’ frustration when met with cloudy, yet precipitation-free days during dry spells. The simple prescript to the poem, “Praying for rain,” suggests an alternative to waiting for rain: petitioning for divine intervention.

Prayers, rituals, and festivals to control the weather have a long history throughout the world, and continue to be performed in countries considered to be completely modernized. Religious weather-controlling practices in Japan can be traced at least as far back as the *Nihon Shoki* (compiled in 720). Although the passage of time and regional influences have continuously shaped these rituals, they continue to be performed in rural areas down to the present. These practices, particularly in rural areas, have been the focus of few works in Japanese and even fewer in English. This dearth of

---

1 Cited in (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Issa no amagoi no ku - 一茶の雨乞いの句 1995). Translation by author. The version listed in Kobayashi’s piece actually has “kongetsu” as the first word, but other versions have “kyō.” Kobayashi Keiichirō states that rain practices were frequently a seasonal word in *haikai*.

2 This fact is amply demonstrated by the November 2007 appeals for rain in the southern United States by churches, communities, and politicians. (Associated Press 2007)
research is perhaps due to the interest in institutional histories, founding figures, or “centers” of power which had dominated scholarship on religion in Japan until recently.

Four patterns of scholarship emerge when examining the work published on rain practices in Japan. In the first type, practices are examined as a means of demonstrating other historical changes, such as the use of rain practices in the consolidation of power by Shingon monks living near Kyoto.\(^3\) In the second type, rain practices are mentioned incidentally as they relate to the main object of study, whether it be the life of a famous figure, a religious site, or the role of temples in villages.\(^4\) Another type attempts to arrange rain practices into action-based categories – in which all of those that use a drum, for instance, are placed together.\(^5\) Finally, there are studies which provide accounts, some more detailed than others, of rain practices performed by communities.\(^6\)

There are several problems inherent in this scholarship on rain practices. The first two types of scholarship, due to the specificity of their goals, obscure the variety of practices in Japan. The third type, focusing on categorization by the “main” action of the practices, disregards the composite nature of rain practices, and may not describe the elements of a rain practice that lie outside the category of interest. The various practices and combinations within practices are described better in the fourth type of scholarship; unfortunately works in this type tend to provide little analysis.\(^7\) Most works, regardless of their type, fail to draw the connections between the practices and the physical and

---

\(^3\) (Ruppert 2002) is an example of this type of scholarship.

\(^4\) For example, (Sawada 2004, 70) describes rainmaking performed by Inoue Masakane 井上正顕 (1790 – 1849) and (Vesey 2003, 326-327) mentions rain pilgrimage to Togakushi to discuss competition of Buddhist temples with other religious sites.

\(^5\) (Takaya Shigeo 1982) is a prime example of this.

\(^6\) For example, the Nagano Prefectural History (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985) and several articles in the Rain Practice issue of the journal Nagano. (Bownas 1963) devotes a chapter to rain practices.

\(^7\) (Bownas 1963) provides a little analysis, which is more than is usually present in other works of this type.
legendary landscapes in which they occur; additionally they fail to consider the specificity or localized nature of practices. The net result of these problems leaves the impression that these practices take place in a vacuum (types one and two) or that they are chosen randomly or constructed chaotically (types three and four). Additionally, these works overlook rain-thanking, which is an essential element of rain practices, as I will discuss in more detail later. To counter these problems, this study puts rain practices back into the landscapes in which they are performed.

This thesis examines rain practices within the Zenkōji Plain (Zenkōji daira 善光寺平) region of northern Nagano Prefecture. A regional focus strikes a balance between individual practices, case studies, and broad categorization. It limits the number of practices that can be examined to a manageable number while still allowing for diversity which might not be possible with a narrower focus. By focusing on one region it is possible to explore the relationship between rain practices and local physical and legendary landscapes, describe the variety and combinatory nature of these practices, and appreciate their connections to communities.

Regional examinations do have potential problems, however. By zooming in from the country-level, one loses the ability to discuss “universal” characteristics and make general comparisons. In contrast, zooming out from the particular obscures the specificity of a practice, much as mountains and valleys seem to flatten when seen from the air. To counter this, I examine case studies throughout this work, pointing out what is specific and what is universal about them. Before embarking on our journey, however, we must first clarify some terms which will guide us.
Rain Practices

Throughout this work "rain practices" refers to prayers, rituals, and festivals which are used to control the weather or thank a deity for controlling it. Prayer is any form of communication directed towards a deity, which can include petitions (kigan 祈願, kitō 祈祷, inori 祈り) as well as thanks (kansha wo inoru 感謝を祈る). A ritual (gishiki 儀式) is the performance of a combination of usually pre-defined actions, mental states, or utterances, which can include prayers. Festivals (matsuri 祭り) are combinations of prayers or rituals performed by more people than a ritual, usually including the members of a community.

While some rain practices might control the weather directly, most are directed to a deity who then acts on behalf of the community. Many of these practices might be more commonly called "rainmaking" (kitu 祈雨 or amagoi 雨乞い), which is done to encourage a deity to cause it to rain. Making rain is only part of the picture, however. "Rain-stopping" (kishiu 祈雨), or ceasing overabundant rain, is also included under the rubric of these practices, even though it is not performed as often as other rain practices. A third rain practice, to coin a word in English and Japanese, is "rain-thanking" (reiu 礼雨), where petitioners thank a deity for rain produced throughout the year. Rain-thanking is often overlooked as a practice, even though a number of accounts mention – usually quite briefly – petitioners showing their thanks through offerings or return pilgrimages to a site (orei mairi お礼参り). I am including these within rain practices because they all

---

8 I am drawing from (Rappaport 1999, 24-26).
9 Some temples and shrines – notably those at Togakushi – have also begun offering "snow-making" (yukigoi 雪乞い) rituals.
function to control the weather, and because they can overlap to varying degrees. A ritual for rain, for example, may include an element which causes it to cease when it has rained enough. Also, the performance of rain-thanking includes — much like when one sends a thank-you card — the idea that the receiver wishes to continue to have a good relationship with the benefactor so he or she can be approached again in times of need. In other words, rain-thanking has the kernel of a prayer for good weather for next year.

Rain practices can also be categorized by when they are performed. Need-based practices are performed by communities when they need to control the weather. Other practices are cyclical, done at the same time each year, often during the New Years or at important times in the farming season: planting, before the rainy season, or before the harvest.

Landscapes

The concept of landscape encompasses natural and urban vistas, paintings of these views, regional characteristics, gardening which imitates and incorporates nature, and the political or economic climate of a region. These various ideas suggest the interplay of nature and representations of it which can most clearly be demonstrated by examining the relationship between a landscape painting and its subject. The artist paints the vista, not only as she sees it, but as she perceives it, drawing on emotions it inspires or connections with her previous experiences. Her painting can then influence how others perceive that same vista.\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) Landscape was first introduced to the English language as a word describing a style of painting introduced from the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century. More than thirty years later the word took on the meaning of an actual view of scenery, of the type usually taken as the artists' object. (Landscape 1992)
If we examine a painting of the cultic site Togakushi (Figure 1)\(^1\), for example, we can see how the artist has rendered the mountains displayed in Figure 2.\(^2\)

In the painting, the mountains become more rugged, the peaks are higher, religious sites normally obscured from view are made more dominant, and the clouds, which obscure parts of the mountain, add an element of mystery. These features combine in the painting to enhance the feelings of awe, mystery, and power the painter perhaps felt when faced with the physical mountain. The painting becomes assimilated into the viewers’ memories and impressions of Togakushi, which can alter how they perceive the physical mountain.\(^3\)

Thus, in landscape, the border between physical reality and representation is blurred or even collapsed. Disparate opinions regarding the influence of landscape on people arise: some state that the land limits and controls people’s views, while others

---

\(^1\) Figure from [Katsuta Teikichi 1893, 19]

\(^2\) Photo of Togakushi courtesy of Andre Eymard. Unless otherwise noted, photos are by author.

\(^3\) (Blacker 1986, 284-285) also compares a painting of Mt. Ontake with the “real” image.
believe that it is the views of people which shape the landscape.\textsuperscript{14} In the first, emphasis
is placed on how the land shapes the culture and characteristics of a person and place.\textsuperscript{15}
The second stresses that it is only through the actions, stories, and experiences of people
that blank space is transformed into a place: it is only through being lived in that a house
is changed into a home, for instance.\textsuperscript{16}

By using the word landscape, I intend to keep the vagueness between the borders
of nature and human-made, to preserve the tension between influence and the influenced.
Therefore, I use landscape to describe the geographic features of a place, changes made
there by people, and people’s views of place which can shape their actions there.
Although there are other types of landscape (such as political and economic), I use
physical and legendary landscape in this analysis. Physical landscape means the natural
geography of the land as well as changes to that geography resulting from human actions.
Therefore, temples, shrines, houses, factories, hydroelectric dams, and so on are as much
a part of the physical landscape as mountains, forests, lakes, and rivers. Legendary
landscape refers to the views of a place which are constructed by people – and also
situate people within that place – through myths, legends, and stories. Both physical and
legendary landscapes influence and are influenced by people and their actions.\textsuperscript{17}

By its very nature, a regional exploration of rain practices takes place within the
landscapes of that region. A goal of this work is to examine the role of those landscapes
in influencing the way communities perform rain practices. In later chapters I show how
the physical landscape, both the natural and the altered, determines how communities

\textsuperscript{14} (Smith 1987, 30-31)
\textsuperscript{15} (Smith 1987, 30-31)
\textsuperscript{16} (Smith 1987, 28-30)
\textsuperscript{17} I am relying on (Stewart and Strathern 2003) and (Reader 2005, 39-41).
combine and perform rain practices. Through these combinations rain practices are localized, thereby becoming part of the landscape, defining the community and giving meaning to places, practices, and objects. Legendary landscapes, which shape conceptions of place, also affect rain practices. These practices take place within legendary landscapes that describe the power of certain sites, tell the origins of efficacious ritual objects, and orient practices within communities.

Of course, temples, shrines, and other places of power exist within the physical landscape, and come to occupy places in legendary landscapes through origin myths (engi 緣起) as well. Rain practices often take place at local shrines and temples, as well as at regional sites. The decision to practice at a particular temple or shrine is not made based on sectarian affiliation, nor do communities make distinctions between Shintō, Buddhism, or Shugendō. Rather, the decision is often formed by the sites’ proximity to and relationships with the community, its history, and legends. This typically leads to an amalgamation in which Shintō, Buddhist, or Shugendō elements are incorporated in the same practice. That this amalgamation continued through the Meiji Period, when the kami and buddhas were supposedly separated and Shugendō practices banned, is a subject which will be briefly addressed in subsequent chapters, but ultimately requires more study than can be provided here.

Community

A community is a group of people who identify themselves with a place, occupation, or other shared attributes. 18 Community is essential to this study because rain practices are communal affairs: poor weather affects everyone’s crops, which in turn

---

18 (Stewart and Strathern 2003, 4)
determines the survival of the whole community. Each household is expected to participate in all rituals, even if by representative, and they are likewise expected to pay their portion of the expenses incurred. The communal nature of rain practices also alters the ways in which the components of the practices are carried out. This becomes obvious when compared to individual forms of these same practices, as we will see in the following chapters.

This work investigates rain practices as they are performed by communities and within landscapes, thus returning context removed in several earlier studies. By focusing on one type of practice this study is able to paint a picture of communal religious actions as they are performed. Even within the larger sphere of the study of Japanese Religions, scholars often focus on single sites, figures, or institutions and are thereby unable to examine connections between local practices, fail to include those which occur outside their borders, or ignore the actions of communities. It is my contention that the regional examination of a single type of religious practice, with space for detailed case studies, allows a deeper understanding of the ritual logic behind the practice, its function in communities, its change through time, and how it is reinforced by and reinforces legendary and physical landscapes.

Organization of This Work

The regional focus of this work also provides its structure. The examination begins with a wide lens in Chapter Two by describing how the physical landscape and legendary landscape intertwine to make sacred space, particularly in northern Nagano

---

19 (Bownas 1963, 115)
20 I have been influenced by the work of Helen Hardacre (Hardacre 2002) and Janine Sawada (Sawada 2004) in my decision to use a regional focus and to look for connections between phenomena.
Prefecture. Next, I focus on cultic sites for rain practices which draw large numbers of petitioners from the plains. These sites are usually located in the “far mountains,” often those which are watersheds. This chapter describes the frequently overlapping legendary landscapes of two of these sites, Mt. Togakushi 戸隠山 and Mt. Hijiri 聖山, and how the tales related to these sites reinforce ideas of the efficacy of the deities enshrined there. Furthermore, I analyze the practices performed at these sites, using brief case studies of groups which made the pilgrimage to, and more importantly, back home from these cultic sites in search of rain.

In Chapter Three, we move down from the mountains into local communities to analyze five case studies of local rain practices. Through these studies I describe the variety, combinatory nature, and localization of rain practices in Japan, and in particular northern Nagano, which is counter to the often oversimplified impression given by previous scholarship. The case studies also demonstrate the connections between communities and their landscapes.

In Chapter Four, the focus narrows to examine the Amagoi Sanjosan Tōrō 雨乞三十三燈籠, a cyclical rain-thanking festival in the Hase Neighborhood of southern Nagano City. In this chapter, we see how one small community organizes and performs a rain festival, the details and logic behind it, and how that festival has taken on new meaning for the community in recent years. Such details are absent from other case studies. Because it is based on fieldwork in Nagano in August 9, 2007, the style of this chapter differs from the others: analysis is woven into first-hand narrative. I have written it in such a way to make the festival, with its colors, lights, and songs come to life, as
well as to place myself, as a subjective fieldworker, in the work. Finally, Chapter Five briefly reviews the previous points and implications of the work.

Next, in order to provide context for the chapters that follow, a brief history of Nagano Prefecture is in order. This will likewise serve as a travel guide for the exploration ahead.
Chapter Two: Mountains of Rain: Geographies and Legends of Cultic Rain Sites

Introduction

Issa’s poem suggests the importance of deities in rain practices. Buddhist and Shintō deities are petitioned for rain, informed when there has been too much precipitation, and thanked for balanced weather. While almost any deity can be the focus of rain practices if legends about its efficacy develop, certain deities are more frequently invoked to control the weather. These include village protecting deities (ujigami or chinju) because they protect the area and see to the needs of its people. Dragons and snakes – or deities such as Benzaiten 弁財天 or Suwa Shrines’ Takeminakata no mikoto 建御名方命 which can take the form of these creatures – are often the focus of rain practices because of the widespread Asian belief that these creatures live in water and can fly into the sky. People petition merciful bodhisattvas such as Kannon or Jizō. They also call upon deities associated with the weather through legends – such as Amaterasu and the deities who brought her out of the Heavenly Cave – or through their names – such as Dainichi Nyorai, used because his name, literally “Great Sun Buddha,” evokes the sun.

In this chapter I examine “cultic” deities, those deities which are the foci of cults located at “cultic” sites. “Cult” here is a translation of the word shinkō (信仰) in

---

1 Cited in (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Issa no amagoi no ku 一茶の雨乞いの句 1995).
2 See (Visser, The Dragon in China and Japan 1913) for an overview of the dragon in Asia. See (Ruppert 2002) and (Fowler 1997) for the dragon as invoked in esoteric Buddhist rituals.
Japanese, which can also mean belief, faith, or creed. I have translated it in this manner, following the lead of many scholars before me, because it seems to best fit the style of belief and worship centered at these sites. Defined in this way, it means something closer to veneration of a person, principle, or thing, which can be obsessive and faddish, or constant and continuous. Therefore, I am using cult in a manner similar to its usage in the Christian Cult of the Saints, where it refers to the veneration of a particular saint or martyr, and not a religion or sect considered to be extremist or false, usually led by a charismatic leader.\(^3\)

I wish to further clarify some of the nuances of “cult,” and the Japanese shinkō, which seem to imply a distinction between “popular,” “unestablished,” and “unorthodox” versus “traditional,” “institutional,” and “orthodox.”\(^4\) Even scholars who have previously broken down this distinction have made this mistake when discussing sites associated with cults. For example, Ian Reader has suggested that Japanese cults are centered on individual deities enshrined in temples or shrines, but “which reach out to, or develop clienteles that are clearly associated with such deities on personal rather than institutional channels.”\(^5\) I agree with Reader that these associations tend to be “personal” in that these participants can (and historically could) choose to be affiliated, rather than being automatically affiliated based on occupation, geography, or familial lines. On the other hand, simply because the participants have a choice does not mean that these affiliations lack institutional connections. Other scholars have shown that in many cases the participants initially became connected to and continued their affiliation with the

---

\(^3\) American Heritage Dictionary, “cult.”
\(^4\) (Ambros 2002, 4-5)
cultic site via itinerant preachers or confraternity leaders who were directly connected with it or trained by its clergy.⁶

Just as the participants are connected to the site institutionally (as well as personally), the cult itself is a part of the site, and therefore is controlled, sponsored, embraced, or propagated at least in part by the shrine or temple of that site.⁷ This also means that these cults are part of the “traditional” and “orthodox” as much as they are “popular” and “unorthodox.” Therefore, I take cult to mean the beliefs and practices associated with the veneration of a specific deity (or group of deities), usually located at one site (though it may be copied). A cultic site, by extension, is a religious site where that deity is thought to manifest itself. An example of a cult and its site is the cult of the Zenkōji Amida located in Nagano City’s Zenkōji temple; this cult expanded in the medieval periods to include hundreds of copies spread throughout Japan.

In many cases these cultic sites are also considered efficacious for rain practices. In some cases, however, there are sites which may not have a large, cultic following in ordinary times, but which are considered efficacious for need-based and cyclical rain practices. Sites that are centers for cultic activities when the weather needs to be controlled should be considered as cultic sites for rain practices. Cultic rain sites often draw large numbers of petitioner-pilgrims from the surrounding area, and so shape many local rain practices.

I will discuss two of these sites in this chapter. First, I will describe the sacred geography of the Zenkōji Basin, demonstrating how geography is a factor in formulating ideas of sacred sites, especially the mountains which frequently become the centers of

⁶ (Ambros 2001); (Smyers 1999, 53-59)
⁷ (Ambros 2002, 4-5)
cults. Next I describe the sites of Togakushi and Mt. Hijiri, focusing on their history, legends, and the rain practices performed there. Through these examples I intend to show how physical and legendary landscapes interweave to inform petitioners of the power of a site. This is not an original concept; rather it represents a recent focus on the role of landscapes in informing pilgrims’ practices and conceptions of a pilgrimage. 8

**Geography and Cultic Sites**

Following one of Japan’s many rivers up from the sea, one passes coastal plains before reaching mountain basins. There are more than a hundred of these basins in Japan, and the Zenkōji Plain, which is also known as the Nagano Basin (*Nagano bonchi* 長野盆地), is one of them. These basins, which may have once been marshland, are now centers of human population – full of rice paddies, villages, cities, and in the case of the Zenkōji Plain, fruit trees. 9

The life of this basin – both its people and their crops – is fed by the numerous streams which flow into the main rivers, the Chikuma 千曲川 and Sai Rivers 真川. These streams lead from the basin through the “village mountains” (*toyama* 外山). In the past some people dwelt in these shorter mountains, growing food in small dry fields, but the people there and in the basin mainly used these mountains as sources of firewood and charcoal. Although some of these mountains can now be used for paddy farming, they remain sparsely populated and are usually reserved for dry fields.

Although the natural forests which may have grown in the basin and village mountains were cut long ago, there are some remnants which survive in temple and

---

8 See (Reader 2005, 39-41) for a brief overview of scholarship of this trend.
9 (Sonada 2000, 36).
shrine grounds. In the case of Shintō shrines, these groves may have been thought of as the residence of kami (kamu-tsu-mori 神つ森), and may have also been protected by taboos. Some of the village mountains may have also been sacred mountains (mimuro-yama 御室山).^{10}

The life-giving streams do not originate in the village mountains, however. Their sources are the sparsely populated “far mountains” (okuyama 奥山 or miyama 深山).

These forested mountains were occasionally used for hunting and gathering, but almost never for logging because of religious taboos and governmental prohibitions devised with the recognition that forested streams produced more water than those surrounded by no trees.^{11} These mountains were frequently considered to be the dwelling of ‘watershed’ deities (mikumari no kami 水分神) and other spirits, as well as appropriate sites for religious austerities.^{12} Mountains can also be worshipped as deities known for their creative and destructive properties — as in Mt. Fuji — and as places where the spirits of the dead are thought to reside.^{13}

In both Shintō and Buddhist conceptions, all of the Japanese islands can be considered sacred and potentially the abode of deities.^{14} Even though this is the case, the land is not uniformly sacred. Some sites, such as mountains, caves, or waterfalls are thought to be homes or manifestations of deities, and thus are more imbued with power. Origin stories (engi 緑起) explain how these sites were discovered to be powerful, what

---

^{10} (Sonada 2000, 39).
^{12} (Sonada 2000, 40).
^{13} (Horii 1966)
^{14} (Reader, Japanese Religions 1994, 187).
deity or deities dwell there, and what famous religious figures discovered them, performed austerities there, or transformed a malevolent spirit into a benevolent one. Further additions to these stories tell the experiences of visitors to the sites — in particular how the deity of the sites assisted visitors. These additions increase the perceived power of the site in the eyes of potential petitioners.  

_Engi_ is a Japanese word for the origin tales connected with temples, shrines, cultic sites, mountains, and so on. These same characters are used in the Buddhist context to abbreviate _in'_enshōki_ 因縁生起, the translation of the Sanskrit word _pratitya samutpāda_, or interdependent co-arising.  

Some scholars have suggested that this is indicative of the Japanese view that all of these sites arise and have power because of the connections they have with the land, with local deities, the revelations or actions of holy figures, and the deities which might have been transplanted or discovered there by those holy figures. Most other scholars ignore this aspect of _engi_, however, so perhaps it is best to leave it translated as origin stories.

In the case of rain practices, there are sites which are considered more efficacious, and therefore draw petitioners from the surrounding region. The dwellings of dragons — caves, ponds, or waterfalls — are considered powerful sites. By extension, temples with the character for dragon in their names are also considered efficacious. Watershed mountains and the sources of life-giving streams in the far mountains are also frequently

---

15 (Reader 2005, 119) describes this process on the Shikoku _henro_.  
16 (Kidaichi Haruhiko 2007, 187); (MacWilliams 1997, 380).  
17 One such scholar is (MacWilliams 1997), especially page 390.
visited with rain petitions.\textsuperscript{18} Other sites have been connected with rain through their \textit{engi}, which describe the deity’s benevolence in granting its petitioners rain prayers.

There are many cultic sites which are popular for rain practices in Nagano Prefecture. These include Mt. Togakushi 戸隠山, Mt. Hijiri 聖山, Mt. Myōtoku 妙徳山, Mt. Mushikura 虫倉山, Mt. Azumaya 阿部屋山, the falls at Yonako Fudōson 米子不動尊, Mt. Tateshina 藤原山, Mt. Asama 浅間山, Mt. Arafune 荒船山, Mt. Dokko 独鰐山, Mt. Hachibuse 鉢伏山, the Upper Suwa Shrine 藤訪上社, and Mt. Moriya 守屋山.\textsuperscript{19} In this chapter, I describe two sites near the Zenkōji Plain which attract large numbers of rain petitioners: Togakushi Mountain and Mount Hijiri. I will describe the location and history of each site, explain why it is important for rainmaking, and what petitioners do when they visit each site.

\textbf{Togakushi 戸隠}

Togakushi lies in the far mountains in the northwest of Nagano City. In the past it was quite a journey to travel into the mountains to make prayers. Its distance from centers of habitation, jagged mountains, and deep forests made Togakushi an ideal place to practice forms of asceticism: works from as early as the twelfth century list it as an area for austerities.\textsuperscript{20} The site was so popular amongst practitioners that there were many struggles between Shingon and Tendai priests, with the latter eventually winning control.

\textsuperscript{18} It is said that the Empress Kōgyoku traveled to the source of a river and prayed when sutra chanting, sacrifices at shrines, and the adornment of statues had not produced rain (Visser 1935, 22-23).

\textsuperscript{19} (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Amagoi to reizan - jisha, 雨乞いと霊山・寺社 1995, 38-39)

\textsuperscript{20} (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Togakushi jinja 戸隠神社 2000, 279)
of the mountain.  

The mountain and its multiplexes became the center of a cult which drew pilgrims from all over Japan. After the separation of kami from buddhas in the early years of the Meiji Period, the shugenja and combinative priests who resided there either became Shintō priests or lay innkeepers. The sites became shrines and placed their Buddhist statuary and implements in a local Jizō hall.

Even with the recent addition of a number of wide roads connecting Togakushi with nearby urban centers, it is still relatively isolated in the winter months. The mountain has become a popular area for outdoor sports such as hiking, mountain climbing, and skiing. Nevertheless, it retains its religious flavor, drawing a large number of people – some in white pilgrims’ outfits – to the five or six shrines located on its slopes each year. The Togakushi shrines also maintained their confraternities (kō 講) through the Meiji Restoration until the present.

Togakushi’s Engi

Togakushi is a good example of how overlapping origin stories create multivalent practices and beliefs associated with the cult of sites. Two of Togakushi’s engi demonstrate its association with rain practices. The first illustrates the connections between Togakushi and deities of the Japanese pantheon, and the second describes the

---

21 These frequently erupted into violence, especially during the Muromachi period. This ended in the fifteenth century when, according to legend, the spirit of an assassinated Tendai monk Sencho 宣澄 chased the Shingon priests off of the mountain. (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Togakushi jinja 戸隠神社 2000, 275-276)
22 (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Togakushi jinja 戸隠神社 2000, 283-284)
23 (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Togakushi jinja 戸隠神社 2000, 277)
24 Togakushi has 1100 kō from Nagano – 510 in the northern, 166 in the eastern, 308 in the central, and 116 in the southern area of the prefecture. Outside of the prefecture there are 416: Niigata has 96, Gunma 33, Tochigi 22, Saitama 31, Ibaraki 30, Chiba 21, Tokyo 11, Fukuyama 11, Gifu 25, Aichi 36, Hokkaido 13, and all other prefectures 47. (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Togakushi jinja 戸隠神社 2000, 284)
opening of the mountain and development of control over it by a monk named Gakumon Gyōja 学問行者.

First is a story from the early Heian period Sendai kujihongi 先代旧事本紀, which includes a retelling of the story of how the sun kami, Amaterasu, hid in a heavenly stone cave after her brother polluted her palace. After her disappearance, plants stopped growing and malevolent spirits began to roam the earth. One deity, Yagokoromoikane no mikoto 八音兼命, gathered the other kami and came up with a plan to lure her out of the cave. Using a tall tree, chickens, a mirror, and a lascivious dance performed by Amanouzume no mikoto 天兎女命, the group of kami enticed Amaterasu to peek out of the cave. Another kami, Amenotajikarao no mikoto 天手力雄命, grabbed the heavy stone blocking the entrance and heaved it to earth. It landed in the middle of Japan, forming the mountains of Togakushi. 25 Years later, during the reign of the eighth tennō, Kōgen 孝元, Amenotajikarao no mikoto decided to make these mountains his dwelling because they were already imbued with his spirit (tama 魂). 26 Yagokoromoikane no mikoto and Amanouzume no mikoto are also among the deities now worshipped at the various shrines on the mountain. 27 This story is replayed in Iwatobiraki no mai 岩戸開きの舞, one of the ten types of sacred dance (kagura 神楽) either performed monthly or by petition at the shrines. 28

25 Amanouzume no mikoto is also Amenouzume no mikoto in the Kojiki and Nihon shoki. In the Kojiki the characters for her name are written 天兎受齋命. (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 276-279)
26 (Naganoken Jinjachō, 長野県神社庁 1990, 130)
27 (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 276-279). According to this legend, the mountain was opened by Yagokoromoikane no mikoto's descendant, Achi no Houribe 阿智祝部, a shugen practitioner.
28 (Togakushi Shrines n.d.)
Another *engi* describes the opening of the mountain and the pacification of a malevolent spirit by Gakumon Gyōja.²⁹ This *engi*, from 1275, states that Gakumon was travelling through northern Shinano when he decided to practice austerities on the top of Mount Iizuna 飯綱山. After meditating there for seven days, he stood up and threw his single-pointed vajra (*tokko* 独鋏). He followed its course, and found that it had landed near the mouth of a cave in front of Togakushi Mountain. He began reciting the Lotus Sutra there. A nine-headed dragon (*Kuzuryū* 九頭龍) emerged from the cave and talked with Gakumon. He said that he had been the steward of a temple on that site, but that he had taken some clothes which had been offered to the Buddha and used them himself. Because of this he had taken the form of this dragon. When other ascetics had come to this site he had come out to listen to their chants, but because their hearts were not sincere (*jisshin* 実心), they succumbed to his poison. He continued, saying that after listening to Gakumon’s chanting, he felt he could become a Buddha. He then flew back into the cave and Gakumon took a huge boulder and covered the entrance.³⁰

These two legends explain the origin of the mountain and its unusual name. In the first, the mountain is called Togakushi, or “door hide,” because it was the door behind which Amaterasu had hidden. In the second it gets its name because Gakumon Gyōja enclosed or hid the dragon deity behind a stone door.

These legends explain more than the origin of the mountain’s name. In the second story, the local deity was controlled or converted by a founding figure. This is a

---

²⁹ This is the *Asabashōshōji ryakki* 阿鞍師抄諸寺略記. A similar *engi* is found in *Togakushisan kenchōji ryūiki* 塔跡山霊光寺流記 from 1458. (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 279)

³⁰ (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 279). There is a story in the accounts of the Chinese monk Hsian-tsang (600 – 664) that also discusses the transformation of a violent former Buddhist monk-turned dragon into a protector of the local people (T. 51, p. 874b – c). (Ruppert 2002, 149 and FN. 18)
frequent motif in engi, and it suggests that the worship of a local deity was present, but was eventually subsumed into a new cult or by a new power.\textsuperscript{31} The local cult did not cease to exist, but rather that it was embraced and controlled by the newer one.\textsuperscript{32} This may have happened twice at Togakushi: first with the cult of the dragon and the heavenly cave deities, and second with the deities and Gakumon Gyōja. That the dragon deity is subservient to the deities from the heavenly cave story is illustrated in the daily ritual in which rice cooked at the Nine-Headed Dragon Shrine (Kuzuryū Jinja 久頭龍神社) is offered to the stone-removing deity at the nearby Togakushi Okusha 奥社.\textsuperscript{33} This does not necessarily mean that the dragon cult was overpowered by the deities associated with Amaterasu, however. It may simply suggest a difference in status of the two deities. The tale of Gakumon and the dragon suggests that a form of esoteric Buddhism came to be practiced on the mountain and that it exerted a heavy influence upon the local cults. This is further demonstrated by the fact that each of the deities was considered to be the local manifestation (suijaku 崇拝) of a Buddhist deity (honji 本地) until the Restoration:

Yagokoroomoikane no mikoto was Shakyamuni, Amenouwaharu no mikoto was Jizō, Amenotajikara no mikoto was Sei Kannon, and the Kuzuryū dragon was Benzaiten.\textsuperscript{34}

Additionally, we can see how these stories connect the site to rain practices. In the first, the deities that are now enshrined on the mountain were responsible for convincing Amaterasu to return to her place in heaven. Thus these deities, who brought the Sun back and enabled crops to grow, can be seen as weather-changing deities. In the

\textsuperscript{31} (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 278, 281); (MacWilliams 1997, 391).
\textsuperscript{32} (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 278, 281). This frequently occurred with kenmitsu schools of Buddhism (MacWilliams 1997, 382-383).
\textsuperscript{33} (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 278, 281).
\textsuperscript{34} (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 276-278)

22
second engi, Gakumon Gyōja brought a dragon – which is associated with water and rain – under his control, and therefore the control of his successors at the temple-shrine multiplex located on the mountain. The dragon’s honji, Benzaiten, is also frequently petitioned in rain practices, seen as a protector of waterways – perhaps because in India she is the river goddess Sarasvati – and can take the form of a snake.  

Togakushi’s efficacy in water related requests was further promoted by the mountain’s oshi 御師, semi-lay practitioners who typically ran inns on the mountain and acted as intermediaries between the laity and priests.  One example of their promotional activities is the book written near the end of the Edo period entitled Miraculous Stories of Togakushi (Togakushi reigendan 戸隠縁縁談). Of this collection’s thirty-two tales, eight are about ceasing or protection from abundant water (mizuyoke 水除け) or the sudden change in course of irrigation ditches (sebiki 瀬引き), while five are about rain or water practices. It is through these origin tales and miraculous stories that the site of Togakushi was, and continues to be seen as efficacious in affecting desired changes in the weather.

Rain Practices on Togakushi

In recent times, petitioners to Togakushi have come from as far away as Hokkaidō for rain practices. The mountain and its shrines also have the widest draw of any cultic rain site in Nagano Prefecture for intra-prefectural groups: of the numerous rain practices

---

35 (Kaneko Kiyoshi 1995, 5-6); (MacWilliams 1997, 397); (Miyazaki Matsuji 1995); (Ludvik 2007)

36 For more on the function of oshi in the Ōyama cult see (Ambros 2001) and (Ambros 2002).

37 Unfortunately I have not been able to locate a copy of this collection. Togakushi Gongen was also considered to be effective at repelling insects and bandits and protecting against frost and wind [Sugimura Ken 1933, 64].

38 (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 285)

39 This person was originally from Niigata but had moved to Hokkaidō (Kobayashi Keiichirō 2000, 286).
listed in the four volumes of the folk practices section of *Nagano Prefectural History*, forty-four involved pilgrimage to Togakushi.\(^{40}\) When they travel to Togakushi, petitioners can participate in three rain practices: they can pray for rain at one of the shrines, they can receive water from the Taneike Pond 稲池 or mountain streams, or they can sponsor a *kagura* performance.\(^{41}\) In many cases, petitioners do more than one of these practices during a single visit.

A group from Mure Village 作礼村 went to collect water from Togakushi in the 1920s. They gathered at the local temple at eight o’clock one morning before Obon, wearing sedge hats (*kasa* 笠) and rain coats made of matted reeds (*goza* 萬蔭). From there they walked to the Togakushi Okusha, stopping at a teahouse and the Chūsha along the way. At the Okusha, the men offered two containers (*masu* 升) of sake and had the priest offer prayers on their behalf while the women waited outside and prayed. The group ate lunch and drank sake from one of the containers. After filling this container with water from a stream near the Okusha, they carried the bottle back to their village, taking it to their local shrine where they had a small party and prayed for rain.\(^{42}\) In this example, even though the group collected water, it occurred after the group had made prayers and offerings at the shrine, and the water was not blessed at one of Togakushi’s shrines. This suggests that in this instance, the prayers and offerings were given a more prominent place than the water.

\(^{40}\) Data collated by Kobayashi Keiichirō in *Kobayashi Keiichirō, Amagoi to reizan jisha, 雨乞いと霧山・寺社 1995, 36-37*

\(^{41}\) Bringing water from a sacred pond, lake, stream, or spring, especially those connected with dragons or other water deities, is also performed in China (Snyder-Reinke 2006, 27).

\(^{42}\) Interview with Hosoyama Toriji 作山道治 paraphrased in (Yano Tsuneo 1995).
During the drought in 1994, a group from Imoi 東井 neighborhood (Nagano City), consisting of members of the farming union, people from the gardening group, as well as neighborhood officials, traveled to the shrines to request rain. They drove to Togakushi, walked to the Taneike Pond – located near the Kuzuryū Shrine – and put its water into a bottle. They took this bottle to Togakushi's Hōkō Shrine 宝光社, where the priest, having been notified of their plans, had prepared to perform a ritual to bless the water. While the petitioners sat watching, the priest violently shook the bottle and read norito.43 Shaking the bottle may perhaps be a play on words “to shake” (ふるる) and “to fall” or “to precipitate” (ふるる): This is done to induce the rain to fall.44 Representatives then offered sacred branches (tamagushi 玉串), and all members bowed. They returned to their local shrine, taking care not to set the bottle down along the way because it would cause rain to fall at that spot, rather than in their neighborhood.45 In this example, the water, gathered from the Taneike, played a larger role in the rain practices than in the previous example.

In general, when petitioners return home, they take the container of water to their local temple or shrine where more rain prayers are said over it. In some cases, the water is poured onto the ground or into the irrigation ditches. For example, in the city of Itoigawa 矢魚川市, Niigata Prefecture, it is said that if one drop of Togakushi’s water is poured out it will rain for one day.46 In other cases, great care is taken with the water because it is believed that where one drop is spilled a pond will form, thus decreasing the

---

43 (Asaba Nagao 1995, 4)  
44 (Bownas 1963, 113)  
45 (Asaba Nagao 1995, 4). In the past, rain petitioners from farther distances set up a relay system where one pilgrim would carry the water to a post where it would be handed off to the next pilgrim.  
46 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 481)
amount of farmable land. It is also customary to return to Togakushi after a successful rain practice to show thanks. In some cases, petitioners thank the deity by offering water; in others they return the water they received to Togakushi when it has rained enough.

The tales describing the use of water from Togakushi do not explicitly describe how the water is thought to function, but some extrapolations can be made. Water is frequently used as an offering or in purification at shrines. However, the level of ritualization surrounding the water—particularly the blessing at Togakushi, the injunction against setting it down on the way home, and the variety of practices once the water has arrived—suggest that it is not simply used as a water offering or a remover of pollution, but as an object of power. This is further illustrated by the fact that if the water received from one site does not produce rain, petitioners will make a pilgrimage to another site to receive its water.

The water has been described a charm or magical object (jubutsu 呪物) into which the divided spirit (banrei 分霊) of a deity has been placed. In such a case, the blessed water would act in a similar manner to a talisman (fuda 札) or amulet (omamori お守り) which has been blessed and imbued with the divided spirit of the deity of the shrine or temple through a ritual. The divided spirit is said to be the same and have the same powers as the original. Petitioners request talismans and amulets for specific reasons, however, so even if a deity has many benefits associated with it, in requesting a specific benefit with a talisman, petitioners are perhaps limiting the power of the deity to

---

47 This is from Sanjō City 三条市 in Niigata. (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 481)
48 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 480-482)
49 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 490)
50 (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 67)
that one benefit. It would be odd, for instance, for someone to attribute his or her good
health to an amulet for safe driving, even if the original deity is thought to produce both
benefits. The talisman or amulet introduces the requested blessing, benefit, or protection
of the deity in a specific area – with talismans thought to work on a larger scale than
amulets. If properly cared for, these items are thought to be efficacious for up to one
year.

If water received from the Taneike and blessed at the Togakushi Shrines is indeed
thought of as a type of divided spirit, then taking it back to the village is a way of
bringing the power of Togakushi’s kami to the village. The power of the divided spirit in
the water is limited, of course, to producing rain, and only in the place where it is initially
put down or where it is poured out. Water, rather than a talisman or amulet, might be
used to house the spirit because it might be a form of “sympathetic magic,” where the
water brought from the shrines is thought to produce more water. Also, water is used
because rain petitions are by nature temporary, where just the right amount of rain is
needed, and too much is just as dangerous as not enough. In this case, a talisman for
producing rain, effective for one year, would be unnecessary and dangerous. Water is less
permanent than a talisman: it can be easily spilled, and if left in an open container it
evaporates, thus losing its efficacy. Water can also be divided easily, allowing it to be
placed equally throughout the community’s paddies, fields, and irrigation ditches.
Finally, a wooden talisman would not mix with water, so in cases where it is placed into
the rice paddies or irrigation ditches, it would not spread throughout the paddy or
irrigation water in the way that a liquid does.

51 (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 67)
52 (Reader 1994, 178)
Another way one can request a good harvest or rain at the Togakushi Shrines is by sponsoring a kagura dance. One of their advertised dances is *Mizutsugi no mai* 水縄ぎの舞, or “The Performance of Adding Water.” In this performance, one priest acts as the watershed kami who purifies the four directions. Then another acting as female kami (*Mizuhanome no kami* 水波乃売神) takes a long bamboo dipper and fills a bottle with heavenly water. The watershed kami then takes the heavenly water and pours it into a stream or river.

The shrines claim “a deep karmic connection” with kagura because Amanouzume no mikoto, the kami who lured Amaterasu out of the Heavenly Cave with the first kagura performance, is enshrined on the mountain. The shrines explain that kagura performances are efficacious because they either soothe the kami, or they act as a form of possession (*kamigakari* 神懐り). *Mizutsugi no mai* might be seen as efficacious because it functions in ways similar to possession – one scholar has postulated that by putting on masks depicting certain kami, priests in this type of performance may have actually been considered to become the kami. If this is the case, then priests distributing water while dressed as the watershed kami and *Mizuhanome no kami* can be thought of as these deities acting in this world. The small scoop of heavenly water added to a stream might be thought of as a blessing performed by the deity through the actor.

---

53 Please visit the website of the Togakushi Shrines for a picture of this kagura (Togakushi Shrines n.d.).
54 (Togakushi Shrines n.d.)
55 (Togakushi Shrines n.d.). I have been unable to find a starting date for the performances. The shrines have over seventy kagura performances a year, performed both regularly and at the request of petitioners.
56 (Togakushi Shrines n.d.)
57 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 573). A similar phenomenon occurs in Daoist rituals where either the medium or the priest becomes the deity, whose actions can accomplish more than those of the priest alone.
Mount Hijiri 聖山

Mount Hijiri lies to the southwest of Nagano City, roughly fifteen miles south of Togakushi. This mountain was, like Togakushi, an area where ascetics traditionally practiced. The mountain may get its name from these ascetics – the character for its name means “holy” or “saint,” but its pronunciation, hijiri narrows its meaning to “wandering saint” or “ascetic.” These hijiri were usually marginally attached to shrines or temples, but wandered through the countryside practicing asceticism, performing rituals, or collecting donations for temple or shrine construction projects. These hijiri were usually marginally attached to shrines or temples, but wandered through the countryside practicing asceticism, performing rituals, or collecting donations for temple or shrine construction projects. Local historians theorize that the ascetic practices of Hijiri Mountain were influenced by those performed on Togakushi.

The mountain is also famous as a watershed: Since long ago, it has been said in local areas that if it is cloudy on Mt. Hijiri, it will become rainy. This is one of the reasons that people come from nearby villages and cities to perform rain prayers. Its role as a watershed was confirmed by a survey performed in the early years of the Meiji Period, which said that water originating on the mountain fed the rice paddies of eighty-seven villages.

Mt. Hijiri’s Engi

Because Mt. Hijiri is a watershed, it is appropriate that the kami of the shrine most associated with rain practices was thought to be the watershed deity, Takemizu-wake no...
kami 建水別神 (also perhaps called Takemikumari no kami). This deity is the child of Takeminakata no mikoto of the Suwa Grand Shrines, who takes the shape of a dragon and is also thought to grant rain petitions. Takemizuwake no kami rules over water, supplies water for irrigation, and is said to have reclaimed the land that is now the southern half of the Zenkōji Plain from marshes.

In the tenth century, a village shrine (satogū 里宮) dedicated to Takemizuwake no kami was built in what is now southern Nagano City. Both the mountain and village shrines were supported by the Shinomiya clan 四宮, on whose land the village shrine was built. The Shinomiya lost power in the area when the Hōjō, whom they had backed, were overthrown in 1335. As a result, the mountain shrine came under the control of a Shingon temple, Kōbuji 高峰寺, and worship of Takemizuwake no kami was surpassed by Hijiri Gongen 聖権現.

The term “gongen” comes from the amalgamation of kami and buddhas (shinbutsu kongō 神仏混合), and it refers to a provisional manifestation of a deity, typically the kami avatar of a Buddhist deity. The Hijiri Gongen was actually the deified spirit of a human, as is the case with a few other gongen found throughout Japan. In this

---

63 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 109)
64 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 109); (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Amagoi to reizan・jisha, 鬼気いと霊山・寺社 1995, 36-37, 39).
65 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 109)
66 (Horiuchi Terumi 1995, 46); (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 109)
67 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 109-110)
68 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 110)
69 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 110). It is not known what happened to the village shrine. In 1837, however, the Hachiman Shrine in Yawata 八幡, which had been prayed at for victory in battle by Kiso Yoshinaka and Uesugi Kenshin, changed its name to Takemizuwake Shrine. Perhaps the priests changed its name to that of an Engishiki shrine to legitimize it. Or, perhaps they actually felt there was a connection between it and the Takemizuwake’s village shrine.
case, it was the spirit of the founder of Köbuji, Gakudō Shōnin 学道上人, from the Shingon temple Kokujōji 国上寺 in Echigo Province (now Niigata Prefecture).

In 1260, Gakudō was passing through northern Shinano province on his way back from the famous cultic sites in Kumano. He stopped at Zenkōji to pray to its Amida Triad, then went to Mt. Obasute 妹捨山 which is famous for moon-viewing. While he was spending the night near Mt. Obasute, he heard of a miraculous Yakushi Nyorai deeper in the mountains. The next day he went to investigate, and was shown the site by an eighty-year-old man. The man told Gakudō that the mountains nearby had been a place for performing austerities, and that although there were only twenty ascetics there now, at one time there were over one hundred. After praying to Yakushi, Gakudō went deeper into the mountains. A hermit possessing supernatural powers (sennin 仙人) appeared and showed Gakudō to the summit.70

Looking in the four directions Gakudō saw the Togakushi Mountains as well as Mt. Fuji. The mountain on which he was standing was called Takasu 多賀須山 (later to be renamed Mt. Hijirī), which had eight peaks, forty-eight trails to the peaks, forty-eight sacred sites (reijō 灵場), and each valley took the shape of the eight-fold path. Gakudō decided this was a good place to perform austerities, so hundreds of hermits made this mountain into a training ground for him.71

Gakudō remained on the mountain performing austerities, praying to the three gongen of Kumano, traveling to sacred sites, and having revelations. Every morning at

---

70 This paragraph is based on information from (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 110).
71 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 111)
four he traveled to Zenkō-ji and had “audiences with” (haletsu 拝謁) its Amida. 72 He had frequent visits from monks at Kokujō-ji, who tried to convince him to return to his home temple. He did return on Rite Days (hōshikihi 法式日). Through his travels to sacred sites, Gakudō’s steel geta, which had been eight sun (9.6 inches) tall, were worn down to only one sun (1.2 inches). 73

In 1292, when Gakudō was over eighty years old, three nineteen-year-old disciples (rishōra 利生ら) came to the mountain. He had them build three sites, one for each of the Kumano Gongen, stating that he wanted to be buried at one of those sites. The disciples also buried seven jewels on the mountain peak to insure productivity of the province. On the fifteenth day of the sixth month of that year Gakudō entered final nirvana. 74

Gakudō’s disciples were meditating on the anniversary of his death when he appeared before them. Through the promise (yogen 予言) of the Kumano Gongen, Gakudō had become Hijiriyama Daitoku Gongen 聖山大威徳権現, who was to remain on the mountain to protect the peace of Japan and be the guardian deity of the province. 75

He told his disciples that because there was not much water on the mountain, he and the Kumano Gongen brought part of the Nachi waterfalls to this area. Later the disciples found clear water bubbling from the ground near one of the shrines. They took a water

72 Haletsu is often used in conjunction with an audience with the emperor (大謁泉); (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 111).
73 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 111)
74 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 111)
75 (Ooka sonshi hensan iinkai 1998, 111)
pipe (toi 管) to make the water flow cleanly to nearby fields. The pond which formed here, like the one on Togakushi, is called Taneike 稲池. 76

That year there was a drought and the disciples performed esoteric rituals and chanted rainmaking sutras. 77 It rained the next night. The following year there was another drought and villagers from Fuse Village 布施村 (now a neighborhood of Shinonoi, Nagano City) traveled to the mountain and prayed for rain in front of Gakudō’s mausoleum with his disciples. It rained that night, but even more miraculously, a new irrigation ditch appeared in the village, ensuring years of water. 78

The legend of Gakudō shows the legitimization of a site through the generation of connections with established sites and figures of power. The first connection is that of Gakudō to Kumano and its three gongen through his pilgrimage, austerities, and transformation into a gongen. 79 After Gakudō reveals himself as the Hijiriyama Daiitoku Gongen, he and the Kumano deities transport the Nachi waterfalls to Mt. Hijiri, connecting the site to the Kumano area as well. The engi also connects Zenkōji and Amida to the mountain and Gakudō. 80 Gakudō’s founding of the temple on the mountain after traveling to Zenkōji shows a connection that is strengthened by his daily audiences with the Zenkōji Amida Triad. The physical landscape of the mountain also suggests connections with Amida: the mountain has forty-eight trails to its peaks and forty-eight

76 (Ooka sonsbi hensan iinkai 1998, 111-112)
77 The text does not specifically state which sutras were chanted. There are a few sutras which are used in rain practices: The Dragon King Sutras 龍王経 (T. 15 Nos. 597 – 99), 佛誦寶雨経 (T. 16 No. 660), The Peacock (King) Sutras 孔雀経 (T. 19 Nos. 982 – 88), the Great Cloud Wheel Rain Prayer Sutras 大雲輪請雨経 (T. 19 Nos. 989 – 93), as well as two sets of dhāranis, the 金剛光焰止風雷陀羅尼経 (T. 19 No. 1027) and 佛誦寶陀陀羅尼経 (T. 20 No. 1163). (Ruppert 2002, 148 FN. 14), Michel Mohr, Personal Communication.
78 (Ooka sonsbi hensan iinkai 1998, 112)
79 (Ooka sonsbi hensan iinkai 1998, 112)
80 (Ooka sonsbi hensan iinkai 1998, 112)
sacred sites. The number forty-eight is the sacred number of Amida: it is the number of vows the bodhisattva Hōzō (法華善王, Skt. Dharmakāra Bodhisattva) — who would later become Amida — made to save sentient beings. A further connection between Amida is Gakudō's transformation into the Hijiri Daiitoku Gongen. Daiitoku (Skt. Yamāntaka) — a Myōō with six faces and arms, seated on a cow or water buffalo — is a wrathful manifestation of Amida. The mention of the cultic sites of Togakushi and Fuji also perhaps suggest connections to those sites as well.

As shown in its engi, Mount Hijiri was a combinative site until the early years of the Meiji Period. The cult of the watershed deity Takemizuwake located at a local shrine was supplanted by that of the Hijiri Gongen; the shrine came to be controlled by Kōbuji. These combined elements were forced to separate in the early Meiji period, with Kōbuji giving up control over Hijiri Gongen Hall. The locals attempted to rename the newly designated Shintō shrine its “original” name, Takemizuwake Shrine, but they could not because the Hachiman shrine in Yawata (now part of Chikuma City, south of Nagano City) had already been named that in 1837. Instead they changed the characters of its name from Hijiri Gongen Hall 聖橋現堂 to Hijiri Shrine 祜知神社. This choice of characters was not random, however. It has been argued that hijiri was originally written “to know the sun,” (hijiri 知り). In a similar vein, the locals used the character “to know” (shiri 知り) with another reading for the character for “water

---

81 See (Duquenne 1983) for more information on Daiitoku Myōō.
82 (Ooka sonshi hensan ōinkai 1998, 112)
83 (Ooka sonshi hensan ōinkai 1998, 332) Additionally there were six Shugen temples on the mountain which were forced to close or become Buddhist.
84 (Ooka sonshi hensan ōinkai 1998, 332)
85 (Hori, On the Concept of Hijiri (Holy-Man) 1958, 129)
pipe” (toi 槻, also read hi) to keep the reading, but change the meaning of the shrine’s name. This newly created name means “to know the water pipe,” a reference to the water pipe connecting the spring created by the Gongen with the Taneike.

Rain Practices on Mt. Hijiri

The four volumes of Nagano Prefectural History focused on folk practices mention rain pilgrimages to Mt. Hijiri only eight times, while a map within the same text showing villages that perform rain pilgrimages shows thirteen neighborhoods that travel to the mountain.⁸⁶ These come from northern or central Nagano: in this way, the site does not draw petitioners from as wide an area as Togakushi. It is, however, a central focus of many petitions from the surrounding region.⁸⁷

Just as there are several rain practices associated with Togakushi, petitioners can perform several practices at Mt. Hijiri. Petitioners now pray at either Hijiri Shrine, the location for the Taneike Pond, or they can pray at Kōbuji, the temple which exercised control over the shrine and pond until the Meiji Restoration. They can also receive water from the pond, muddy its waters, or both.

A group from the Shinkō Neighborhood 信竜町 of Nagano City traveled to Mt. Hijiri in the Taishō Period. They informed the priest at Kōbuji of their visit, then went to the Taneike Pond where they walked in the water while loudly chanting “Mt. Hijiri’s Gongen, make it rain!” After this they prayed with the priest at Kōbuji. They received water from the Taneike Pond, which they put into their own fields. Then they built a

---

⁸⁶(Kobayashi Keichirō, Amagoi to reizan jisha, 雨乞いと霊山・寺社 1995, 36-37); (Naganokeshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 734).
⁸⁷(Horiuchi Terumi 1995, 46-47); (Sebarada Tadashi 1995); (Hijiriyama no mizukō dai san 嶿山の水乞い代参 2004).
ritual altar in their local shrine and had a rain festival there. They visited Togakushi later.\textsuperscript{88}

In more recent times, groups from Kyōwa Neighborhood 共和地区 (now in Shinonoi, Nagano City) perform rain practices at Mt. Hijiri in the following way. Every year representatives from the area climb the mountain, and after praying for rain at Hijiri Shrine they circumambulate Taneike three times. They then enter the pond barefoot and walk three times around the inside, trying to make the pond as muddy as possible. After returning to their neighborhood the representatives perform a rain festival in front of the Suzumiya Shrine 鈴宮, during which they light a bonfire.\textsuperscript{89}

Water received from a cultic site has already been explained as a form of talisman bringing the deity's blessing and protection to an area. Muddying a cultic pond by walking around in it requires a less lengthy explanation. Some have argued that it is a way of angering the deity, thus causing it to retaliate by making rain.\textsuperscript{90} There are many rain practices which are thought to bring about rain through angering a deity, usually by causing ritual pollution (\textit{kegare} 貰れ, \textit{oai} 汚穢). Polluting to cause rain is performed throughout Japan, with popular practices including polluting ponds or water in ritual containers by putting into the water human or animal bones, grave soil, horse or cow manure, steel, stones, or grass and tree branches.\textsuperscript{91} Entering the water at a cultic site is probably not a way of causing rain through \textit{kegare}; rather it draws the attention of the

\textsuperscript{88} (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 739-740)
\textsuperscript{89} This paragraph is based on (Hijiriyama no mizukoi daisan 聖山の水乞い代参 2004).
\textsuperscript{90} (Horiuchi Terumi 1995, 47)
\textsuperscript{91} (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 431-452)
deity to one's plight by acting disrespectfully. Usually, temple or shrine grounds are not a place for making loud demands, nor are places considered to be the dwellings of or gifts from deities meant to be entered. Entering the water and shouting might be ways of figuratively pounding on the deity's door when polite calls of "sumimasen ga..." have not worked.

Cultic Rain Sites and Pilgrimages

In this chapter I have demonstrated how Japan's sacred geography demarcates mountains as sacred and valleys as the dwelling places of humans. More importantly, however, I have shown how the intertwining of physical and legendary landscapes draw rain petitioners to cultic rain sites, and further, how it informs their practices while there.

Before moving to the next chapter I would like to discuss a few issues concerning travel to cultic sites for rain practices. These trips, which can be considered pilgrimages in every way, bring to light an issue which has been questioned in pilgrimage studies recently. Many studies of pilgrimage, and even pilgrimage diaries, stop once the goal, usually a final holy site or the fulfillment of a vow, has been reached. Earlier studies emphasized only the act of the pilgrimage, and the deeds performed at the goal, not the return home; even those studies which do discuss the return trip focus on the speed with which it is done or the changes generated by the pilgrimage discovered upon the return, which are all in contrast to the serious, slow quality of the trip to the site. In the case of pilgrimage as a rain practice, the return home can be even more important than the departure to the site, as we saw after groups received water from Togakushi. The

92 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 551-561)
93 (Frey, Pilgrimage and Its Aftermaths 2004, 96)
94 (Frey 1998, 177-201)
difference between rain pilgrimages and “typical” pilgrimages is, in part, one of goals. In “typical” pilgrimages the goal is to reach the final site. By contrast, in rain pilgrimages, the goal is to have an effect on the weather at home. Thus the pilgrimage remains serious for the return trip, following rules concerning travel and care of the water received. Additionally, if the goal of weather-change is not reached after one pilgrimage to a site, other sites may be visited, different deities petitioned, and more blessed objects received until it is.

Another issue these pilgrimages highlight is the role of community in pilgrimage and practices at cultic sites. Rain pilgrimage is frequently done by the whole community or its representatives because, as mentioned in the Introduction, rain practices are a community affair. These communities may be the whole village or neighborhood if the area has a large percentage of farmers, or it may be a community of farmers within an area (in some cases led by the Japan Agriculture Cooperatives (JA, Nōgyōkyōdōkumiai 農業協同組合) branch of the area). In addition, communities often have cultic rain sites that they traditionally visit—or that they visit first—in petitions. This means that these pilgrims’ most important ties to a site are through the community, not through personal choice or institutional connections. These small differences can, perhaps, point to larger theoretical concepts within the fields of pilgrimage and cultic site studies, and is worthy of further investigation. In the next chapter we come down from the mountains and into the valleys where we examine the variety of local rain practices.

---

(Horiuchi Terumi 1995, 47).
Chapter 3: Sundry Local Rain Practices in Northern Nagano

The drums of the afternoon storm have finally begun, I think.
一茶 Issa 文政 8 (1825)\(^1\)

Introduction

In this poem, Issa plays on the thunder of a welcome afternoon storm in the summer and the sounds of taiko drums which are frequently used in local rain practices. Local rain practices are performed in a community and are usually held at a village temple or an area shrine (ujigami or chinju) or center on the deity of these sites. As in rain pilgrimage, all of the community is involved, either directly or through proxy.

Local rain practices vary more widely than those performed at cultic rain sites. Many of these rain rituals and festivals combine different elements, and this variance and combination appears chaotic and random. Despite the appearance to the contrary, these ritual and festival elements were probably not chosen by chance, nor were they combined haphazardly. Rather they are a bricolage of components chosen from common Japanese and East Asian practices, which are shaped by local physical and legendary landscapes, as well as the perceived efficacy of sites, deities, and practices. The result is more than simply a bricolage of convenient practices; it forms a composite, where the elements are combined such that the perceived efficacy of the resulting ritual or festival is enhanced.\(^2\)

Rain practices are not, of course, the only religious practices within Japan that are composites of many ritual elements: local festivals often combine many different

---

\(^1\) Cited in (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Issa no amagoi no ku 一茶の雨乞いの句 1995).
\(^2\) I am using “bricolage” in the simple dictionary definition of something put together using available materials, not in the way that Lévi-Strauss uses it in *The Savage Mind.*
elements, if not to the extent that rain practices do. Unfortunately, the composite nature of rain practices (and other festivals as well) is often overlooked by scholars using ritual to show historical changes (for instance) or those who catalogue or categorize the practices based on one aspect to the exclusion of others present in a ritual. These types of scholarship are not without merit, but by exclusively examining rain practices in this way, the variety present within one practice is lost. On the other hand, studies which examine a number of practices by category also miss the localized nature of these rain practices. One of the goals of this chapter is to provide a balance between case studies and categorization: to examine both the variety and localized nature of rain practices.

To that end, this chapter details four case studies of local rain practices performed widely throughout northern Nagano in which the following elements are central: making noise by chanting or playing instruments (*narimono 鳴り物*), putting a statue into water (*mizu ni ireru 水に入れる*) or splashing a statue with water (*mizu wo kakeru 水をかける*), and lighting a bonfire (*sendataki* or *sendayaki 千馳たき* or 千駄焼き). A fifth study describes the incorporation of a new element into the landscape of local rain practices: the use of a dragon scroll (*ryū no kakejiku 龍の幟軸*), which is a rare practice for northern Nagano. These studies demonstrate not only the composite nature of rain

---

3 (Ruppert 2002) is an example of using rain practices to highlight something else, in this case the consolidation of power and development of prestige of Shingon priests. (Takaya Shigeo 1982) is an example of listing rain practices within categories, often to the detriment of the parts of the practices which do not fit within that category.

4 *Sendataki* is also called *senbataki*, *sanbawara*, *sendbahi*, *sendaki*, *sengantaki*, and *sentroriaki* depending upon where in Japan it is practiced. (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 520). (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 729-742); (Kobayashi Keichirō 1995, 36-37). Popular rain rituals performed throughout Japan include *komori*, purification, dipping or splashing statues with water, putting water in a vessel, changing water at shrines, moving a deity in a palanquin, those inspired by the Shingon rain sutras, making dragon shapes, animal offerings, placing impure things in ponds, purifications, divination, receiving water from a cultic site, receiving fire from a cultic site, lighting a fire on a mountain, wading in sacred pools, performances to cause rain, dances, *tendoku*, and *nenbutsu*. 40
practices, but how connections with local landscapes shaped these practices. Many of the
festivals or rituals described here, which are based on entries in the Nagano Prefectural
History and first-hand accounts in the journal Nagano, are need-based, and therefore have
not been performed in many years because of ample rain.

Case Studies

I. Narimono: The Drums of Ogawa Village

During a Taishō Period drought, all of the members of the farming households
from the Natsuwa 夏和 neighborhood of Ogawa Village 小川村 gathered at their local
Hachiman Shrine (Takebu Hachimangū 武部八幡宮). There the priest petitioned for
rain, probably by reading norito. Some participants spent the night at the shrine (komori
龍もり) while others played taiko drums on the shrine grounds. They chanted “Let it
rain! Dōdotto, Dōdotto!” or “In the sky, heavenly king, Dragon: Let it rain! Sōtotte,
Sōtotte!” Next, the petitioners journeyed to Hijiri Mountain and petitioned for rain there.
After making their petitions, they entered the Taneike Pond and prayed while wading
around inside it.

There are several reasons for the use of instruments in this practice. The drums
and bells are thought to resemble the sound of thunder, as Issa’s poem at the beginning of
this chapter elegantly demonstrates. In addition to this resemblance, the kami of thunder,

3 (Naganokeshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 733)
4 The chants read as follows: “amefurasetamae dōdotto dōdotto” 「雨降らせたまえドードットドードット」 and “Tenjiku Tennō Ryūtatsu amefurasetamae sōtotte sōtotte” 「天竺 天王 龍辰 雨降らせた
まえ そうとって そうとって」. “Tenjiku” can mean “India” or “sky.” I believe that the second
definition is probably what is meant in this case. Unfortunately I have been unable to find meanings for
either dōdotto or sōtotte.
5 (Naganokeshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 733)
6 It is unclear from the sources what bells
were used.
Raijin, is often depicted surrounded by drums.\textsuperscript{9} Thus, petitioners might use drums as a form of sympathetic magic to summon rain.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, there is an adage that says that it rains after a battle.\textsuperscript{11} Drums were frequently used in battles, so using them in a shrine or temple might trick the deity into making rain by simulating battle. Finally, drums and other instruments also typically accompany rain dances (amagoi odori 雨乞い踊り), which are popular in western Japan. Of the eighty rain practices described in the Nagano Prefectural History for northern Nagano, no mention is made of the dance, although five groups listed there perform rain practices by playing instruments—especially the drums or bells—chanting, or both.\textsuperscript{12} This could mean that the rain dance was either never performed there, or the drums may have once accompanied a dance which was at some time removed from the practice.

Bells can also be used for accompaniment, but there might be other reasons. Bells are used in folk festivals in China to scare dragons from their hiding places in rivers and caves and to induce them to create rain.\textsuperscript{13} It has been suggested that dragons, as creatures associated with the phase wood, might be especially sensitive to the sound of clanging metal because metal can control wood.\textsuperscript{14} While farmers in Nagano might not play bells for this reason, it does provide a cursory explanation until a more detailed study can be performed.

\textsuperscript{9} This depiction of Raijin dates from the Kamakura Period. Prior to that time, he was often thought to take the form of a snake or a small child. (Suzuki, Raijin 2005)
\textsuperscript{10} (Takayama 2007)
\textsuperscript{11} (Bownas 1963, 119). This saying led farmers in Kyūshū during the drought of 1934 to request an artillery bombardment to simulate battle to bring rain.
\textsuperscript{12} The Nagano Prefectural History section on rain practices in northern Nagano actually has more than eighty entries, in quite a few cases, however, the same community is listed more than once in different sections.
\textsuperscript{13} (Andersen 2001, 52-53)
\textsuperscript{14} Poul Andersen, personal communication.
Chanting as a rain practice occurs quite frequently, and the petitioners often address a deity and request rain in these chants. In the *Nagano Prefectural History*, chants are mentioned seventeen times in conjunction with other practices. Of these cases, dragons were addressed eight times, the Hijiri Gongen was addressed twice, and in seven cases it was unclear to whom the chant was addressed. There is also frequently a section of the chant which could either be an onomatopoetic simulation of drum noise, or which may be a type of mantra or norito. This is exemplified by the “Dōdoto” of the Ogawa Village chants, which could be the sound of a large object crashing to the earth, water gushing or crashing against rocks, or perhaps of thunder.

Komori, praying in the sanctuary of a shrine or temple for one or more nights, was frequently performed by pilgrims at pilgrimage sites. For example, pilgrims did this at Shinano Zenkōji until the middle of the Meiji Period. There were many reasons for performing this type of practice, including seeking rebirth in the Pure Land, inducing dreams of the deity, or convincing the deity of the urgency of one’s wish in the hopes that the wish would be granted. Rain petitioners performed komori in their local shrine or temple primarily for this last reason. According to the *Nagano Prefectural History* this was performed as a rain practice in eight places in northern Nagano.

This case study demonstrates how an area’s protecting shrine can become central in the performance of local rain practices. The *Nagano Prefectural History* lists thirty-three cases where a rain practice took place at or involved the kami of the local shrine.

---

13 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 729-740)
15 (Ono Hideichi 1984, 226)
17 (Aihara Fumiya 1987, 55)
18 (McCallum 1994, 189); (Ambros, Liminal Journeys: Pilgrimages of Noblewomen in Mid-Heian Japan 1997, 321-322); (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 221-238). There is also komori for purification, igomori, usually performed in a room of one’s home before a festival or after a funeral.
Local protector shrines are frequently involved in rain practices because the *kami*
enshrined there are thought to look after the local area and population. Performing a rain
practice in the shrine or shrine grounds alerts the *kami* to the need of the community.¹⁹
The study also highlights the connection of many local practices with the cultic rain site, Mt. Hijiri, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

II. Soaked Statues and Sodden Stones

At Hōzōin Temple 宝蔵院 in the Toyono 豊野 area of northern Nagano City there are two sacred objects which were fished from rivers: a statue of Dainichi from the Chikuma River and a stone in the shape of a cow's head from the Torii River 鳥居川.

The statue is prayed to for rain, but as a hidden image it is not available for petitions of a more physical nature; however the stone, called Gyūnbō 牛んぼう, is used for rain practices. According to legend, a fisherman pulled the stone out of the river and put it in his garden. After the stone mooed throughout the night, the sleepless man took it to Hōzōin, where it has been residing quietly since. Perhaps because of the stone's watery origins, it is said that if one bathes it on sunny days, it will rain soon.²⁰

On the afternoon of July 30, 1994, the farmers from Toyono suffering from a drought traveled to Hōzōin to borrow Gyūnbō. They placed the stone in front of the main image, offered a container of sake, and chanted the Heart Sutra with the resident priest. They then carried Gyūnbō to where the Chikuma and Torii rivers meet. The petitioners stripped to their underwear, entered the river and prepared a space in front of a large rock. This rock served as their temporary altar on which they lighted a candle and offered a

¹⁹ (Bownas 1963, 117)
²⁰ (Kuraishi Kazuhiko 1995)
container of sake. Then they carried Gyūnbō into the river, at first gently splashing it with water and washing it with their hands. All participants lined up and prayed to the stone for rain. Following this, they opened the sake and poured it over the stone. The participants, two at a time, lifted Gyūnbō over their heads while shouting “Wasshoi!”21 The stone was washed in this way for thirty minutes, after which it was returned to Hōzōin and placed in front of the main image. The priest chanted the Heart Sutra again in thanks. By the time the ritual had finished, it was raining.22

Dunking ritual items or statues into water or splashing them with water to cause rain is a ritual carried out throughout Japan.23 Within northern Nagano, there are seventeen occurrences of this mentioned in the Nagano Prefectural History involving stone or wooden statues of Buddhist deities, gongen, and shintai.24 They are splashed with water, carried into and out of a nearby river, left in the water until it rains, or thrown in so violently that some have broken.25 In one case, a naked man strapped a wooden statue of a gongen to his back and swam across the Sai River and back again.26 The Chikuma River, the longest river in Japan and the most prominent river in the area, is

---
21 I do not know how large Gyūnbō actually is, though there is a picture in Nagano. Based on this, it appears to be roughly two feet long and anywhere from nine to twelve inches high and wide. Though lighter than some other stone statues dunked in rivers, it might be heavy enough to require two people to lift above their heads.
22 Recounted by Muramatsu Yasuo 村松安雄 in (Kuraishi Kazuhiko 1995, 17-18).
23 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 265-299)
24 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 729-742)
25 (Kuraishi Kazuhiko 1995, 18)
26 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 735). The Sai River flows from the south west and connects with the Chikuma River in Nagano City. It is from the space in between these rivers that the battle where Takeda Shingen and Uesugi Kenshin got its name: Kawanakajima, or the island in the rivers.
frequently used in petitions in the Zenkōji plain. If petitioners do not have a river nearby, they will use streams, ponds, or even irrigation ditches.

Reasons behind this action are perhaps as varied as the deities used. Some scholars have postulated that this practice is done to make the deity angry and cause it to retaliate with rain. In some cases, particularly those in which the statue is thrown into the water so violently that it breaks, this might be the reason. However, angering the deity can backfire: a drunken man from Wakatsuki 若柳 (Nagano City), angry that petitions for rain had gone unfulfilled, threw a statue of Benzaiten into a local pond in 1924. Villagers found the statue the next day, but its face is said to have turned from peaceful white to angry red. In her anger, Benzaiten is said to have insured that the drought of that year became worse.

The respect petitioners showed Gyūnbo in the case study demonstrates that angering a deity is not the only reason for putting a sacred object or statue into water. Some petitioners splash water or lightly rub it onto the statue, suggesting that it is either a way of purifying the deity or an act of devotion – similar to pouring milk over statues in India or water over statues at some temples in Japan. Another possible interpretation is that if the statue has come from water, like Gyūnbo or the Dainichi of the myth, returning it there during rain petitions might be a way of replenishing its original water energy. Other statues might be dipped in water because of their names. Petitioners might have

---

27 Chikuma is the name for the river in Nagano, but in Niigata the river is called the Shinano River 信濃川. Rivers are, of course important as suppliers of water and new alluvial soil, but they can also be dangerous. Even in contemporary Japan – with its dams, flood control gates, and cemented river banks – rivers engorged with excess rain water destroy low-lying farmland, houses, and bridges.
28 (Horiuchi Terumi 1995, 47)
29 (Kaneko Kiyoshi 1995, 6)
30 (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 280)
dipped statues of Dainichi in the water because the symbolism of covering the “Great Sun” with water would cause rain. In fact, in Toyono there are several Dainichi statues which are dipped in the water.\(^{31}\)

The case of Gyūnbō shows the importance of local physical and legendary landscapes in rain practices. The temple Hōzōin is not simply the place where Gyūnbō is kept, but also the site of the rain petitions requested by the community and led by its resident priest. Temples, like local shrines, can be the sites of rain practices: the *Nagano Prefectural History* mentions twenty-two cases involving local temples and rain practices in northern Nagano. Proximity to a river, stream, irrigation ditch, or pond affects the performance of this practice: without a sizeable body of water, a statue could not be dunked, so it would have to be splashed with water. Additionally, places far from water are probably less likely to perform this practice. Finally, legends affect the choice of statue or item to be dunked. Of course, this practice is frequently combined with others seen as efficacious, like making rain pilgrimage to a cultic rain site, having a festival at a local temple or shrine, or chanting the nenbutsu one million times.\(^{32}\)

### III. *Sendataki*: Fire on the mountain, fire near the shrine

In 1940 the villagers of a neighborhood in Kinas Village, near Mt. Togakushi, performed the following rain practices. One person from each household participated in a Shugendō ritual called *ozatate* 御座たて.\(^{33}\) This is an oracular ritual performed to communicate with a mountain deity before climbing a mountain, and is

\(^{31}\) (Kuraishi Kazuhiko 1995)

\(^{32}\) The million-time nenbutsu is performed when petitioners sit in a circle around a giant Buddhist rosary and pass the beads while chanting. This has its origins in the Heian Period and done frequently at funerals, to gain merit for rebirth in the Pure Land, or for practical benefits. (Zenkōji jimukyoku, 雑光寺事務局 1991, 68)

\(^{33}\) (Naganok denieshiki kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 737)
associated with the Ontake Sect 御岳 (also 御嶽) of Shugendō (or Shintō).

After performing this ritual, the participants climbed the tallest mountain in the village, Mt. Ichiya 一夜山 (5,124 ft.). There they lighted a *senda* fire while an Ontake ascetic (*Ontake gyoja* 御嶽行者) chanted sutras. When these failed to produce rain, the villagers moved the *ujigami* from its shrine. Immediately there was an oracle telling the villagers to carry sedge hats (*kasa* 帽) and go to receive water from Togakushi. They all went to Togakushi the next day.

The *ozatate* ritual, also simply called *oza* 御座, was performed by two groups in northern Nagano before they climbed a local mountain to perform a rain practice. This shows the influence of the Ontake cult – centered at Mt. Ontake in the mountains about sixty-five miles directly south west of Nagano City – in northern Nagano. *Oza* is a form of *yorigito* 寄り祈祷 (oracle or séance) centered on two people who, at least in the past, have developed oracular powers through years of ascetic practice. The first is the *nakaza* 中座, the medium into whom the deity descends and through whom it speaks. The *maeza* 前座 induces the *nakaza’s* trance through chants and mudras, questions the deity, and brings the *nakaza* out of the trance by slapping him or her on the back. Unlike other *yorigito* which center around male-female pairings, the *maeza* and *nakaza* can be of either sex. *Oza* is used to ask the deity a variety of questions, from the weather on the

---

34 For more on the various changes to the Ontake sect, see (Nakayama Kaoru 2007).
35 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 737)
36 (Blacker 1986, 281-284)
mountain to events in a person’s life. In rain practices it might be used to consult the deity about the best way to produce or stop rain.

Fire also plays a prominent role in the rain practice of this village. There are seven rain rituals in northern Nagano involving bonfires mentioned in the *Nagano Prefectural History*. Fires are either lighted on the top of the highest mountain or in the grounds of the village shrine, or both. There are many reasons that this may be done. Fire, as a bonfire or as lanterns, can be brought to the deity as an offering. Bonfires can also be used as beacons, transmitting communities’ needs to rain deities who are thought to live in the shrines, on mountains, or in the sky. Bonfires are also lighted during fire festivals which are held after New Years and during Obon to request many benefits for the coming year or harvest; lighting one when the weather needs to be controlled can perhaps be seen as a special case of this type of request. Creating excess fire is also thought to produce rain by upsetting the balance of the five phases (*gogyō*五行): the deities will attempt to restore the natural balance caused by the bonfire by making it rain. Finally, heating or scorching clouds is also thought to produce rain.

The study of Kinasa’s rain request, much like the case of Gyūnbō above, demonstrates the importance of geography – in this case tall mountains – in rain practices. Like the presence of rivers in certain rain practices, proximity to mountains determines...
whether a community can light a sendataki on a mountain top. It is an example of how regional traditions, in this case the oracular ritual from Mt. Ontake, can be incorporated into local rain practices depending upon how influential these traditions are in the area. Further, the influence that Shugendō had on several rain practices is clear in this study. Finally, it shows the connection of this practice with the cultic rain site Togakushi.

IV. Pilgrimage
During a drought in the Meiji Period, one person from each household of the neighborhood of Kashiwao 柏尾, in Iiyama City 飯山市 (north of Nagano City), went to the neighborhood ujigami. There each participant performed the hundred-time pilgrimage (hyakudo mairi 百度参り), which will be described below. After this they took off their clothes, entered the shrine and performed the following ritual one hundred times: they struck a bell, chanted “Ryōryōhatta iryō. Please bring the rain,” and spilled some water. In addition to prayers at the shrine, participants traveled to Kamikijima 上木島 (in Kijimadaira Village 木島平村, between Nagano and Iiyama cities), obtained water from Taru Waterfall 樺滝 and carefully brought the collected water back to their neighborhood. They chose Taru Waterfall, rather than another cultic rain site, because of a legend describing its relationship to their neighborhood: it was said that the dragon living there had once lived in Kashiwao.

45 Unfortunately, I have been unable to find Ryōryōhatta iryō. The Nagano Prefectural History lists this in katakana, not kanji, so it is difficult to find a meaning. Perhaps Ryōryō is an adverb meaning adamantine or referring to the clear sound of a bell (鈴々 and 哖々 respectively). If it was the former, the hatta iryō would then be “discarding one’s clothes” (脱った衣料). (Michel Mohr, personal communication).
46 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 740)
The petitioners of Kashiwao performed a special type of pilgrimage called *hyakudo mairi*, in which practitioners or petitioners walk between a temple or shrine and a set point one-hundred times. Usually a stone with rings, like those of an abacus, marks one end of the pilgrimage; petitioners might also make piles of small stones to keep count (Figure 3).\(^{47}\) *Hyakudo mairi* developed sometime during the Kamakura Period from the hundred-day pilgrimage—a practice in which petitioners made a vow to visit a temple or shrine and pray there one hundred days in a row.\(^{48}\) The *hyakudo mairi* is frequently performed as a penance, an ascetic practice, or to show one’s sincerity in requesting the deity’s assistance.\(^{49}\) The performance is thought to be more efficacious if done barefoot.\(^{50}\) When performed by a group whose members all request the same benefit, as in the Kashiwao’s rain prayer, the petitions are thought to be more persistent and the practice more efficacious.\(^{51}\) This same logic applies to the chants and ritual offerings of water performed in front of Kashiwao’s tutelary deity: if each person

---

\(^{47}\) Photo by author.  
\(^{48}\) (Suzuki, Ohyakudo 2006)  
\(^{49}\) (Reader, Japanese Religions 1994, 173)  
\(^{50}\) (Suzuki, Ohyakudo 2006)  
\(^{51}\) (Bownas 1963, 117-118)
performs it one hundred times it is more persistent and efficacious than if it is performed once by a single person. It was probably performed in the nude for the same reason that people perform *hyakudo mairi* barefoot: to convince the deity of the seriousness of their plight.

The petitioners also visited the Taru Waterfall, which was actually two waterfalls in the Taru River prior to its damming: the male Otaki 雄滝 and female Metaki 雌滝. It is unclear which falls the people from Kashiwao collected water from, but a separate group from Nakashima (Suzaka City 須坂市, north of Nagano City) took water from the Metaki. In 1984, however, the use of the Taru River for hydroelectric power diverted the flow of the river, which dried up the falls and effectively halted its use in rain practices. People complained to the hydroelectric company which now allows the river to flow for eight hours on May eighth, the festival day of the Fudō Shrine (*Tamataki Fudōmyōō Jinja* 玉滝不動明王神社) at the bottom of the falls. On this day people come to see the “Illusory Waterfalls”. That the falls only come into existence for one day a year early in the rice planting season, prevents their use in need-based rain practices, which are usually performed later in the summer.

This case study demonstrates the incorporation of the *hyakudo mairi*, an efficacious practice performed for everyday and extraordinary petitions throughout Japan. It shows the use of legend to explain why practices may not always occur at the most

---

52 (Kijimadairamura yakuba n.d.)
53 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 740). The group from Nakashima would fill a barrel with sake, tie rope around it, toss it in the pool at the bottom of the waterfall, then pull it out. When they opened the barrel, the sake had been replaced with water. They used this water to perform rain rituals. They began doing this in 1987.
54 (Kijimadairamura yakuba n.d.); (Kijimadaira mura kankō kyoukai n.d.). They nicknamed the falls Maborashi Taki, or Illusory Falls, because it appears only once a year.
convenient location, such as a waterfall in one’s village. Finally, it demonstrates how changes in the landscape – in this case because of the actions of humans, though these changes may also occur naturally – can affect rain practices.

V. Others: When a picture of a dragon causes rain

In the mid-nineteenth century a man named Seki Chōshō (1812 – 1862) from what is now northern Chikuma City 千曲市 received a painted scroll (kakejiku 掛け軸) of two dragons flying in a cloudy sky. Other members of this small farming community came to know of his scroll, and because of the association of dragons and the weather began to believe this scroll could produce rain. In times of drought, villagers would come by the man’s house and request that he hang up the scroll. He would put it up in the alcove of an inner room, offer sake, and pray before it. He also sent a notice to the villagers detailing his actions. The scroll was hung and worshiped a number of times from the end of the Edo Period into the Shōwa Period by Chōshō and his descendants.

Chōshō’s great-grandson reports that he was surprised when people from his neighborhood stopped by his house in 1994 and said “What do you think? Won’t you try to bring out the scroll occasionally?” even though it had not been discussed in many years. He brought it out, offered sake and prayed to the scroll.

Rituals performed in front of a dragon scroll are mentioned only once in the Nagano Prefectural History, but this ritual taps into a larger East Asian tradition of rain rituals and festivals involving pictorial and three-dimensional dragon or snake images.

---

56 Chōshō is said to have gotten the scroll from a friend in the merchant and artisan town of Obuse 小布施 (north of Nagano City). (Seki Shun 1995, 13)
57 (Seki Shun 1995, 14-15)
58 (Naganokenshi kankōkai, 長野県史刊行会 1985, 742)
These images, considered to manifest the spirit of a dragon, range in scale from miniature to gigantic, and may be the foci of everything from esoteric rituals to communal festivals.\(^{59}\)

The story of the Seki’s scroll shows how an item considered to be powerful in the larger landscape of rain practices can, when introduced to a place, quickly become an accepted practice in the local landscape. It also demonstrates the enduring nature of rain practices. In the special Rain Practice (amagoi 雨乞い) issue of Nagano magazine, many authors discussed how rain practices which had not been performed since the early Shōwa Period had been revived during the drought in 1994.\(^{60}\)

* * * * *

The five case studies demonstrate the diversity of rain practices in northern Nagano. They show how practices are frequently combined to form a composite rain ritual or festival. In addition, the studies illustrate the influence of the physical landscape of rivers, mountains, temples, and shrines as well as the legendary landscape explaining the origin of efficacious statues, items, or sites in shaping these composites.

I have not yet focused on a very important component of rain practices: the community in which they are performed. I turn to the community in shaping and being shaped by rain practices in the next chapter, in which I focus in detail on a rain-thanking festival called the Amagoi Sanjosan Tōrō.

\(^{59}\) (Takaya Shigeo 1982, 351, 354, 367); (Ruppert 2002, 158); (Fowler 1997, 157-159)
\(^{60}\) (Miyazawa Toyoh 1995); (Yano Tsuneo 1995); (Asaba Nagao 1995); (Kuraishi Kazuhiko 1995)
Chapter Four: *Amagoi Sanjosan Kentō, The Thirty-three Lanterns Dedicated to Kannon*¹

The swaying of the people is greater than that of the grasses. Rain celebrations.

一茶 Issa 文政 8 (1825)²

Introduction

Celebrations of rain are frequently performed with some element in which the providing deity is thanked for its benevolence. As I mentioned in the Introduction, these elements of thanking are often overlooked by scholars, perhaps because they see these aspects as less important than the “main” part of the practices. Thanking the deity is vitally important in religious requests, particularly rain practices, as a way of maintaining a good relationship with the deity. In some cases, thanking has become more important than what is usually considered to be the main aspect of the practice. This is true for the festival examined in chapter, the Thirty-three Votive Lanterns Rain Prayer (*Amagoi Sanjosan Kentō* 雨乞三十三献燈, hereafter called *Sanjosan*), which commemorates an act of thanks to the Kannon enshrined at Hase Temple in southern Nagano City for rain she provided long ago.³

This chapter, written with analysis woven into first-hand narrative, provides a more in depth examination of rain practices, allowing us to zoom in on the combinative nature of rain practices, their role in the community, and how they have altered with time.

A postscript provides further analysis of larger issues within the festival, including

---

¹ The work on this section is largely based on ethnographic research performed in the late summer of 2007.
² Cited in (Kobayashi Keiichirō, *Issa no amagoi no ku* 一茶の雨乞いの句 1995). There is a misspelling of “soyogi” in Kobayashi’s version where it is rendered “yosogi.” “Soyogi” is how this set of kana is ordered in other copies of this poem, and it makes more sense than *yosogi*, so I have changed it.
³ Normally the characters 三十三 would be read “sanjūsan,” but according to Okazawa Keichō, the head priest of Hasedera, the locals slurred their speech so it became “Sanjosan.” (Okazawa Keichō 2007).
discussions of its combination of Shintō and Buddhist elements and an attempt to understand the whole festival by evaluating its ritual logic. Its main goal, however, is to demonstrate how rain practices are performed by the community while concurrently reinforcing it.

The Festival

I climbed the uneven stone steps, treacherous in the half-light, and crossed over the small bridge which marks the end of the mundane world and the beginning of one ruled by the Bodhisattva Kannon. Although I had not seriously considered this divide in my previous visits, it was with a feeling of anticipation that I crossed it that night. The whisper of the wind and the rustle of leaves seemed to speak of deeper secrets than in the daylight hours. The usual weatherworn statues in their red bibs and caps seemed to move in the mysterious play of shadow and lantern light. The other visitors climbing the steps also seemed to respond to the difference in atmosphere: they spoke in hushed tones and proceeded with caution as they continued up the stairs. The deeper atmosphere did not deter them from their goal of praying to the temple's Eleven-faced Kannon. Their prayers would be especially potent that night, August ninth, because it was a special karmic time (tokubetsu ennichi 特別縁日) when worshippers gain merit equivalent to one thousand visits during monthly karmic days (ennichi 縁日).

Rectangular paper lanterns hung sporadically on the trees cast pools of light which faintly illuminated the stairs, statues, and people. The lanterns bore paintings of summer flowers, poems, and even popular cartoon characters, the latter obviously painted
by children. A group of parishioners had hung them that afternoon as an offering.\textsuperscript{4} Japanese on the side of the lanterns stated that that night was not only auspicious for gaining merit it was also the night of a local festival. Indeed, it was this rain thanking festival, the Thirty-three Votive Lanterns Rain Prayer, which I had come to observe.

The change in ambiance was sudden as I crested the stairs. The temple grounds were brightly lighted, not only by decorative lanterns, but by floodlights attached to the bell tower and the flashing yellow light of a fire truck waiting in readiness. These lights shined over an empty area between the bell tower and the Kannon Hall. A crowd of two or three hundred people lingered on the edge of the clearing, hesitant to enter the lighted area set to serve as the stage for the main part of the festival.

I picked my way through running, playing, and shouting children and groups of quietly chatting adults. Although everyone seemed to be preoccupied, it was apparent that they were anticipating the arrival of the decorated pole which is the centerpiece of the festival. I continued to the hall containing the statue of Shirasuke 白介, the legendary seventh-century founder of the temple whose efforts to bring peace to the spirits of his deceased

\textsuperscript{4} The group is called “The club [for] the love of excellence” Jōzu wo ai suru kai 上手を愛する会.
parents are described in the twelfth-century tale collection, the *Miraculous Tales of Hase’s Kannon* (*Hase Kannon reigenki 長谷観音靈験記*).\(^5\) Shirasuke’s statue, which is normally covered by curtains, had been uncovered to allow him to witness the evening’s events. As many of the other visitors, I bowed my head slightly as I passed, continuing up the stairs to the Kannon Hall.

Though small, The Kannon Hall is impressive in its symmetrical stone-and-wood architecture, artwork, and the view it commands of the lower Zenkōji plain.\(^6\) The hall was being renovated during my first visit to the temple in the spring of 2006, but almost one-and-a-half years later the plaster was still stark white and the colors on the lintel designs bold, as if newly painted.

About a dozen people of various ages were gathered on the terrace in front of the hall, patiently waiting their turns to pray to Kannon.

At the head of the line was a ten-year-old boy who struck an inverted bell (*shōkei 小磬*) which was sitting on a table, level with his head. Earnestly pressing his hands together, he closed his eyes, bowed his head, and prayed to the

\(^5\) Shirasuke can also be written 白助. The *Hase Kannon reigenki* is broken up into two books, the first of which contains nineteen tales about Kannon in relation to the Kannon section of the Lotus Sutra. The second book contains tales about Kannon in relation to Hasedera in what is now Nara Prefecture. Shirasuke’s tale is the first tale of the second book.

\(^6\) The temple was destroyed by the forces of Kiso Yoshinaka 木曾義仲 (also known as Minamoto no Yoshinaka, mentioned in the *Heike monogatari*) in the sixth month of 1171 because it was the family temple of the Ohatsuoe family 小長谷願, who did not support Yoshinaka. The temple was partially restored in 1290 by a monk named Shinkai 真海. The Kannon Hall was finally rebuilt in 1672. (Miyazaki Yūshō 1996, 174-175).
bodhisattva for several seconds before heading down the steps to play with his friends (Figure 5). This bell, not present during my previous visits, had been brought out for the occasion.

Seeing lights and hearing voices from inside the hall, I went to a side door and peered in. Ten to fifteen older men — wearing white button-up shirts, slacks, and the white neckties Japanese men wear on joyous occasions — were crowded into the hall. These men, the representatives of the neighborhoods (kacho 区長) in Shiozaki, were seated with their backs toward the door, facing the goma platform (gomadan 護摩壇). With serious countenances they intently listened to the resident priest, Okazawa-san, explain the purpose of the goma fire ritual. He was wearing light green robes for the occasion, and although he just turned forty years old, he looked like a man ten years younger. In contrast to the older men who were stiffly formal in their roles, the relaxed yet serious Okazawa was in his element in front of the platform. Seated at a drum behind him was another priest, also in green, who had traveled about forty minutes from a small temple in Ueda City to assist with the festival.

Although it was not explicitly communicated, it was obvious that entrance to the inner area of the Kannon Hall was restricted to those directly involved in the ritual. The floor of that area, one step up from the veranda, separated it from the outside: this is a common East Asian architectural design which separates the area in which one can wear

---

7 Photo courtesy of Kuroda Kazuyo.
8 There are a number of ways to translate 区長: “neighborhood or area heads” is the most common. I have chosen “representative” not only because it is less cumbersome than the other translations, but because it seems to best fit the function of these men in the festival.
9 It is not uncommon for priests of small temples to assist with rituals in other temples. When I visited one Shingon temple in Ueda, I was told that the resident priest was busy for the next week assisting the priests of other small temples, some as far as one-and-a-half hours away by car, with the ritual for feeding the hungry ghosts (segakie 施餌鬼会).
shoes from the area in which one cannot. That only one side door was open, rather than all of the doors, also acted as a means of restricting access. The attitudes of the priests and representatives, as well as their formal attire, expressed a further degree of separation.

This area was the first of several which were used exclusively by the representatives and priests. Some areas were considered to be sacred or purified areas. This included the Kannon Hall and the Upper Hase Shrine (Hasejinja kamisha 長谷神社上社). Other areas were specifically reserved for the representatives so they could observe parts of the festival. This included both the sacred areas of the Kannon Hall and Upper Shrine, as well other areas such as the veranda of the Kannon Hall and the temple residence.

After explaining the goma, Okazawa took a wooden wand (sanjō 散杖) and purified and empowered the water (kaji kōsui 加持香水) in a small bronze bowl on a table in front of him by stirring the water with the tip of his wand. He tapped the bronze bowl three times then waved the wand in three circles at the representatives before returning the wand tip to the water. He tapped and waved the wand two more times.

This action, known as kaji 加持, is performed as a part of esoteric rituals to empower or purify objects, areas, or people. 10

Okazawa turned to face the goma altar, bowed three times from the knees, and then sat with folded knees on a raised cushion. He and the assistant priest began chanting accompanied by the deep tones of the drum which reverberated through the small hall.

10 On the purification of water in Shingon rituals, see (Miyata 1988, 6-7). On kaji see (Mikkyō jiten hensankai 密教辞典編纂会 1979, 234-237). On the use of kaji in Shingon rituals and practices, see (Yamazaki 1988, 110-112, 154-159). For more on the use of kaji in healing, see (Winfield 2005); and (Oda n.d.)
Okazawa added the *goma* sticks (*gomagi* 護摩木)*11 to the altar and before those observing realized it the fire was blazing, sending sparks and smoke past the covered image of Kannon and into the rafters. The orange flames reflected in the gold-colored trim of the altar and Kannon’s enclosure. The observers sat, mesmerized by the fire, the offering of sticks and incense, oil and flowers, and the sound of chanting accompanied by the drum’s beat.12

It is the interactions between the physical components—location, objects, and actions—and meanings of the *goma* ritual which increases its perceived efficacy, much like in good No theater, where sets, fire light, costumes, and the actors’ skill combine with a meaningful script to draw the audience into the play.13 The ritual took place inside a hall dimly lit by candles and electric lights, which served to focus attention on the fire. The altar and hearth were on a slightly raised dais where laypeople are not allowed; this use of sacred or purified ritual space separated the priests from the observers.

Okazawa’s use of mudras, ritual implements, and chants have specialized meanings for Shingon priests, but are indecipherable to the petitioners. The esoteric nature of these actions serves to separate those who can perform the ritual from those who cannot. His appearance of competence in performing these actions strengthened his perceived ability to communicate with the deity and empower talismans. The mantras chanted, as Japanized pronunciations of Sanskrit, sounded like Japanese yet had no inherent meaning to the uninitiated: they were signifiers not confined to any single

---

*11 Petitioners write their desires on the *gomagi* which are then burnt on the fire. Temples explain the reason for doing this differently: the inscribed *gomagi* is burnt as a means to get practical benefits, or it is a way to remove obstacles or desires and then get practical benefits or enlightenment.

*12 See (Payne 1991) for more on the *goma*.

*13 Here I am drawing on Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd’s concept of physical, meaning, and virtual space in ritual and art. (Williams and Boyd 1993, 15-16, 25).
The chants seem to have the potential to signify and communicate with what is outside normal human cognition because their meaning lies outside the realm of ordinary language. Also, because of their lack of inherent meaning, the observer is drawn instead to the sound of the chants – the power of which comes from Okazawa’s voice. This power was intensified by the addition of drumbeats.

Some things Okazawa chanted, however, were comprehensible. More than halfway through the ritual, he listed the benefits being requested of Kannon through the ritual. He did not break the rhythm of his earlier chants as he requested safety for the area before resuming his Japanized Sanskrit.

The central element of the ritual is the fire. The fire of the goma began almost imperceptibly, yet quickly became a crackling pillar of flames which seemed to grow and shrink with the volume of the priests’ chanting. Many temples explain that through the goma fire, passions and impediments are destroyed and wishes can be created. The fire of the goma is a means of communication, through which offerings are transmitted and talismans infused with divine power.

After the ritual offerings were made into the fire, Okazawa took three goma talismans (goma fuda) from a stack of around fifteen talismans. Holding them in his right hand like a folding fan, he waved them in the flames three times; he repeated this action until he had waved all of the talismans in the flames. By waving the talismans

---

14 (Williams and Boyd 1993, 43)
15 (Williams and Boyd 1993, 43)
16 (Oyamadera n.d.) and (Myōōji n.d.) are examples of this.
in the fire Okazawa placed the spirit of Hase Kannon into each talisman. Even though the fire was still consuming its offerings, Okazawa stood, repeated his three knee-bows, and then began distributing the talismans amongst the representatives. Each received a foot-long talisman with the Sanskrit Siddham character for the Eleven-headed Kannon, “ka,” at the top, followed by “Goma offering: preventing disasters, removing dangers. Prayers for ease and satisfaction” written in Japanese. Around the wooden talisman a paper cover had been wrapped, which was held on with a red and white ornamental wire. On the paper cover was written in orange characters the neighborhood name and the words “area safety” (chiiki anzen 地域安全).

Talismans are usually intended for the protection or fortune of a building and its occupants, and they are placed in the Buddhist altar (butsudan 仏壇) or Shinto shelf (kamidana 神棚) in the petitioners’ homes. The talismans the representatives received, which were for the protection of the entire neighborhood, would be placed in the office of their

---

17 For more on divided spirits in talismans and amulets, see (Reader and Tanabe, Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan 1998, 153, 194). In the Tendai goma ritual the divided spirit is placed in the talismans by waving the wand and water in the direction of the talismans.
18 The talismans say: Hōshū gomaku shōsai joyaku nyoi marzoku kiyū 奉修護摩供消災除厄如意滿足祈願.
community centers. As one of the men told me, the group comes to the temple twice a year, on New Year’s and August ninth, to receive new talismans.

After the men accepted their talismans they filed out of the hall. Some headed down the stairs to the courtyard, and others moved towards the front veranda. I gazed into the now empty Kannon Hall at the source of the divine power which had drawn us there that night. Even though it was her special karmic day, Kannon’s statue remained enclosed in the ornately designed black wooden case with gold-colored trim which towered almost to the rafters at the head of the hall. Her statue at Hase temple is a secret image (*hibutsu* 秘仏).*²⁰ There are a number of possible reasons statues are hidden: enclosing a statue raises its esteem, it is a way to protect the statue, it might be because of reasons related to esoteric Buddhism, it could show Shintō influences, and it may be believed to increase the statues’ power because containing power within a vessel causes it to develop and intensify.²¹

* * * * *

Movement near the bell tower signaled that the next act of the festival was about to begin. I turned from Kannon and quickly walked down the stairs and across the courtyard. I arrived in time to see two young men wearing white headbands, white t-shirts, navy blue work bibs, blue shorts, and sneakers, arrive at the top of the

---

²⁰ Because I have seen pictures of the statue, it is not a *zettai hibutsu*, an image never shown. I do not know, however, how often it is displayed to the public.
²¹ (Horton 2007, 166-173), (Rugola 1985, 158)
steps (Figure 7). They were twirling ropes with flaming torches at the ends (hinawa 火縄), and with shouts of “Watch out!” and “Back up!” they cleared a path through the crowd, assisted by a few others in volunteer police and firefighter uniforms. Following this path was a group of around fifty men carrying a long, decorated pole.

The men carrying the pole were dressed similarly to the torch spinners. They climbed the stairs with surprising speed, considering the difficulty of the stairs, the width of the pole, and the number of pole bearers (Figure 8). At the widest horizontal spars of the pole they ran six abreast, men on the outside brushing against the plants and low tree limbs which bordered the stairs. Any misstep would have tripped up the whole group, yet all fifty seemed to run as one entity, even as they crested the stairs with the thirty-five foot long pole. At the top of the steps the men turned left, went around the left side of the bell tower, through the courtyard, and to the front right side of the stone retaining wall of the Kannon Hall. They set the pole down there and began preparing it by lighting and attaching thirty-three red, green, and yellow lanterns.

---

22 Photo courtesy of Kuroda Kazuyo.
23 Photo courtesy of Kuroda Kazuyo.
This pole had begun as five separate poles which were washed in a stream near Jōshinji temple 淨信寺 by a group of local children that morning. From the afternoon a group of parishioners at the Yamazaki Neighborhood Community Center attached the four shorter poles — ranging from less than five feet to over twelve feet in length — to the thirty-five-foot-long pole using handmade rope. They connected the tip of the long pole to the tips of the now perpendicular poles with rope, after which they tied the leftover rope to the long pole. The structure is said to resemble a lotus leaf, with the poles as veins and the outside rope as the edge of the leaf. To this outside rope the group attached bamboo leaves (sasa 箔), and then tied colored strips of paper (tanzaku 紙帖) to the leaves. The group which had cut the papers had also written on them the wishes of the people as well as the poem: “The Dharma Rain which is said and heard falls in the hour of the boar [9-11 PM] on the ninth day of the seventh month [of the lunar calendar].” The bamboo leaves and papers attached to the outside rope are decorations used in the Star Lovers’ Festival (Tanabata Matsuri 七夕祭り), celebrated throughout Japan in either July or August, but which is held in Nagano from August seventh.

When the preparations were completed the group raised the pole to vertical while shouting “IYA-, IYA-, IYA!” After this they had a small party, drew lots for roles, and

---

24 I was not able to see the preparations for the festival. They are based on (Okazawa Keichō 2007); (Naganoken minzoku no kai 1988); (Shibata Yoshio n.d.).

25 (Okazawa Keichō 2007)

26 The poem reads: “Tsutaekiku onori no ame wa Fumizuki no kokonoka no yūbe I no koku nizo furu” [伝へきく御法の雨は文月の九日の夕べ宴の刻にそ降る] in Japanese. (Naganoken minzoku no kai 1988, 302). The Dharma Rain refers to a section of the Lotus Sutra in which the Buddha claims to expound the teaching to all in ways that are useful to each, much like rain falls uniformly, yet nourishes different plants in the way that is most effective for each. (Watson 2000)

27 The Tanabata originated as a Chinese folk celebration of the yearly meeting of the lovers the Herdsman (the star Altair) and the Weaver (Vega). In Japan this combined with the tale of Tanabatatsune, a weaver who meets her lover kami once a year. In Tanabata celebrations, people write their wishes on colored strips of paper, then tie them to green bamboo stalks. In some areas people light lanterns, have large scale festivals, or parades. (Yumiyama 2007)
rested until nine o’clock when they began carrying the pole the two kilometers from the Yamazaki Community Center to Hase Temple.

* * * * *

A group of children, dressed in the same manner as the pole carriers, followed the pole up the steps. These forty to fifty children, the oldest around twelve years old, may have been the same children who had washed the poles earlier in the day. Leading the children were a few mothers and grandfathers. The inclusion of children is a way of passing on the tradition of a locally important festival to a younger generation.

A group of middle-aged men, with headbands and blue and white happi coats with the character “sai” or “matsuri” for festival (祭) on the back, followed the children up the steep steps (Figure 9).28 Some of these men, who came from the Hase Neighborhood, were playing small flutes or drums while others carried a portable wooden shrine (mikoshi 神輿 or 御輿) which had been decorated with bamboo leaves and lanterns. On the back of the shrine, which had come from the Lower Hase Shrine (Hasejinja shimosha 長谷神社下社), was a small drum.29 These men followed the path of the pole except they went to the front, left side of the Kannon Hall’s retaining wall.

Figure 9: The mikoshi arrives

28 Photo courtesy of Kuroda Kazuyo.
29 Hase Shrine, listed as Nagatani Shrine (based on another reading for the characters 長谷), is one of 48 shrines – listed among the 41 minor shrines – in Shinano Province to be listed in the tenth-century Engishiki. (Bock 1972, 144).
They set the shrine down and began preparing for the dance (*kagura* 神楽 or *shishimai* 獅子舞). Two men carefully removed the red and black lacquered lion mask (*shishi* 獅子) and blue and white cape. These had been placed inside the *mikoshi*, where the *shintai* is normally placed. This suggests that the lion mask serves as the *shintai*, and that the dancers became part of the *kami’s* manifestation.\(^{30}\)

While these preparations were being carried out, the musicians continued to play, with the addition of drums, and some representatives placed seven white paper lanterns – four of which said “Hase,” and three of which said “The society for the preservation of the great sacred dance” – in front of the retaining wall.\(^{31}\) The young men around the pole finished attaching the red, green, and yellow lanterns. Two men purposefully walked away from the pole holding ropes.

---

\(^{30}\) It is common that the mask would be the *shintai* in Shishi dances. [Takayama Shigeru 1999, 284].

\(^{31}\) The lanterns said 長谷 and *Daikagura hozon kai* 大神楽保存会 respectively.
One walked between the bell tower and the main hall of the temple and the other walked up the stairs next to the Kannon Hall.

With a pull and push the young men began to raise the pole while three or four men secured the base to keep it in place (Figure 10).\textsuperscript{32} The progress of the pole slowed as they pushed it over their heads, but the ropes attached to the top were pulled taut, men moved closer to the base to push, and others moved to the sides to guide it in its course. Spectators joined the participants in shouting encouragement. Cameras flashed as the pole was raised and stabilized to the accompaniment of the flutes and drums. The colored paper strips spun and fluttered in the breeze. Ten or fifteen men remained at the base of the pole, supporting it for a time. The pole, which was almost as tall as the Kannon Hall, towered over the spectators.

The lanterns seemed to make an arrow pointing to the sky, with twelve lanterns on the lowest horizontal pole, ten on the next, six and four on the highest poles, and a lone lantern shining from the tip of the vertical pole (Figure 11).\textsuperscript{33} These thirty-three lanterns represent the thirty-three forms Kannon is said to take to save humans, as stated

\textsuperscript{32} Photo courtesy of Kuroda Kazuyo.
\textsuperscript{33} Photo courtesy of Kuroda Kazuyo.
in the Lotus Sutra. They also express the gratitude of the people for the rain Kannon has provided that year. This annual tradition of carrying thirty-three lanterns to Hase Temple is explained in a local legend which states that the people of Yamazaki carried one lantern per household to the temple to express their thanks to Kannon for providing relief from the harsh drought of that year. In the legend there were exactly thirty-three households in the area.

A legend recorded in the The Records of Sarashina County (Sarashinagunshi) states that the locals have performed this festival since “the great drought a long time ago.” The Records suggest that the festival was begun in the middle of the Genroku era (1688-1704). The first mention of the Sanjosa in a historical document, however, comes from the Kōka sannen Shiozaki ikken tsuzuri ni 弘化三年塩崎一件綴二 from 1846, which states that the festival had been carried out “since long ago.” Local historian Shibata Yoshio also discusses two other links to the Sanjosa, the first from 1729, and the second from the early 1800s, but unfortunately he was unable to provide reliable sources for either. Although it is difficult to date exactly, the festival had probably taken form by at least the middle of the nineteenth century.

Immediately after the pole was vertical, the two men to the left of the Kannon Hall began to perform the lion dance facing the Kannon Hall. Both men worked in

---

34 See (Yū 2001, 45-47) for more on Kannon’s thirty-three forms, particularly as it derives from the Vedic depiction of the thirty-three gods of heaven.
35 (Shibata Yoshio n.d., 41).
36 (Shibata Yoshio n.d., 41).
37 It appears that there might be an error in Shibata’s naming of the text. There should be a number of folios following the number 2 in the title. Michel Mohr, personal communication.
38 The text, which is quoted in (Shibata Yoshio n.d., 41), states 「雨乞立願にて、古来より山崎三十三、同様の趣操承り候」.
39 (Shibata Yoshio n.d., 41).
unison – one man in the front moving the mask, and the other behind him controlling the rear of the lion. At times the head of the lion shook as it reared up; other times it seemed to bow to Kannon, its head lowered and back raised. Halfway through the dance they paused as the man in the rear came out from under the costume. He twisted the cape of the costume so it wouldn’t hinder the man in the front who was assisted in attaching the mask to his face by a third man. The much shorter lion resumed his dance, but this time in his right hand he held a wand with white paper streamers (gohei 御幣) which are used in Shintō purification rituals. He shook the wand as he moved powerfully with the flutes, drumbeats, and singing. The men singing enumerated requests for protection of the area from disease, disaster, and requests for a good harvest.

Lion dancing is one of the main categories of kagura in Japan. It is said to have come from the Asian Continent as a masked performance or court dance, and spread among commoners in the medieval periods. There are many types of shishi, but the two-person and single-person types are the most common. Just as there are many types, shishi dancing has many functions. Because the shishi can stand for all wild animals, it

---

[40] [Yonei Teruyoshi 1999].
can be used in pacifying the spirits of wild animals killed in a hunt.\(^\text{41}\) It can also ward off evil, be a prayer for the preservation of farmland, thanks for a harvest, entertainment for the deities, or a request for rain.\(^\text{42}\) Because the Sanjosan is a rain festival, it is easy to assume that the dance is being performed for rainmaking purposes; however, as the requests listed earlier show, this dance was also performed to request area safety.

* * * * *

After the man finished the lion dance, he removed the mask – which was returned to the mikoshi – and moved to the side of the courtyard. The spectators shifted their focus back to the pole as the men holding the stabilizing ropes slowly began to move closer to it. The torch spinners took this as their cue and started to clear a path around the bell tower to the stairs.

The lanterns, which swayed with the movement of the pole and the breeze, are connected with the bounty of the harvest. It is said that the number of lanterns which remain lighted while the pole is standing foretells the bounty of that year’s harvest; as

\(^{41}\) Yajūnok’yō 野歯の供養. [Yonei Teruyoshi 1999].

\(^{42}\) [Yonei Teruyoshi 1999]
more than half of them remained lighted throughout the dance, the harvest this year will
be fair. 43

When the two men reached the pole, they joined the others supporting its base.
They gently pushed the pole
towards the courtyard. The
pole, suddenly bereft of its
support, seemed to hang in
the air like a cut tree before it
began picking up speed
(Figure 13). 44 The strips of
paper fluttered like leaves as
the pole completed its arch of
descent and crashed into the
ground. Immediately onlookers – who had passively observed until this moment –
rushed in and tried to gather pieces of the lanterns, which are believed to grant the
receiver good health or household safety if placed on the family’s kamidana or good
harvest if placed near the family field. 45 In the same instant, the young men who carried
the pole grabbed it and rushed to the stairs.

The raising and toppling of the pole resembles the Shugendo pine pillar rite
(hashiramatsu 柱松) which was performed at sites all over Japan, including several close

43 (Shibata Yoshio n.d., 41). (Kazama Futoshi 2007)
44 Photo courtesy of Katagiri Yoshie.
45 (Shibata Yoshio n.d., 41). (Kazama Futoshi 2007)
to the Shiozaki area.\textsuperscript{46} In this ritual, which was often performed during Obon or Tanabata, participants would construct at least one pillar of brushwood twice the height of a person with gohei and sakaki branches on top. The participants, often Yamabushi, would climb the pillar to light the gohei, cut them off with one swipe of a sword, jump off the pillar, and then knock it down. Wakamori Tarō, a Shugendō specialist who examined the hashiramatsu, suggested that raising the pillar invited a deity to enter it and that deity was sent off when the participants knocked the pillar over.\textsuperscript{47} The pillar’s role as a shintai became lost or downplayed as the years passed, however, and the rite soon became a way for Yamabushi to display the powers they attained through their summer austerities, burn bad karma, pacify demonic spirits, or divine the bounty of that year’s harvest.\textsuperscript{48} The Sanjosan pole, which is set up during Tanabata, lighted, knocked down, and used to divine the bounty of the harvest for that year, is in many ways similar to the hashiramatsu. This suggests that it could have originally been a rite performed by local Yamabushi or copied from a hashiramatsu rite by the villagers. Without further research, however, it is impossible to determine exactly how these similarities arose and whether or not Sanjosan developed out of the hashiramatsu.

While previously the pole of the Sanjosan may have been a shintai, its current function is slightly different, and can be determined by examining its various parts.\textsuperscript{49} As

\textsuperscript{46} Some of these areas include Togakushi and Iiyama 羽山. It is performed in only a few sites now.
\textsuperscript{47} (Wakamori 1989, 191).
\textsuperscript{48} (Wakamori 1989, 181-182, 184, 192).
\textsuperscript{49} It is tempting to draw connections between the pole and the \textit{axis mundi} described by Mircea Eliade. Some scholars, particularly Hitoshi Miyake (Hitoshi 2001, 94-96, 139-141), have stated that some pillars in Shugendō rituals function as \textit{axes mundi}. In these cases it is clear from the mythology of the ritual that the pillar does act as a connection between heaven, hell, and the earth. As Jonathan Z. Smith (Smith 1987, 17) states, declarations that something functions as a center must be established with each new endeavor, rather than assuming a priori that a pole or pillar is an axis mundi, it is better to begin with the assumption that it
seen in the legend of the *Sanjosan*, the lanterns function to make concrete the gratitude of
the community to Kannon for the good weather that year. The lanterns connect the
modern community to the time of that drought of “long ago” when there were thirty-three
households. They also refer to Kannon herself, and the thirty-three forms she takes to
save sentient beings. The *tanzaku* strips of paper on the outside of the pole communicate
the wishes of the people to Kannon, as well as make those wishes concrete and visible to
the other members of the community. Thus the pole becomes a tangible manifestation of
the gratitude and wishes of the participants, while simultaneously representing the
community and Kannon.

* * * * *

After the pole was carried
away, most of the crowd began
dispersing happily into the night,
leaving behind the magic of the
festival and returning to their homes
or after-parties. The festival,
however, was not over. The
musicians continued to play their
flutes as four men picked up the
portable shrine and carried it up stairs to the left of the Kannon Hall, stopping in a small
clearing in front of the Upper Hase Shrine. There they performed the lion dance facing
the Upper Shrine. They were watched in their performance by over thirty people, mostly

is not and prove that it is. I believe that in the case of the *Sanjosan*, the pole does not act as a center or a
connection between this and other worlds.
family and friends, and by seven neighborhood representatives, their silhouettes visible in the dim light, as they sat behind their lanterns on the porch of the Upper Shrine.

The Upper Shrine is located on the grounds of Hase Temple. This proximity suggests that Hase Shrine, like many other shrines before the separation of kami and buddhas in the early years after the Meiji Restoration, was controlled by the priests of a nearby esoteric Buddhist temple—in this case, Hase Temple. The deity enshrined at the shrine is Hasshō Daijin 八誓大神, the deity which protects the surrounding area, Sarashina Province. Hasshō Daijin is the kami of the mountain behind the shrine. The first evidence of this is that the mountain, Hase 長谷, and the old name for Hasshō, “Hase” 八誓, are homophones. Another hint is in the Shrine’s architecture: it is a simple thatched roof supported by wooden poles with a porch underneath. This style, in which there is no sacred enclosure (honden 本殿), is used when the object of veneration or the shintai — sometimes a mountain or lake — lies behind the shrine. This style is in contrast to the Lower Shrine, which has an enclosed shrine building with the shintai enshrined inside. The deities at the Lower Shrine are Kotoshironushi no kami 事代主神 and Tateminakata no kami 軍御名方神, both from the Suwa Grand Shrines in central Nagano Prefecture.

50 (Hardacre 2002).
51 Hasshō Daijin is also the grandson of Yaimimi no mikoto 八井耳命. (Shinshū kyōdōshi kenkyūkai 1962, 103-104).
52 (Shikinaisha kenkyūkai, 式內社研究会 1986, 310). Hasshō Daijin was at one point in time called the Hase Gongen, though I have been unable to find more information about this matter.
53 (Kuroda Ryūji 1999, 173).
54 (Shinshū kyōdōshi kenkyūkai 1962, 104); (Shikinaisha kenkyūkai, 式內社研究会 1986, 310-311). The Lower Shrine was called the Area Protector Shrine Suwa Great Deities (Ubusunagami Suwa ōnikotokami 坊主神護防大命神). Both shrines together declared their names to be Hase Jinja after receiving approval to do so from the Yoshida house on February 21, 1836 (天保 7.1.5).
After the lion finished its performance for the small crowd at the Upper Shrine, the group carried the portable shrine across the temple courtyard to the front of the temple residence. The now empty grounds -- the stage for the festival -- were still lighted by the large lights. The crowd and family members of the performers had gone to after-parties or their homes. The performers had one final dance that night, however; they danced in front of Okazawa-san, his family, and several of the local representatives. The musicians began to play in front of the residence’s large sliding doors, which were open to the night, while the dancers performed inside. When the head dancer finished and removed the mask, Okazawa brought him and the other performers glasses of water in gratitude for their hard work. They chatted for a few minutes, and then the performers returned the mask and cape to the portable shrine and carried it down the stairs. They placed the mikoshi on the bed of a waiting mini-truck, and drove it back to the Lower Shrine. Okazawa, after talking with me for a few minutes, drove with a few representatives to an after party.

The festival was over -- I climbed down the still-treacherous stairs, crossed over the bridge, and returned to my mundane world.

Postscript: Questions and Further Thoughts

* Shinbutsu bunri

The festival’s combination of Buddhist, Shintō, folk, and possibly Shugendō practices is striking. These elements were freely combined in shrines and temples throughout Japan until the separation of kami and buddhas in the early years of the Meiji
Period. The effects of this separation can be seen at Hase Temple and Shrines, which, judging from their proximity, were most likely connected before the Restoration but are now separate entities. Although I have found no historical description for comparison, the combination of elements from these separate traditions in the contemporary Sanjosan suggests one of two things depending upon when these elements were added. 1) If these elements have not always been a part of the festival, or were removed and recently restored, perhaps the Sanjosan is similar to other shrines and temples in the contemporary period which have begun reintroducing elements of other traditions to their festivals. 2) If these have continuously been a part of the festival since its inception (i.e. before the Restoration), this may suggest that although the local authorities enforced the edict to separate shrines from temples, they overlooked or were not interested in enforcing the division of combinatory elements in festivals, particularly in festivals which were not sponsored by temples or shrines but by local communities. If this was the case, it points to the need to reexamine the effects of shinbutsu bunri, especially on festivals and rituals, and also to determine if this was the result of a regional interpretation of the separation of kami from buddhas peculiar to the Zenkō-ji plain.

Ritual Logic and Community

As in the local practices in the previous chapter, the various elements present in the Sanjosan were not haphazardly combined. Rather, they were probably combined with a goal in mind, and organized according to a type of ritual logic. By analyzing the

55 In particular, there were two declarations separating the kami and buddhas. The first, on 9 April 1868, declared that no combinatory priests could serve at shrines. The second, on 20 April of that year, made it illegal to call kami by the title gongen, outlawed the enshrining of Buddhist deities in shrines. (Thal 2005, 131).
56 Unfortunately, I have not been able to determine when they were added.
57 (Dolce 2007)
parts of the festival, we can determine their functions within the festival and moreover, the goal of the whole. First, the goma is performed as a way to transmit the wishes and offerings of the community to Kannon via its representatives and priests. It also is a way to refresh and distribute the blessings and protection of Kannon— in the form of talismans— given to the community during New Year’s and the Sanjosan celebrations. The pole, as discussed earlier, communicates wishes and gratitude to Kannon. Additionally, the poem written on the tanzaku paper strips points to the falling of the Dharma Rain, or the spreading of Kannon’s benevolence to all who attend the festival. The shishi dance is a way of purifying the area, but it also transmits requests for a good harvest and protection from illness to the protectors of the community, Kannon and the Hasshō mountain deity. These elements all combine in a way that suggests the goal of the festival is the renewal of the protection of the community by Kannon and Hasshō.

Renewal of the community has become an important part of the festival, especially with changes in the modern and contemporary periods. As mentioned in the Introduction, rain prayers were, of necessity, a community affair. Every household was expected to participate in and pay for the rituals which would benefit the whole community. There were three reasons for this requirement. First, the prayers and rituals become more energetic, sincere, and insistent the more people were involved; the rituals therefore were thought to become more effective. Second, many prayers were made to the village deity which watched over all members of the community. It was thought that the absence of even one member of the village might convince the deity that the problem was not very serious. Finally, households whose members did not wholeheartedly participate in the rituals risked losing the human aide given by the community. For
example, the household might be thrown out of farming associations, it might lose
funerary assistance from other community members, or volunteer firefighters might
overlook the house and protect others if a fire blazed in that area. For these reasons, all
able-bodied members of the community participated in rain prayers which occurred
within the community.

The community needed rain and sunshine in the appropriate amounts and times to
produce a good harvest which insured the successful continuation of the community.

Rather than rely on luck, however, the community performed rain prayers as an
additional step in this cycle to encourage various deities to insure agreeable weather.

---

58 (Bownas 1963, 116-117).
59 As mentioned earlier, pilgrimages to cultic sites for rain prayers were done by one or more
representatives from the community.
These prayers and rituals did more than reassure the community members that they had done everything physically and spiritually necessary for their survival. They also – by requiring that all members be involved – defined and reinforced community membership.

All households are also required to participate in rain-thanking festivals like the *Sanjosan*. This is clearly seen in its legend where members from the thirty-three households in Shiozaki carried a lantern for each household to the temple in thanks. It is also present in the contemporary version, though there have been several changes in modern times which have caused a reinterpretation of this ritual requirement. With the growth of the Nagano area, more families have moved to the Shiozaki area, which makes it impractical to require that all families participate in the festival. Additionally, farming is no longer the principal means of support for a large number of the families, making participation in the festival somewhat of a novelty rather than a necessity. By including the elected neighborhood representatives in the festival, organizers have gotten around this requirement.

Rain prayers, rituals, and festivals, especially cyclical ones, have remained important through the last hundred years for a number of reasons. First, rain is still very important to farming, even if the percentage of farmers has declined. Second, the festivals, like other regional activities or crafts, have been viewed or designated important cultural heritage; the *Sanjosan* is no exception. Third, the prayers, rituals, and festivals have been adapted to address the contemporary needs of the community. In some cases, they occupy a place of pride as a unique local practice; they are a way to define the

---

60 In particular, there are now 128 households in the Yamazaki Neighborhood. (Kobayashi Maiko 2007)
61 These changes have occurred in many farming areas throughout Japan which are located close to urban centers. For more on this, see (Yoshiaki 2003, 25-36)
community against others without festivals, or those with differing festivals. As an extension of this, the festivals are used to promote the area – and tourism.\(^\text{62}\) The Sanjosan is used in this manner, but it is also a way to draw the community together – part-time farmers with office workers, people who have lived in the area for generations with newcomers. Organizers of the festival actively encourage the participation of children as a way to keep the festival continuing successfully.\(^\text{63}\) For community members the night of the Sanjosan is a night to see their community in action. As one woman stated, "People I know danced in the shishi, my children’s friends walked to the festival [with the pole], and the neighborhood people played an active role. It was a really fun evening."\(^\text{64}\) The festival brings the community together, acting in a centripetal manner, counteracting the centrifugal pressures of contemporary suburban life.

The Sanjosan brings the community together, but it also preserves the structures present in that community and Japanese society. This can be seen in the division of roles based upon age and gender: with children of both sexes under the age of fifteen washing the pole and accompanying it to the temple; young men from fifteen to thirty-five carrying it; people older than thirty-six preparing the pole, performing the lion dance and accompanying it; and older men acting as the representatives.\(^\text{65}\) Women over the age of fifteen have set roles in preparing the festival, its parties, and in looking after children – both those involved in the festival, and those who are not.

\(^{62}\) For more on the tension between preserving unique local culture and promoting tourism, see (Hashimoto 2003).
\(^{63}\) (Kazama Futoshi 2007)
\(^{64}\) (Anonymous 2007)
\(^{65}\) (Yajima Noriyuki 1998)
In this chapter we have witnessed how one community puts together and carries out a rain festival, from the morning preparations to the last beat of the drum. We have examined how the *goma*, dances, and lanterns form a composite to thank protector deities for rain and renew the protection they offer the community, while renewing the community itself. Additionally, through the *Sanjosan* we could glimpse the reasons communities like Shiozaki continue to light the lanterns, beat the drums, or travel to the sites that are parts of their annual rain festivals.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

In the previous chapters we traveled from northern Nagano’s high peaks, down to the Zenkōji Plain, past rivers, temples, and shrines, before we finally joined a community in its annual rain-thanking festival. In our travels we have learned much about rain practices and were able to discern several historical and theoretical insights which may inform future studies. In this chapter I expand upon five of these ideas which concern regional studies of ritual and practices, pilgrimage theory, the separation of kami and buddhas, thanking practices, and rain practices.

First, this study points to the usefulness of examining religious practices in a regional context. By exploring rain practices within the Zenkōji Plain, I delineated the connections between communities, regional cultic sites, landscapes, and the elements within the practices. This demonstrates that through regional investigations, the logic of the composition of practices can be elucidated. I do not mean to imply, however, that we are able to determine exactly why petitioners perform practices in the manner that they do. Rather, I mean that by examining the landscape (vista) and the artist’s palette, we are given clues as to why the completed painting looks like it does. In other words, by examining the physical and legendary landscapes surrounding a practice we are given clues as to why an element might have become part of the practice while others were left out.

---

1 (Kobayashi Keiichirō, Issa no amagoi no ku 一茶の雨乞いの句 1995)
This examination also suggests a point of departure for the development of new pilgrimage theories. The communal nature of rain pilgrimage in particular challenges previous understandings of pilgrimage in two ways. First, rain pilgrimage is performed for the sake of the community which means the goal was not simply arrival at the site, but the production (or halting) of rain in the pilgrims’ communities. Because of this the return trip, as well as what occurs at the site, becomes more important than the trip to a site in some cases. Further examination of pilgrimage to, and more importantly from, cultic rain sites can provide a counterpoint to the previous scholarly and secular works which emphasize pilgrims, sites, and the journey to a site.

Additionally, the communal nature of rain pilgrimage alters Turnerian concepts of pilgrimage which center on liminality – being between states and outside of social structures – and communitas – the sense of community between pilgrims generated in liminal states.² If all or part of a community makes a pilgrimage to and from a cultic site, then presumably the structures inherent in the community will remain present even during the pilgrimage. This suggests that while communitas is part of rain pilgrimages, it develops within or is already a part of the social structures of the community, not in their absence.³ Therefore new concepts regarding pilgrimage, particularly communal ones, need to be developed. Communal pilgrimages, even cases of pilgrimage by confraternities, have been relatively understudied. Also, when pilgrimage by groups has been studied the authors examine the individual aspects of the pilgrimage, rather than the

² (Turner and Turner 1978, 249-250)
³ This is the opposite of what Karen Smyers observed during her travels to Fushimi Inari with confraternities (Smyers, Inari Pilgrimage: Following One's Path on the Mountain 1997, 449).
communal ones.\textsuperscript{4} For theoretical implications alone, the concept of communal pilgrimages deserves to be studied in more depth and in other locations.\textsuperscript{5}

Next, rain practices have demonstrated the need to examine the effects of \textit{shinbutsu bunri} on local religious practices. In some cases, such as the Sanjosan, practices may not have changed much after the Restoration, even though they might combine many elements from various traditions. If this is true, the case of the Sanjosan shows that because these elements may have remained intact in the festival through the Restoration \textit{shinbutsu bunri} did not destroy or alter all local practices, at least in northern Nagano.

In other cases, such as Mt. Hijiri, previously combined sites were separated by \textit{shinbutsu bunri}, altering, but not destroying, rain practices. The separation of these sites following the Restoration meant that petitioners had to make a choice between rituals performed at Kōbuji Temple or Hijiri Shrine, while previously similar rituals may have been performed by combinatory priests at Kōbuji. On the other hand, the practices at Mt. Hijiri’s Taneike have probably remained relatively unchanged. These examples demonstrate the need to examine the effects of \textit{shinbutsu bunri} on religious practices. This will enable scholars to have a more nuanced understanding of the effects of early Meiji Period policies towards religious traditions and practices.

Fourth, the examination of rain-thanking practices suggests the need for a more holistic examination of rituals. Although some studies examine the stages following religious practices, many do not mention thanks given for boons received, while others

\textsuperscript{4} (Reader 2005); (Smyers, Inari Pilgrimage: Following One’s Path on the Mountain 1997)
\textsuperscript{5} Karen Smyers examines pilgrimage to Fushimi Inari by confraternities (Smyers, Inari Pilgrimage: Following One’s Path on the Mountain 1997).
simply state that the petitioners returned to give thanks. Perhaps one reason some scholars overlook this element of practice is that it is as variable as the petitioners who give thanks, and therefore harder to examine in the context of the main practice. Another reason could be that some communities themselves might downplay the importance of this action. However, for scholars to abbreviate or ignore this intriguing postscript to a practice is like downplaying the importance of the follow-through in many sports. As any coach will explain, following through is the most critical part of throwing or hitting a ball: it is the difference between a bunt and a line drive in baseball, for example. It is through thanking practices that petitioners express their desire to continue relationships with the temple, shrine, or deity. Furthermore, as these thanks often take the form of offerings such as casks of sake, banners, flags, lanterns, or carved stones, they make the relationship between the site and thanking petitioners concrete, and therefore analyzable.6 Additionally, as concrete objects on display at sites, the offerings alter the landscape and advertise the power of the site to all who visit.7

Finally, this journey has demonstrated the highly variable, localized nature of rain practices yet we have also discovered that the local landscapes limit practitioners’ choices. Rain practices are composites of various practices, yet that combination is also influenced by local landscapes. Ultimately these practices, which are still performed cyclically or as needed, remain meaningful to the communities that perform them, even in an age of weather satellites.

---

6 Duncan Williams has analyzed the stone markers left by pilgrimage confraternities at Daiyizan (D. R. Williams 2005, 68-69). Sarah ThaI has examined offerings of stone and metal monuments to Kotohira Shrine (Thal 2005)
7 (Reader 2005, 69-74)
Rainmaking is absurd, says the reed warbler. Issa Issa Culture 14 (1817)
Appendix: Geography and History of Nagano Prefecture

Nagano Prefecture, also called by its old names Shinshū 信州 and Shinano 信濃, is a landlocked prefecture in central Japan. Nagano, which lies to the northwest of Tokyo, is frequently called the roof of Japan because of its mountains: it has sixteen mountains over 10,000 feet, more than any other prefecture. It is also known for its natural environment, rural scenery, hot springs, hiking, and winter sports, all of which make Nagano a popular tourist destination. Tourism increased with the addition of highways and high speed trains built in preparation for the 1998 Winter Olympics and Paralympics held around Nagano City. Several religious sites draw pilgrims (and tourists) from all over Japan: Zenkō-ji 善光寺 in Nagano City, Mount Togakushi and its shrines in northern Nagano City, the Suwa Grand Shrines 須賀大社 in the center of the prefecture, and Ontake Mountain 御嶽山 (also 御岳) near the southwestern border of the prefecture are all popular destinations.

Archaeological evidence shows that humans have lived in the Nagano area for at least 35,000 years. Central Nagano, near Lake Suwa 須賀湖 had one of the largest communities during the Jōmon Period (roughly 11,000 BCE – 400 BCE), with some of the oldest statues in Japan excavated from this area. Rice cultivation was introduced to Japan around 2400 years ago, and it was brought to Nagano about two hundred years later. With rice cultivation the society appears to have became more stratified, and in the Kofun Period (~300 CE – ~600 CE) large keyhole-shaped tombs were built,

9 (Nagano Prefecture n.d.)
presumably for the rich or rulers. Tombs of this type, based on models extant on the Korean Peninsula, began to be built in the Zenkōji Plain in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. While some have postulated that this shows a connection with the peoples of the Yamato area, who had been building keyhole tombs for a century prior to this, others have suggested that this shows a more direct influence from the kingdoms of Korea, with immigrants from there arriving to the Zenkōji Plain directly, instead of traveling through Yamato.  

During the Asuka (552 – 645) and Nara (645 – 794) Periods, the rulers in Yamato began to consolidate their control, ostensibly exercising authority over the whole country by the Nara Period. The country was divided into sixty provinces, and Shinano was one of them. Shinano Province is mentioned in the Kojiki, Nihon Shoki, and the Man'yōshū; clothes made from Shinano linen from these periods have been preserved in Nara; and horses bred in the province were sent to nobles in the capital. Despite these connections, it is not clear how much control the central government actually had in the provinces.

In the Heian Period (794 – 1185), the system of land taxation based on continental models, was overtaken by shōen systems in which families, temples, or shrines usually located near the capital owned estates in the provinces. These estates were managed locally; the shōen in Shinano came to be managed by wealthy, powerful clans. Many of these clans were supporters of the Taira family in the late Heian Period, but one, headed by Kiso Yoshinaka 平 潟仲 (1154 – 1184), supported Minamoto Yoritomo 源 頼朝 (1147 – 1199). Yoshinaka developed a large following in Shinano,

---

10 (McCallum 1994, 18)  
11 (McCallum 1994, 21); (Nagano Prefecture n.d.)  
12 (McCallum 1994, 21)
and forces led by him took control of the capital in 1183. Yoritomo, fearing the power Yoshinaka had developed, killed him in 1184. When Yoritomo took control of the country in 1185, he sought to maintain direct supervision over Shinano because it had been home to supporters of the Taira and Yoshinaka. In addition to placing the province under the direct control of the bakufu and sending loyal warriors there to act as guardians, Yoritomo became a patron of the largest religious sites in the province, the Suwa Grand Shrines and Zenkōji Temple.\(^\text{13}\)

The Hōjō clan 北条氏 acted as the bakufu’s agent in Shinano. When the Kamakura bakufu fell in 1333, the Hōjō remained in control of the province, keeping many supporters. Around this time Ashikaga Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305 – 1358) was attempting to create a new bakufu. He was opposed by the Hōjō, whom he eventually defeated. Takauji sent the loyal Ogasawara clan 小笠原氏 to control Shinano Province, which it did for several years marked by frequent revolts and infighting.\(^\text{14}\)

Northern Shinano, under the control of local clans after the Ogasawara left the area in 1447, was the stage for several battles at the end of the Muromachi Period (1392 – 1573). These battles, fought at Kawanakajima 川中島 in Nagano City, were between two of the most powerful warlords of the time, Takeda Shingen 武田信玄 (1521 – 1573) and Uesugi Kenshin 上杉謙信 (1530 – 1578). These battles occupied Takeda and Uesugi, allowing Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534 – 1582) to amass forces relatively

\(^{13}\) (McCallum 1994, 64-65)  
\(^{14}\) (McCallum 1994, 155-159)
unchecked. Takeda eventually won; however, after his death his forces were defeated by Oda and Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542 – 1616) in 1575.

The Tokugawa Period (1600 [or 1603] – 1867) was characterized by stringent government controls, the growth of the merchant class, and a flourishing of the arts. The number of pilgrims to religious sites increased dramatically due to government restrictions on travel outside of one’s province unless on pilgrimage and an increase in devotion to popular deities. Shinano Province — with famous sites such as Togakushi, Ontake, Suwa, and Zenkōji — benefited from pilgrims’ patronage.

Following the Meiji Restoration (1868), Shinano was split into two prefectures which were later reunited and named Nagano Prefecture in 1876. One of Japan’s first international products was silk, and Nagano became the “silk thread kingdom” of Japan. Farmers raised silk worms in their attics, factories reeled the thread, and schools were built to teach sericulture. The silk industry and farmers involved in it were severely affected by the worldwide depression in 1929.

Following World War II, computer and precision-machinery industries have developed in Nagano. However, the prefecture is still largely rural, and agriculture remains a major part-time occupation: in 1990, farmers accounted for fourteen percent of Nagano Prefecture and roughly the same for the Zenkōji Plain and its surrounding

---

15 (McCallum 1994, 160-161). Zenkōji was burnt to the ground, and its treasures taken by Takeda and Uesugi. The former wound up with the temple’s main image of Amida, flanked by the bodhisattvas Seishi and Kannon. He took this to his headquarters in Kōfu where he built a new Zenkōji. After his death, however, the icon changed hands and locations six times over the next 43 years. With the fall of one owner, another, hoping to be associated with the powerful icon, took his place. This pattern continued until Toyotomi Hideyoshi returned the icon to Shinano shortly before his death in 1598. See (McCallum 1994, 160-166) for more details.

16 (Nagano Prefecture n.d.)

17 Emigration to Manchuria was heavily promoted in Nagano by the government, so Nagano became the prefecture with the highest number of emigrants. (Nagano Prefecture n.d.)
mountains, as opposed to roughly three percent for the entire country. Unfortunately, I do not have a percentage of those who farm part-time, though I suspect it is large. There are (currently) around 2.2 million people in the prefecture, Nagano City is the capital (~356,000 people), and other cities include Matsumoto, Ueda, and Iida.

---

18 The population (in 1990) for the Zenkōji Plain is 271,014, with 38,893 of those in farming, forestry, or fishery (the latter two make up a small percentage of the total). (Statistics Bureau, Management and Coordination Agency 総務庁統計局 1993, 102-104). This is, unfortunately, the latest year for which I was able to find statistics.
Bibliography


Anonymous, woman, interview by Nagano Cable Television. (August 9, 2007).


94


Kazama Futoshi 風間太, interview by Nagano Cable Television. President of the Sanjosan tōrō Patronage Society 三十三籠籠奉賛会会長 (August 9, 2007).


Kuroda Ryoji 黒田龍二. "Jinja kenchiku no rekishi to ruikei 神社建築の歴史と類型." In Shinto jiten 神道辞典, edited by Inoue Nobutaka 井上順孝, Okada Shōji 岡田

96


—. Recent Times.  


Okazawa Keichō 岡沢慶澄, interview by author. (August 9, 2007).


Snyder-Reinke, Jeffrey P. *Dry Spells: Rainmaking, Power, and the State in Late Imperial China*. Ph.D Diss.: The University of Michigan, 2006.


—. Introduction to Togakushi Shrines' Kagura 戸隠神社太々神楽のご紹介.


—. The Dragon in China and Japan. Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1913.


