**INTRODUCTION**

*The Ōyama Cult in Regional History*

In their *Handbook for Travellers in Japan* (1891), Basil Hall Chamberlain and William Benjamin Mason recommended Ōyama, a sacred mountain in central Kanagawa Prefecture, as a convenient tourist excursion from Yokohama, about 22 miles west of the port. From the 1860s, a number of Americans living in Yokohama began to visit the mountain to experience its natural beauty. Towering above the western edge of the Kantō plain, Ōyama had attracted countless visitors even before the arrival of Western-style alpine mountaineering. Chamberlain and Mason wrote:

> This celebrated mountain, about 4,000 ft. high, . . . is a favorite goal of pilgrims, who continue to be attracted to its shrine, although the old Buddhist objects of worship have here, as in so many other parts of the country, been replaced officially by comparatively obscure Shinto deities. . . . The people of the neighboring countryside often call the mountain by the name of Sekison-san.

From the late seventeenth century on, Ōyama flourished as a popular pilgrimage site dedicated to the esoteric Buddhist Wisdom King Fudō Myōō and the honji suijaku deity Sekison Daigongen, a local rock deity understood as an emanation of Fudō Myōō or of the bodhisattva Kan-non. Even in Chamberlain and Mason’s time, its strong Buddhist flavor was still palpable despite the official disassociation of kami and Buddhas in the early Meiji period (1868–1912). This is evident in the continued use of the honji suijaku name for the deity on its summit—Sekison—as a designation for the site as a whole.
In the study of Japanese religion, the early modern period was once regarded as a time when Confucianism and Nativism flourished and Buddhism became degenerated, but in recent years this image has changed. Following the lead of recent Japanese scholarship, some Western scholars have reevaluated the role that Buddhism played in early modern culture and society while others have traced the development of Shinto outside Nativist circles. As Herman Ooms notes, in addition to Neo-Confucianism the religious landscape of early modern Japan included “Shinto and Buddhism as well as eclectic and folk traditions.”

This religious pluralism, Ooms points out, presents a dilemma for the researchers when trying to select a subject for their studies that will be representative of early modern religion as a whole: does one select a “representative” tradition, does one choose a panoramic view of all traditions, or does one trace a theme across multiple traditions? While many researchers—including recent revisionist scholars—have chosen the first option of selecting a representative tradition, Ooms argues that this obscures the plurality of the religious landscape. Ooms’s suggestion not to single out one tradition as representative is helpful in conveying the rich religious diversity of the period, but his characterization of the early modern Japanese landscape might convey the impression that Shinto and Buddhism somehow existed as clearly distinct traditions even before the Meiji era. Given the highly combinatory nature of premodern Japanese religions, this still raises methodological problems.

Focus on a particular region or locality provides an alternative solution to this dilemma. Michel Foucault has noted that the nineteenth century was preoccupied with history whereas in the twentieth century, space became an important paradigm, leading to ideological debates between “pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space.” Edward Soja argues:

So unbudgeably [sic] hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life, a practical theoretical consciousness that sees the lifeworld of being creatively located not only in the making of history but also in the construction of human geographies, the social production of space and the restless formation and reformation of geographical landscapes: social being actively emplaced in space and time in an explicitly historical and geographical contextualization.
The parallel in the field of Japanese religions would be the juxtaposition of sectarian or tradition-based narratives, with narratives that focus on a particular region or site. In recent years, several scholarly works have appeared that are emplaced in specific local contexts. In her study of Japanese religion in the nineteenth century, Helen Hardacre, for example, chooses to examine a specific region—parts of the Musashi and Sagami Provinces—rather than a specific religious tradition. Alternatively, Nam-lin Hur discusses a specific site, the Buddhist temple Sensō-ji in Edo; and Sarah Thal closely analyzes the historical development of the cult of Mt. Konpira in Shikoku. Recognizing the importance of place over sectarian affiliation or tradition in Japan, Allan Grapard has argued eloquently that we need more studies focused on a specific institutional complex:

First, Japanese religiosity is grounded in specific sites at which beliefs and practices were combined and transmitted exclusively within specific lineages.

Second, Japanese religiosity is neither Shinto nor Buddhist nor sectarian but essentially combinative.

Third, those combinative systems, which evolved in specific sites, were indissolubly linked, in their genesis as in their evolution, to social and economic structures and practices as well as concepts of legitimacy and power, all of which were interrelated and embodied in rituals and institutions marking those sites.

Inspired by Grapard’s three hypotheses, this monograph focuses on how the Ōyama cult, which transcended sectarian divisions and traditions, fit into the socioeconomic landscape of the Kantō-Tōkai region. The Ōyama cult is a particularly instructive case because of its highly combinatory nature as well as its role as an important pilgrimage center that affected the entire Kantō region. The word “cult” is used here not in the sense of a fanatical, unorthodox, spurious religious movement or “sect” but as a translation of the Japanese word shinkō, indicating the beliefs, practices, and infrastructure associated with a sacred site (e.g., a mountain) or a particular deity. This usage approximates more closely its Latin root, cultus, in the sense of worship, veneration, or observance of religious obligations.

The Ōyama cult serves as a lens through which to view the early modern Japanese religious landscape. During the early modern period, Ōyama (literally, Big Mountain)—also known as Afurisan (Wild Moun-
tain or Rain Falling Mountain)—developed into a flourishing pilgrimage site that was well known throughout Edo and its hinterland, the Kantō region. The mountain had a wide appeal ranging from rainmaking and business success to faith healing. Once its early modern institutional structures were established through patronage from the Tokugawa bakufu, Ōyama was able to attract large numbers of pilgrims due to its proximity to the city of Edo, then one of the largest urban centers in the world. Even though it was officially affiliated with the Kogi Shingon School as a branch temple of Mt. Kōya—and served as an important regional center of that school—its devotees included adherents of all forms of Buddhism. Even at the mountain itself, several other Buddhist schools were also involved in the management of the site, including the Rinzai Zen school and Honzanha shugendō, a branch of yamabushi (mountain ascetics) affiliated with the Tendai school. Ōyama’s oshi (former mountain ascetics and shrine priests serving as innkeepers and proselytizers) disseminated the cult among one million devotees throughout the Kantō region, leading to the development of tens of thousands of Ōyama pilgrimage associations (kō). At the height of its popularity in the early nineteenth century, Ōyama’s mountain slopes were covered with over twenty temples, multiple shrines, and about 160 inns in two temple towns (monzenmachi): Sakamoto Village and Minoge Village. These numerous institutions controlled access to Ōyama’s deities and its sacred sites—its waterfalls, caves, and peaks. This sacred multiplex flourished over the course of the early modern period both as a sectarian Shingon center as well as a non-sectarian pilgrimage destination until the early Meiji period when the new regime’s policy disassociating kami and Buddhas (shinbutsu bunri) changed the Ōyama cult into a Sect Shinto organization, Ōyama Keishin Kōsha (Association of Reverence and Humility).

It is important to note that Ōyama was a regional site. It illustrates the high degree of regionalization and localization of the premodern Japanese religious landscape. Even today, the mountain has little name recognition beyond the Kantō region, but it is a regional landmark that serves as a favorite destination for hiking and school trips by residents of the surrounding Kantō Plain. The mountain gained the status of a regional landmark in the early modern period. Located only about 45 miles from the city of Edo, it is thought to have had about one million
parishioner households in the Kantō-Tōkai region at the height of its popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The pilgrimage to Ōyama during the Sixth and Seventh Months was an integral part of the region's annual ritual calendar. The system of roads to Ōyama—though perhaps not quite on the level of the Tōkaidō, a major highway between Edo and Kyoto—shaped the cityscape of Edo and the landscapes of the Musashi and Sagami Provinces in significant ways. What were once the pilgrimage routes to Ōyama had become major regional arteries of transportation in Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture.

The Development of the Oshi System

In Japanese scholarship, the Ōyama cult falls under the rubric of sangaku shinkō, which can be translated as “mountain veneration” or “mountain cult.” Despite the common association of mountain cults with the tradition of mountain asceticism (shugendō), this category also includes other elements, such as monastic Buddhism and pilgrimage. In fact, formal mountain asceticism was nearly eradicated at Ōyama in the 1660s and remained only a minor component of the Ōyama cult from then on. At that time, most of the mountain ascetics at Ōyama turned into oshi. To recognize them as a separate type of religious professional, their name, oshi, has been left in Japanese throughout this monograph, which devotes several chapters to their development and activities at Ōyama.

In early modern Japan, the oshi emerged as a major type of religious specialist that played an essential role in the popularization of mountain cults and pilgrimage sites. Oshi were present at sites such as Ōyama, the Ise Shrines, and Mt. Fuji and had their counterparts in Köya hijiri and Zenkōji shōto and tsunado. Such religious professionals were found at many large-scale sacred sites and pilgrimage destinations across Japan. They were usually not celibate, ran inns to lodge pilgrims, and maintained parishes to which they distributed amulets and from which they collected regular donations. Oshi have sometimes been regarded as a subcategory of shrine priests or mountain ascetics. Occasionally, they have also been likened to peddlers. Although it is true that the oshi often originally derived from shrine priests and mountain ascetics, and were itinerant like peddlers, these descriptions do not aptly characterize the central role that the oshi played in the popularization of sacred sites in the early modern period. Even though they emerged at some sites,
such as the Ise Shrines, before the early modern period, they grew into a distinct category of religious professionals at many regional sites, such as Ōyama, during the late seventeenth century.

One of the earliest detailed historical studies of the oshi appeared in Shinjō Tsunezō’s work on the socioeconomic development of pilgrimage in Japan, Shinkō Shōjī sankai no shakai-keizai shiteki kenkyū. Shinjō delineates the emergence of the oshi systems in premodern Japan, focusing on Kumano and Ise, where the earliest and the most extensive oshi systems developed. His findings—though embedded in a nostalgic narrative of a medieval golden age and early modern decline common in scholarship of his generation—apply in many ways to similar systems at other sacred sites and are useful to review.

According to Shinjō, the oldest oshi system developed at Kumano. From the early twelfth century, the Kumano oshi provided lodging and performed ritual prayers for pilgrims who were brought to their doors by mountain ascetics and Buddhist priests acting as pilgrimage guides (sendatsu). Through the oshi-sendatsu system, the pilgrimages to Kumano expanded to levels of society outside the aristocracy, even when pilgrimages to other shrines and temples were still largely limited to the nobility.13 Shinjō argues that in the Kamakura period, the oshi’s patrons began to include not just aristocrats but also warriors. At first the bond between an oshi and a pilgrim was only temporary and limited to the duration of the pilgrimage, but eventually deeper ties developed whereby pilgrims from a specific warrior conglomerate became regular patrons (dan’otsu or danna) of a specific oshi. These patrons came from diverse geographic regions, including Tōtōmi, Musashi, Dewa, and Kai Provinces. By the late fourteenth century, the oshi’s patrons included kin groups from the wealthy peasantry from the provinces around the capital, where the peasantry’s standard of living was improving markedly. Around 1400, the oshi served patrons from the most distant regions of Japan, including northeastern Honshū and the southern tip of Kyūshū. As the number of patrons from among the peasantry increased in the mid-fifteenth century, the oshi began to shift their attention away from the kin groups to the village unit, which began to emerge in the late medieval period.14 Perhaps this clear shift in patron constituencies is partially illusory due to selective source materials. The hypothesis that the circle of patrons of religious institutions gradually widened from aristo-
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crats in ancient Japan to warriors in the early medieval period, and to the peasantry and merchant class in the middle and late medieval and early modern periods, has been questioned by recent scholarship. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that gradually the oshi came to rely on merchant and peasant patrons to a much greater degree than they had initially.

In the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, osbi systems also developed at the Ise Shrines, the Matsuo Shrine, the Mishima Shrine, Mt. Fuji, and at Hakusan. At the Ise Shrines, the onshi developed from the large number of low-ranking shrine priests who needed to supplement their income by providing accommodation for pilgrims. The system began at the Outer Ise Shrine in the early Kamakura period based on aristocratic and warrior patrons, but it did not start to flourish until the late Kamakura period when patronage expanded to whole warrior conglomerates. The Ise Shrines were able to forge ties with warriors in eastern Japan through the shrines’ extensive land holdings there. It was primarily the onshi who spread the Ise cult in these areas. In contrast to the Kumano osbi, the Ise onshi tended to deal with their patrons directly without the sendatsu acting as middlemen. Once the patrons extended out to peasant villages by the early sixteenth century, the onshi relied on village elders as middlemen in order to maintain their ties. These patrons collectively made up “parishes,” which the Ise onshi considered property that could be passed down from generation to generation or even sold. The same practice has also been documented at Kumano, sporadically in the Kamakura period and more frequently in the Muromachi period. Throughout the sixteenth century, the Ise onshi also kept careful records of their parish rounds, detailing their journeys and listing patrons’ names. On their rounds of patron households, the Ise onshi not only administered purification rituals and distribute amulets but also collected funds and distributed small trinkets, tea, and local souvenirs. The records also show regional differences in the composition of parishes: some consisted primarily of warriors and wealthy peasants whereas others comprised large numbers of ordinary peasants.

In the early modern period, the osbi at Kumano declined in number because the Kumano sendatsu, on whose mediation the osbi relied, virtually disappeared by the mid-eighteenth century. However, the Ise onshi prospered since they had more direct, personal contact with their patrons. By the 1590s, 145 onshi operated inns at the Outer Ise Shrine.
order to quell the fierce competition among the onshi, the bakufu’s Tōtōmi Province office, near the Outer Shrines, regulated the interactions of the Ise onshi, recognizing parishes as hereditary possessions of the onshi and the household (ie) as the basic unit of a parish. The Ise onshi system expanded until the mid-eighteenth century but then declined into the mid-nineteenth century. In 1738, the number of onshi at the Outer Ise Shrine peaked at 592 but fell to 370 in 1832. Similarly, the number of onshi at the Inner Ise Shrine reached 271 in 1777 but dropped to 181 by 1866.17

Shinjō concludes that the interactions of the Ise onshi with their parishioners became increasingly mercantile, with the onshi acting more as peddlers than religious professionals, and that their numerical decline indicates the decreasing religious importance of the profession.18 However, Shinjō’s pejorative association of onshi with peddlers reflects not so much an actual degeneration as it does the scholarly inclinations of his generation as well as the prejudices and suspicions of the sedentary population toward vagrants, mendicants, itinerant religious professionals, and other marginals; and this is commonly reflected in the historical sources.19

The mercantile activities of the onshi were not necessarily linked to a degeneration of the profession but were linked to their religious functions and helped them reaffirm their social networks. In the late seventeenth century, the German physician Engelbert Kaempfer wrote of the interactions between pilgrims and the Ise onshi—or, as he called them, negi or kannushi (shrine priests)—observing that the onshi served both as innkeepers and guides for pilgrims at Ise and maintained customary ties with their patrons in their territories by distributing amulets and small trinkets in exchange for annual donations. The more prestigious the recipient of the talisman, the larger his donation; but in return, the recipient would also receive more elaborate trinkets.20 Based on Kaempfer’s description and parallel evidence from Ōyama, the distribution of trinkets emerges in a different light. The distribution of trinkets and small gifts went hand-in-hand with the dissemination of amulets and the collection of donations. The practice of distributing gifts is therefore not indicative of the onshi’s degeneration into a mere peddler without religious functions. The data from Ōyama further suggest that a parallel numerical decline of the onshi was caused by the increasing formalization of the profession, which narrowed the pool of those
eligible for the title. Even though the Ōyama oshi had their roots in the medieval period, they only fully emerged as a distinct category of religious professionals in the early modern period.

The Ancient and Medieval Periods

One reason to focus on Ōyama’s early modern history, rather than its ancient or medieval history, is the lack of source materials about these earlier periods and, conversely, the relative abundance of material on the site from the early modern period. Prior to the early modern period there is very little documentation of the actual conditions of the community on Ōyama, a fact that was already bemoaned by Sudō Shigeo (1826–1886), the Nativist author of the Afurijinja kodenkō (A treatise on the old legends of the Afuri Shrine, 1849). He wrote about medieval Ōyama: “Because there are no official records from that time, hardly anything is known except for legends told by the elders.” The kind of artifacts and documents that survived from earlier periods are limited to a few archeological finds, legends concerning the founding of the temple on the mountain slope, and sporadic mention of contact with the imperial court and military leaders in the Kantō region.

As a result, very little is known about Ōyama in the ancient period. Excavations on Ōyama’s summit in 1879 and 1960 indicate that the site was indeed a center of worship dating back to antiquity. In addition to finding Jōmon pottery, the archeological surveys unearthed several other artifacts, the oldest of which dated back to the ninth century.

Medieval legends of the founding of Ōyama’s Buddhist institutions, particularly those in the Ōyamadera engi (The founding legend of Ōyamadera), claim that the Buddhist monk Rōben (689–773), the second patriarch of Kegon Buddhism in Japan and a founder of the central state-sponsored temple Tōdaiji in Nara, established a Buddhist temple at Ōyama in 755 when he returned to Sagami, the province of his birth. Rōben is said to have chosen Ōyama because it was known as one of the mysterious places in the region. Through his close connection with the imperial court, Rōben was supposedly granted funds from Sagami, Awa, and Kazusa Provinces to support the newly founded Buddhist temple. The historicity of this legend is questionable. Even if we assume that a Buddhist temple was founded on Ōyama in the late eighth century, it could hardly have been more than one of many remote sa-
cred places in the distant provinces from the perspective of the imperial court in Kyoto. Legend has it that other famous monks also visited Ōyama including Közō, a disciple of Gyōki (668–749); Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon school; and Annen (841–890), a famous Tendai monk. These claims probably also lack historicity and were merely attempts to convey pedigree on the site. However, the Ōyamadera engi’s assertion that the shrines on the summit were built in 890 under Emperor Uda (r. 887–897) is at least corroborated by the Engi shiki, compiled under Uda’s successor Emperor Daigo (r. 897–930), which does indeed list the Afuri Shrine, the principal shrine on Ōyama’s summit, as one of twelve minor provincial shrines in Sagami Province. Unfortunately, this source contains no details about the institutional dimensions of the site.

Once the Kantō Plain became the seat of government for the new military regime during the Kamakura period, Ōyama began to appear more frequently in historical documents. Throughout the medieval period, the religious at Ōyama aligned themselves with local warlords who controlled the region, receiving their patronage and land in exchange for military service and ritual assistance. The warlords relied on the military support of local warriors and yamabushi from Ōyama, who were able to provide valuable intelligence during military conflicts because of their familiarity with the local terrain. Naturally, the warlords also sought divine assistance through Ōyama’s ritualists, who used their prayers and rites to afford sacred protection to the petitioners and victory in war.

Concretely, Ōyama’s importance began to rise with the establishment of the Kamakura bakufu in the east. Previously a mere distant, provincial site, Ōyama suddenly gained national importance through its proximity to the military headquarters in Kamakura, which sought the sacred assistance of Ōyama’s ritualists. In 1184, Ōyamadera, the main temple, was awarded a small village in its foothills by Minamoto no Yoritomo, who became shogun in 1192. In return, according to the medieval Azuma kagami, monks from Ōyamadera gave the shogunate their ritual support by participating in memorial rites for Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa, in 1192 and 1193, and by reciting the Daihannya不断地 (Great Wisdom Sūtra) to ensure safe childbirth for Yoritomo’s wife, Masako, in 1192.
From at least around this time, Ōyama was associated with the Shin-gon school, specifically the Shingon Ritsu school. One factor that contributed to Ōyama’s rise in stature during the Kamakura period was the work of the Shingon Ritsu monk Kenjō (7–1296), popularly known as Gangyō Shōnin. Gangyō received the patronage of the Hōjō, who acted as regents to the shogun in Kamakura, and their patronage enabled Gangyō to commission esoteric rituals at Ōyama. He eventually revitalized Ōyama and installed a large iron statue of the Buddhist deity Fudō as the temple’s main image of worship. In his efforts to spread faith in Ōyama’s Fudō and, thus, to raise funds for the reconstruction of the site, Gangyō might have propagated, if not created, the legends of the founding of the temple described in the Ōyamadera engi, first mentioned in a document around 1300. Gangyō was in many ways a typical representative of Kamakura-period Ritsu monks, who were particularly active in raising funds for the reconstruction of Buddhist temples. Since Ritsu monks were particularly known for their strict observance of the Buddhist precepts, they had the ethical credibility to solicit donations. Gangyō’s personal emphasis on monastic orthodoxy also explains why a figure such as Rōben, an eminent eighth-century Kegon monk closely associated with Tōdaiji and thus the Buddhist orthodoxy in Nara, plays such a central role in the founding legends of the temple. Gangyō was not the only Shingon Ritsu cleric interested in Ōyama and the story of its foundation. In 1307, another Shingon Ritsu cleric, Ken’ā (1261–1338), who was highly active in neighboring Musashi Province, made a pilgrimage to Ōyama and viewed a copy of the Ōyamadera engi. Ken’ā and his circle of students had a strong interest Ryōbu Shinto associated with the Ise Shrines and kami matters in general. Hence the founding legend of a combinatory multiplex like Ōyama might have been of great interest to him.

Several decades later, the Ashikaga shogunate also sought Ōyama’s allegiance. Even though the military government was based in Kyoto, Ōyama was important to the Ashikaga because they also maintained an eastern outpost in Kamakura not far from Ōyama. Ashikaga no Takauji rewarded a local strongman, Satō Chūmu, for his service in battle by making him bettō (head administrator) of Ōyama in 1350, a testimony to Ōyama’s growing importance as a religious institution in the region. He also donated to the temple a small piece of land in the foothills in

return for pacification prayers conducted by Ōyamadera in 1352 during the Ashikaga’s struggle to maintain control over the Kantō region. Between 1350 and 1422, the Ashikaga repeatedly turned to Ōyamadera to commission pacification prayers and prayers for victory in battle. In return, they rewarded the temple with land, monetary donations, and resources for construction projects. In 1490, the Ashikaga were the first to extend their rule of law over the Ōyamadera’s homestead when they admonished the residents of the temple and the villages at the foot of the mountain to obey the law. However, they made no attempt to regulate the affairs of the temple in as concrete detail as the Tokugawa would about two hundred years later.

From 1530 to 1590, Ōyama aligned itself with the Later Hōjō clan, based in Odawara, southwest from Ōyama, who had gradually managed to take control of the Kantō region, beginning with Izu, Sagami, and Musashi and eventually also large parts of Kōzuke, Shimotsuke, and Shimōsa. Like the Ashikaga, the Odawara Hōjō supported construction projects and donated land to the temple complex. In return, they counted on Ōyama’s ritual and military support during the mid-sixteenth century, commissioning prayers for military success and relying on yamabushi from Ōyama to act as scouts in battle. Ōyama also became involved in the wars that preceded the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa. The Hōjō felt increasing pressure from Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu after the former issued an edict demanding that the Hōjō submit to his authority as his vassals. To defend their autonomy, the Hōjō mobilized capable villagers in Sagami and in southern Musashi and Izu Provinces, threatening those who failed to comply with capital punishment and promising rich rewards for loyal service. When Hideyoshi raised his forces and attacked the Hōjō in 1589, Ōyama became embroiled in the struggle. As the Hōjō fought their last battles against Hideyoshi, from 1589 to 1590, forces from Ōyama fought on the side of the losing Hōjō.

After his victory, Hideyoshi issued orders to curb the military activities of Ōyama’s anchorites and asserted his authority over the land by commissioning cadastral surveys in the 1590s. Ōyama and its foothill villages were surveyed between 1591 and 1593, providing us the first concrete image of the mountain: Ōyama’s slopes were shared by several large temples, multiple hermitages of yamabushi as well as the houses of
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a shrine priest, a shrine carpenter, and several laymen who may have been Ōyama’s first oshi—inkeepers catering to pilgrims.36 The site was administered by a yamabushi of warrior background who acted as bettō and resided at a temple called Godaiin Hachidaibō.37 Thus it is only with the coming of the Tokugawa to the Kantō region in the 1590s that much more tangible evidence of the institutional structures of Ōyama and its cult is extant, although much information is still missing even for this later period. For example, it is regrettable that detailed sources containing the concrete experiences of pilgrims are rather limited because hardly anyone kept narrative records of the relatively short pilgrimage to the mountain.

The Early Modern Transformation

Emplacing Ōyama in the early modern Kantō region requires, in Clifford Geertz’s parlance, a “thick description” of its regional and local contexts. This is made possible by the ready availability of documents from the early modern period. This study is largely based on regional and local sources—such as regional gazetteers, document collections compiled by contemporary municipal archives, and previously unpublished documents in private collections. This monograph is also greatly indebted to the work of local Japanese historians. With the rise of interest in local history since the 1970s and subsequent surveys of available documents in the 1980s, scholarship on the early modern Ōyama cult has grown in volume and in scope during the past few years. Despite the virtual absence of Western scholarship on the site, Japanese scholars have recognized the importance of Ōyama in the early modern Kantō region. Tamamuro Fumio has divided Japanese publications on the Ōyama cult into three large categories: one, the organization of Ōyama’s oshi (innkeeper-proselytizers) and their relationship with their parishes; two, pilgrimage routes to Ōyama; and three, the development of the Ōyama cult in the Meiji period.38 In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the cult in the culture of early modern Kantō region, this monograph not only expands on these three aspects in Chapters 3, 5, and 7, respectively, but also adds chapters on Ōyama’s sacred geography, its role as a Shingon institution, the ritual activities associated with the pilgrimage cult, and the development of the legends about its deities. The cult of Ōyama defies easy definition because it cuts across the lines
of demarcation between religious traditions and specific schools of Buddhism. Therefore, this study focuses on thematic elements of the cult as they developed over the course of the early modern period.

Chapter 1 introduces Ōyama’s sacred geography to provide a spatial, material, and symbolic context for the Ōyama cult and its institutions. The classical Eliadian definition of sacred space tends to locate sacrality in constant physical and symbolic features of a site, but Ōyama serves as an example of a sacred place (rather than merely an abstract space) whose significance was assigned in various, sometimes competing, ways that shifted along with institutional and historical changes. The chapter traces Ōyama’s transformation from a medieval yamabushi site that was understood as an earthly manifestation of Maitreya’s Tuṣita Heaven into a complex Shingon academy and popular pilgrimage site in the early modern period.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine Ōyama’s institutional complexities. A typical premodern cultic site, Ōyama presented an integrated mixture of traditions that were inseparable but not always entirely harmonious. Ōyama comprised Buddhist, Shinto, yamabushi, and oshi institutions of various sectarian affiliations. Chapter 2 focuses on the line of seventeen abbots who managed the mountain during the early modern period. This chapter discusses the ways in which the Shingon Buddhist clergy assumed control over Ōyama, maintained its hold over this sacred site, and simultaneously turned it into a major regional Kogi Shingon academy. As a regional Shingon academy that was necessary to train clerics for the growing number of temples established by the temple registration system of early modern Japan, Ōyama was able to become a leader in a regional network of Kogi Shingon temples even though it had few branch temples of its own. As a sacred site, Ōyama was controlled institutionally and ritually by the Shingon clergy, whose twenty-plus subtemples on the mountain cooperated in the administration of the site, led by the abbot of Hachidaibō, its main Shingon temple. Ōyama’s Shingon institutions therefore had dual functions that alternately reinforced and stood at odds with each other. The growing popularity of the site and the influx of pilgrims enhanced the Shingon temples’ wealth but also created rifts among them. These factors contributed to the gradual weakening of the Hachidaibō abbots’ control over the site.
Chapter 3 traces the development of the *oshi* system at Ōyama. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the *oshi* managed large parishes of devotees throughout the Kantō region. By the nineteenth century, about 160 *oshi* were administering one million parish households across the entire Kantō-Tōkai region with an average of about 6,000 households per *oshi*. Some of the most powerful *oshi* had as many as 12,000 parishioner families. These parishes were different from those of Buddhist temples in the temple registration system, which might ideally have had one hundred to a thousand parish households with obligatory ties to the temple through the performance of funerary and memorial rites. Instead of providing funerary rites, *oshi* distributed amulets and collected yearly donations from their parishioners, housing them in inns at Ōyama when they came on pilgrimage. In order to lessen competition from inns in nearby villages, Ōyama’s *oshi* were specially licensed by the local Shingon clergy at Ōyama, but in the early nineteenth century many *oshi* began to seek additional Shinto licenses from the Shirakawa house, a sacerdotal lineage associated with the imperial court in Kyoto. These Shirakawa licenses, together with a growing interest in national learning among the *oshi*, became important factors in the disassociation of *kami* and Buddhas in the Meiji period.

The next two chapters examine the development of the pilgrimage to Ōyama. Chapter 4 explores how Ōyama’s ritual specialists, clergy and the *oshi*, jointly managed the pilgrimage cult, which became centered on the summer festival: The clergy officiated at rituals within the Buddhist precinct, i.e., Ōyama’s principal cultic sites, whereas the *oshi* lodged pilgrims, acted as intermediaries between pilgrims and clerics, and maintained active relationships with their parishioners through parish rounds to distribute amulets and collect first-fruit donations. By the early nineteenth century, Ōyama had become a highly complex and active site whose influence extended across the entire Kantō region. The Ōyama cult had successfully adapted its economy from one based primarily on state patronage during the medieval period to one based on the donations from a broad social base—its parishioners in villages and urban areas.

Chapter 5 discusses the impact of the Ōyama cult on the Kantō region as a popular pilgrimage destination. During the early modern period, some lengthy pilgrimages, such as mass pilgrimages to the Ise Shrines
or solitary pilgrimages by impoverished travelers around the island of Shikoku, had a reputation for running counter to the orderly social ideals of the bakufu—they represented in some respects what Victor Turner termed an antistructure to everyday life. Pilgrimages to Ōyama, however, reinforced rather than undermined social structures. The pilgrimage shaped the regional identity and inspired numerous woodblock prints, popular travel guides, and other works describing the ritual calendar of Edo residents and travel in the Kantō-Tōkai region. Overland and sea-borne pilgrimage routes developed that linked Ōyama to the Kantō region. Since pilgrims from Edo took only about one week to complete the pilgrimage, and pilgrims from the northeastern provinces in the Kantō took only about twice as long, the bakufu posed little opposition to the pilgrimage. Moreover, most pilgrims traveled in confraternities based in rural villages or urban neighborhoods, or organized around professional groups or businesses. Such pilgrims did not abscond from their communities; instead, they were usually dispatched as annual representatives. Confraternity members pooled their funds to finance the pilgrimage, and therefore the pilgrims were not a burden on communities along the route but fueled the regional economy.

Chapter 6 examines imaginary representations of the mountain. Changing and competing legends concerning Ōyama’s pantheon developed in conjunction with institutional and geographic changes at Ōyama. This chapter covers a variety of texts produced by religious professionals at Ōyama. This intertextual universe of competing narratives created and copied by the Buddhist clergy and osbi reflects the underlying tensions and complexities at the site. The Ōyamadera engi, whose origins lie in the medieval period, depicts a typical yamabushi pantheon centering around the fierce Buddhist Wisdom King Fudō Myōō and was later incorporated into early modern versions of Ōyama’s pantheon promoted by the Shingon clergy. However, the Shingon clergy also produced new legends on the one hand linking Ōyama’s deities to native deities featured in the ancient national chronicles and, on the other, embedding them in Shingon’s Ryōbu Shinto theories, which identified all deities with the cosmic Buddha Dainichi. With the influx of Shirakawa Shinto into Ōyama beginning in the late eighteenth century, new legends emerged aimed at linking a particular sacerdotal lineage with the ancient imperial court and its mythology. Through this last
process, Ōyama’s sacred rock deity Sekison, which had been identified with Fudō in the medieval period and later with Kannon, gained an increasingly distinct identity as a native deity. Last but not least, the presence of Nativists in the mid-nineteenth century brought about an unprecedented shift away from earlier models of layering and accretion toward attempts to recover Ōyama’s “original” Shinto deities before the arrival of Buddhism, foreshadowing the tensions that led to the disassociation of kami and Buddhas in the early Meiji period.

The final chapter examines an important turning point in Ōyama’s history: the disassociation of kami and Buddhas and Ōyama’s transformation into a Sect Shinto organization during the first two decades of the Meiji period. During this period Ōyama changed fundamentally—in its sacred geography, in its physical layout and institutional structures, in the nature of its deities, and in its rituals. Set in motion through legislation issued by the new Meiji regime and implemented through local initiatives, Ōyama’s early Meiji transformation changed the mountain from a thoroughly combinatory complex into a dual site with distinct Shinto and Buddhist spheres. Even though the Meiji regime provided the legal basis for the changes, their implementation was determined by local forces, which were even able to adapt orders that fundamentally challenged the economic basis of the Ōyama cult, such as the prohibition of oshi in 1871. Because of local efforts, Ōyama’s new institutions and rituals were partially indebted to structures that had been developed during the early modern period while the clear disassociation of kami and Buddhas as well as attempts to standardize the organization of believers throughout the Kantō region changed the basic nature of the Ōyama cult.

The Ōyama cult illustrates that location or place, an aspect of a religious site that is often ignored, constitutes a central force in shaping religion. Premodern Japanese religion, like Japanese society in general, was largely emplaced in specific locales and regions. As a pilgrimage site, Ōyama was consciously constructed as a remote place far from human habitation; in fact, it was a place marked by its proximity to a major urban center and by great accessibility—pilgrims visiting the mountain, Ōyama’s innkeepers traveling through the region to collect donations and distribute amulets, and Shingon clerics from temples in the region training at Ōyama in order to return to their home temples after the completion of their training period. In its ordinariness, the
Ōyama cult occupied a middle ground that was neither at the center of political power nor at the margins of society. The cultic site that initially survived on patronage by the *bakufu* came to depend almost exclusively on the donations’ broad social base—villagers, townspeople, and low-ranking officials. The Ōyama cult was not used by the *bakufu* to mobilize human resources or to suppress resistance to the regime, but neither was it a movement to subvert the existing social order. The cult flourished precisely because it was based on and upheld the social structures that shaped village and urban life. Therefore, it can serve as a useful case study of mainstream early modern religion and society.