

## Sacred Sites and the Dynamics of Identity

Sarah Thal

Rice University

Local histories have long examined both the ties that bind communities together and the developments that make them distinct. As is evident in the term itself, "local" history takes as the most fundamental of these ties the connection of a group of people to a particular location. It is curious, therefore, that writers of local history have often taken this geographic connection for granted. There are clear political reasons for this narrative viewpoint: local governments of towns, districts and prefectures have sponsored many of these writing projects to cover the areas within their jurisdiction. But such politics of publishing have begged the question of how inhabitants of an area come to associate themselves not just with local units of administration but with the land itself. How do they define their communities in relation to the physical landscape, thereby locating themselves not only in geographical, but in social, political, and intellectual space as well?

In Japanese history, this question holds particular relevance for the study of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The transition from the early modern *bakuhau* system to the modern nation-state has often seemed to imply the disappearance of distinctive, local identities into a single sense of nation. The most prominent printed images of each period reinforce this seeming dichotomy: Bashō's poetry, Jippensha Ikku's humorous travel tales, and Hiroshige's and Hokusai's prints of famous places depict vivid, vibrant local color before 1868, while afterward, national newspapers, books, and prints of the emperor draw attention to Tokyo and the imperial institution. Despite this image of centralization and homogenization, local histories have shown that many elites throughout the countryside retained and, in some cases, increased their influence under the new regime. Likewise, I contend here that people continued to use the famous sites that had distinguished their communities in the early modern period to maintain and create a variety of intellectual, social, and cultural communities well into the twentieth century. As individuals and

groups defined themselves around these prominent places, they perpetuated the landmarks of early modern Japan as important foci around which to create new identities for themselves and their communities in the modern age.

The study of landmarks in Japan almost inevitably leads to the study of sacred sites. Throughout Japanese history, notable mountains, caves, or springs have been identified as sites of sacred power: worshipers approached them with offerings, consecrated them with rituals, and publicized their miraculous powers in performances and in print. During the early modern period, this focus on powerful religious sites blossomed amidst growing prosperity, an increasingly commercial economy, and a prolific culture of print and performance to fuel a spectacular boom in pilgrimage and tourism by the early nineteenth century. In popular culture, the Bunka-Bunsei period (1804-1830) became an age of gods and miracles, inseparable from the famous sites in which those gods resided.<sup>1</sup> Thus, people from every domain converged on pilgrimage centers such as Ise, Kōpira, Zenkōji, or Mt. Fuji in search of miraculous benefits and pleasurable entertainments. Hundreds of thousands of visitors each year offered donations and purchased amulets at these places in the hope of securing the gods' protection for themselves, their families, and their businesses. Impressive miracle tales were retold, embellished, and set in print, advertising the power of certain deities and their shrines to heal blindness, prevent fire, multiply wealth, or prevent drowning. Pilgrimage traffic provided the livelihoods of souvenir sellers at the most popular destinations, and supported innkeepers and boat operators along travel routes

---

<sup>1</sup> Constantine Vaporis, in *Breaking Barriers: Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994, especially pp. 217-254, addresses the culture of pilgrimage as a culture of travel, thereby seeing -- along with many other scholars -- a "secularization" of pilgrimage. But the religious context within which commoners saw the places to which they journeyed on their pilgrimages could simultaneously work to associate seemingly a-religious actions, such as travel, with the gods and their miracles.

throughout the country.

The sacred sites around which this economy and culture of pilgrimage revolved became focal points for the development of a national identity that helped shape the modern nation-state. Not only did the ceaseless travels of pilgrims and sightseers bring people from throughout the islands into communication with each other,<sup>2</sup> but the sites of the deities themselves gained new significance as local gentry increasingly sought to identify themselves and their homes with a national essence. It was around such centers of worship that the nativist ideologies of Motoori Norinaga and, especially, Hirata Atsutane developed and spread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Literary scholars near many sites identified their locally enshrined deities as Shinto *kami* named in the ancient texts. As Hirata's fusion of nativist literary analysis with Shinto ritual and religiosity spread throughout the countryside, increasing numbers of these scholars joined the Hirata school, adopted Hirata's designations of local buddhas and bodhisattvas as native *kami*, and, by the 1860s, began organizing in support of reviving the imperial, *kami*-worshiping bureaucracy of ancient Japan.<sup>3</sup> When influential nativists swept to power alongside their sponsors in the new Meiji government,<sup>4</sup> Hirata's focus on purifying worship sites and governing in conjunction with the *kami* became, for a short while at least, official policy. In the wake of legislation issued from Tokyo in 1868 separating *kami* and Buddhas, nativist scholars who had become Shinto priests converted thousands of worship sites into Shinto establishments.<sup>5</sup> Soon, they incorporated the

sites into a nationwide system of state shrines where deities were worshiped as *kami* and the priests lectured on state-defined teachings of obedience, reverence, and patriotism.<sup>6</sup> The Meiji government thus confirmed the importance of prominent Edo-period sites of the gods as outposts of civic education, as ritual centers that enhanced the legitimacy of the imperial government, and (at least for the most dedicated nativists) as institutions whose prayers harnessed the powers of the gods in the service of the state. Despite the growing prominence of Tokyo and the nation -- or, rather, precisely because of it -- the sacred centers of early modern fame remained important and, indeed, gained new significance in the modern period.

The sites of the gods thus became pivotal points of connection between local communities and the modern nation-state. As social, political, and economic patterns changed throughout the Meiji period, people used the sacred sites, as they had in the years before 1868, to negotiate new identities for themselves. The processes by which such identities were shaped were clearly evident at the shrine to Kompira on Mt. Zōzu on the island of Shikoku. In the mid-nineteenth century, Buddhist Kompira rivaled Ise as the most common destination of pilgrims nationwide.<sup>7</sup> Con-

---

influential Edo period temples, more than 98% were converted into Shinto shrines. Tamamuro, "On the Suppression of Buddhism," in Hardacre and Kern, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan*, Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997, 504.

---

<sup>2</sup> James H. Foard, "The Boundaries of Compassion: Buddhism and National Tradition in Japanese Pilgrimage," *Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (February 1982), 231-251.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Thal, *Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods: A History of Kompira Pilgrimage in Meiji Japan*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Walthall provides a vivid example of the alliance between some of the more prominent nativists and the Choshu samurai in *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Tamamuro Fumio has calculated that of the most

<sup>6</sup> On the Great Teaching Campaign in English, see James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 87-135; and Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868-1988*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, 42-59. Sakamoto Koremaru has provided evidence that the appointment of shrines as state shrines occurred as each shrine petitioned to the central government for that status, not due to centralized decisions in the Jingikan. Sakamoto, *Kokka Shintō keisei katei no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994, 69, n. 21.

<sup>7</sup> In his magnum opus on the social and economic functions of pilgrimage, Shinjō Tsunezō estimated the annual number of pilgrims to Ise, Mt. Kōya, Honganji, and Kompira at approximately

verted to Shinto in 1868, Kotohira Shrine -- as it then officially became known -- lent the prestige of its powerful deity to the new Meiji regime, which in turn conferred upon the shrine the official imprimature of imperial rank and state sponsorship. Kotohira Shrine thus stood at the nexus of popular religious practice and the authority of the emerging nation-state.

As people in Shikoku and beyond renegotiated their positions in the changing order of early Meiji, many used their relationship to the shrine to define themselves and their status in their communities. As they re-conceptualized the shrine, they used the site of the god in three ways that would shape both themselves and the modern age: first, as a source of semi-official social status; second, as the basis for promoting a regional tourist economy; and third, as a marker of the intellectual and civilizational divide between rural and urban Japan. In each case, a group of people -- whether individually or in concert -- created or affiliated themselves with a community of their choosing through their approach to the shrine on Mt. Zōzu.

### Site and Status

During the early modern period, the social status that accrued from formal association with the shrine of Kompira was not always a matter of choice, at least for residents of the area. The hereditary priest (*bettō*) of Konkōin, the head sub-temple of the Kompira complex on Mt. Zōzu, ruled over the shrine and the 330 *koku* domain of Kompira, swearing fealty to the Tokugawa shogun under the sponsorship of the lord of the Takamatsu domain. Priests of other sub-temples on the mountain acted as administrators of the village, collecting taxes and adjudicating conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Local officials or residents of longstanding local prominence were tied to the priests by the special rights and responsibilities they received from the

shrine. Every year during the annual festival of Kompira, these relationships to authority were reenacted ritually as priests, town officials, and representatives of privileged households performed important roles in the festivities.<sup>9</sup>

In 1868, this network of formal political and ritual ties was disrupted. The head priest of Konkōin, relieved by imperial troops of authority over his small domain, converted to Shinto in a bid to maintain control over the profitable mountain shrine, which he unilaterally converted to Shinto at the same time. Because the administration of the town was now separated from the administration of the shrine, however, assignment of ritual positions in the annual festival and other observances no longer directly mirrored local political hierarchies. Moreover, after the official government designation of Shinto shrines as sites for state worship in 1871, and the centralization of administrative power in Tokyo in 1872, priests at the shrine were no longer determined locally on the basis of heredity, but were appointed by the national and prefectural governments. As the state shrine system developed and new rituals were created and standardized, an official, formal style of reverence was regularly modeled at Kotohira and other shrines. National and local governments provided monetary support for the shrines, and representatives of the village and prefectural governments formally presented donations to the *kami* on national holidays and at major shrine festivals. Thus, in the Meiji period, officially appointed Shinto priests and government representatives joined prominent local families as formal participants in the annual rites.

With the severance of feudal relations between village leaders and shrine priests, the way was opened for more people to avail themselves of the status offered by formal affiliation with the shrine. In 1874, Kotohira Shrine, like several other shrines to which bureaucrats from Tokyo had recently been appointed, established a new, lay pilgrimage association.<sup>10</sup> Intended in large

400,000-500,000 people per year in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *Shaji sankei no shakai keizai shiteki kenkyū*, Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1964, 929-930.

<sup>8</sup> Kotohira Chōshi Henshū Iinkai, *Chōshi Kotohira 3*, Kotohira: Kotohira-chō, 1999, 57-59.

<sup>9</sup> *Chōshi Kotohira 3*, 105ff.

<sup>10</sup> For appointments, see Tokoyo Nagatane, "Shinkyō soshiki monogatari," in Yasumaru Yoshio and Miyachi Masato, eds., *Shūkyō to kokka*, Nihon kindai shisō taikai 5, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988, 387.

part to offset the loss of feudal land-based income with newly-instituted membership dues paid by initiates, the Kotohira Shrine Reverence Association also provided a forum in which priests could inculcate into pilgrims new national teachings established in Tokyo. The priests of the Reverence Association led initiates through a complex bureaucratic registration process, preached to them about civic values, and guided them through the new set of prayers, purification rituals, bows, and hand-clappings that had been defined as the proper form of Shinto ritual. Almost any pilgrim, as long as he or she paid the membership fee, could participate in a formal ceremony akin to the rituals performed by government officials, complete with access to the main sanctuary and the receipt of a specially blessed amulet and a cup of sake in front of the altar. Through the sermons and ceremonies of the Reverence Association, then, association members were trained in the formality of elite obeisance; for the price of a small membership fee, they, too, could pass by less privileged worshipers to climb the steps to the main sanctuary, thereby joining the ranks of the specially recognized.

It seems clear that these special privileges were the reason that almost two million people had joined the Kotohira Shrine Reverence Association by the end of the 1880s.<sup>11</sup> Not only did a recruiting pamphlet for the Reverence Association prominently feature an illustration of the sanctuary ceremony in 1878, but letters to the shrine and association repeatedly inquired about "procedures to enter the sanctuary" (*naijin iri no tetsuzuki*) and referred to members as "people who have received entry into the sanctuary" (*gonaijin iri ōsetsukerareni sōrō*).<sup>12</sup> Testimonials written to the shrine also extolled the powers of the special association amulet, attributing to it the rescue of a child fallen overboard or a soldier's

survival on the battlefield.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the privileges themselves, many members of the Reverence Association treasured the special relationship to the shrine that those privileges signified. Some votive plaques offered in thanks to the *kami* explicitly mentioned the Reverence Association affiliation of the donors, attesting to what they saw as the god's partiality to association members. A plaque donated to the shrine in 1881 from Kii province, for instance, recorded the registration number of the local Reverence Association and praised the sincere prayers of the association for their special ability to rid a woman of fox possession.<sup>14</sup>

Membership in the Reverence Association was thought not only to indicate a privileged status in relation to the deity, but in some cases seems to have signaled higher status in the local community as well.<sup>15</sup> Within the Reverence Association itself, a clear hierarchy both reflected and informed perceptions of social status in communities throughout Japan. To acquire formal office in the association was considered a mark of prestige. The Reverence Association repeatedly issued lists of the criteria for office, stipulating that association officers must not only "have had deep respect for the gods for many years," but must have "demonstrated particular skill in forming associations, be people of repute and proper conduct, and possess more than the average amount of property."<sup>16</sup> Because Reverence Association office was contingent upon the number of individuals and associations a person

<sup>11</sup> *Kotohiragū shiryō*, v. 11. This number is not implausible. See the introduction by Tamamuro Fumio in Tamamuro, ed., *Kotohiragū sūkei kōsha kōchō mokuroku*, Kotohira-chō: Kotohiragū Shamusho, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Murai Shin'ichirō, ed., *Sūkei kō no susume*, Takamatsu: Murai Shin'ichirō, 1878; letters from Takimoto Keisaku (ca. 1886) and Kadowaki Hiroomi (16 May 1906).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., text of *ema* donated by Imamura Kichitarō of Okayama, testifying to a miracle in 1879, recorded in *Kotohiragū shiryō*, vol. 67; and the letter from Hayashi Torazō, 5 June 1905.

<sup>14</sup> *Ema* from Kii province (1881) in *Kotohiragū shiryō*, v. 67.

<sup>15</sup> In some communities, membership in the Reverence Association or an independent *Kompira kō* was apparently limited to the leadership of the community, while in others it seems that almost everyone joined. Shinjō Tsunezō touches on this regional social variation among Tokugawa-period *kō* in *Shaji sankei no shakai keizai shiteki kenkyū*, 729.

<sup>16</sup> "Kotohira hongū sūkei kōsha jōrei" (1886), in *Kotohiragū shiryō*, v. 14.

brought into the organization, many ambitious men vied to create Reverence Association groups in and around their home towns. Others applied to the shrine for official recognition as association leaders or Shinto lecturers. One man, writing to request recognition as a lecturer for the association in 1896, not only avowed a long-standing faith in Kompira<sup>17</sup> but provided an extensive resume detailing his military service, his membership in the Red Cross, and his leadership experience in such Shinto-affiliated groups as Kurozumikyō and Keishinkyō.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, leadership in the association was considered a respected and effective step upward on the social ladder of voluntary national service.

Village leaders also used worship of Kompira to unite communities under their direction. This was most conspicuous during the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. During these conflicts, mayors and chambers of commerce in communities within walking distance of the shrine organized residents into monthly, weekly, or even daily processions to Kompira.<sup>19</sup> The organizers who coordinated the ritual with the shrine simultaneously reinforced their own authority within their community and demonstrated to outside observers their unity in support of the troops. In these wartime rituals, villagers worshiped as representatives of their communities much as government bureaucrats worshiped as representatives of the state. As one man reported on a group pilgrimage to Kompira during the Russo-Japanese war:

[On the way,] we encountered people returning from praying for the soldiers. Each group held a flag bearing inscriptions for the health of the soldiers, the victory of the imperial troops, the defeat of the enemy country, and the like. On the sides of the flags

were written the name of each village, or "daily pilgrimage flag." Each flag was made of simple cloth, with writing in black ink. The people holding the flags also wore simple clothes and straw sandals. They had serious expressions as they thought of the soldiers abroad. . . . Around noon, we climbed the mountain, arrived in front of the main shrine, washed our hands and rinsed our mouths, and all together were serious and prayed.<sup>20</sup>

Visits to the shrine had acquired a somber overtone of social responsibility -- first among village elites, then during wartime extending among the people they mobilized. As local leaders used the site to bolster their social standing, they transformed the shrine from a source of local political status to a conduit of centralized state power that lent its aura of national prestige to each person to the extent that he or she cultivated an official relationship with the shrine. Through their participation in membership rituals or village processions, worshipers proclaimed their affiliations with like-minded people both nearby and across the nation, identifying with each other on the basis of religious, social, or national concerns through their actions on a mountain in Shikoku.

### Culture and Capitalism

More than just offering the perquisites of status, however, the shrine of Kompira and its prominent reputation made possible the economic livelihood of people both in the town and throughout the region. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, business leaders of the area joined together to promote the site, its culture and its history, thereby developing the mountain as a profitable meeting ground for a growing group of educated elites. Joining culture and capitalism at Kompira, they forged ties horizontally with fellow promoters that often reinforced the vertical hierarchies of status.

During the Tokugawa period, the domain of

<sup>17</sup> Although the official name of the shrine and the deity were changed to "Kotohira" in 1868 (and the name of the town a few years later), all are still referred to as "Kompira" in popular parlance. For this reason, when referring to the deity and site in general terms, this essay uses the term, "Kompira."

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Saiō [first name illegible], dated 1 June 1896.

<sup>19</sup> Matsuoka Mitsugi, *Nennen Nikki*, 18 August 1894ff.

<sup>20</sup> *Kagawa Shimpō*, 12 November 1904.

Kompira relied for its political and economic prosperity upon business generated by pilgrims to the mountain, which in turn relied upon the national fame of the site. There were two main strategies through which promoters advertised the pilgrimage during these years. The most common was to focus on the miracles of the deity and the pleasures of the entertainments nearby. Thus, playbills advertised *kabuki* performances, pamphlets related famous miracles of the deity, and flyers published in Edo and Osaka included the names and prices of Kompira's *geisha* within their national rankings.<sup>21</sup> The Kompira section of Jippensha Ikku's comedic travel tale, *Hizakurige*, published in 1810, publicized this mixture of miracles and entertainment throughout the country.<sup>22</sup> Periodic displays of the buddha image (*kaichō*) held on the mountain attracted large numbers of people to the shrine, to sideshows, and to the inns, gambling dens, and brothels of the town. This powerful mix of miracles and entertainment formed the popular image of Kompira.

Among a small but influential group of intellectuals and artists, this popular image of the pilgrimage was accompanied by a more erudite interpretation. Poets and painters extolled the site and the deity in imagery from the Chinese as well as Japanese classics. Nativists published local histories and gazetteers asserting connections between Kompira and such imperial figures as Sei Shōnagon or Emperor Sutoku, or identifying it with ancient shrines mentioned in the *Engishiki*.<sup>23</sup> The priests of Konkōin, like those at other important religious institutions during the Edo period, collected cultural objects, bolstering their positions through conspicuous consumption, commissioning screens, scrolls, and ritual images as well as receiving donations of valuable art objects from neighboring lords. By the mid-nineteenth century, then, Kompira had be-

come for a limited elite not only a popular pilgrimage site but also a storehouse of culture.

Both the popular and the elite cultural versions of Kompira survived and flourished in the Meiji era. From the early 1870s, however, more and more people threw their weight behind promoting the shrine as an imperial and cultural institution. The Shinto priests of the shrine -- and, increasingly, local elites eager for profitable associations with the semi-governmental organization -- worked concertedly to publicize not just the "civilized" culture of the shrine's artistic heritage (in contrast to what some saw as the "superstitious" culture of miracles and entertainment, unsuitable for the modern age), but, at the same time, the shrine's ties to the imperial house, now the symbolic center of modern Japan.<sup>24</sup> During the early years of Meiji, the priests of Kotohira capitalized upon the growing trend to display rare and unusual objects not in *kaichō* (for, as a Shinto shrine, Kotohira no longer had a carved worship image to display) but in nationally publicized expositions. In 1879 and 1880, expositions at Kotohira Shrine attracted more than 250,000 people to see objects shown no longer because of their miraculous, Buddhist attributes, but to dramatize the ties of the shrine to emperors or other cultural figures associated with the area.<sup>25</sup> In 1904, the priests built a two-story, western-style museum within the shrine grounds, making Kotohira the first shrine in the country to display Buddhist statues, scrolls, and other artifacts permanently in its own museum. Inns at the foot of the mountain likewise advertised western-style buildings and cultural displays, extolling the area's cultural heritage and worldly progress in an attempt to attract affluent, culturally knowledgeable guests to the town.

Tourist promotion -- which, in the area of Kompira, was one of the most important strategies of industrial development -- continued to rely heavily upon this cultural interpretation of the shrine in the twentieth century. As the nearby

<sup>21</sup> *Chōshi Kotohira* 3, p. 166.

<sup>22</sup> Jippensha Ikku, "Kompira sankei zoku hizakurige shohen," in *Hizakurige sono ta*, vol. 1, Nihon meichō zenshū, Edo bungei no bu 22, Tokyo: Nihon Meichō Zenshū Kankōkai, 1927.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Ishizu Ryōchō, "Kompirasen meisho zue" (ca. 1804-1818), in Kagawa-ken, ed., *Kagawa Sōsho* 3, Takamatsu: Kagawa-ken, 1943, 365-369.

<sup>24</sup> This imperial focus had, of course, existed before 1868 (especially in Konkōin's campaign for an imperial monopoly in the eighteenth century), but during the Meiji period it intensified and became more widespread.

<sup>25</sup> *Chōshi Kotohira* 3, 446.

ports of Takamatsu, Tadotsu, and Marugame competed for steamship traffic from across the Inland Sea, boat operators funded the publication of tour guides extolling the attractions of the area. Often singling out the shrine as the centerpiece of the region, they capitalized on the fame of the site by calling their publications, "Guide to Kotohira," or placing an image of the shrine or its famous insignia on the cover. The guidebooks functioned as cultural catalogs, filled with descriptions of the art, scenery, and history of the shrine and neighboring attractions that their publishers deemed worthy of the educated tourist's attention.<sup>26</sup>

In many ways, this cultural emphasis was due to the audience targeted by local promoters. Chambers of Commerce and business associations in Takamatsu, Kotohira and elsewhere focused on attracting the growing numbers of military officers, professionals, and well-to-do businessmen and their families who had the wherewithal to travel by rail or steamship, stay at the most luxurious hotels, order the most expensive meals, and buy the growing number of souvenirs sold at shops near the shrine. These people generally came from well-educated families of the rural gentry, proud of their local heritage and interested in the culture and history of the region. If they came from outside of the prefecture, many were interested in the culture and history of Kotohira as part of the national heritage as a whole. Some travelers kept diaries in which they recorded the number of objects on display, or commented on architectural details of shrine buildings. For these educated gentry, a visit to Kotohira Shrine was a chance to demonstrate their cultural and historical knowledge, and thus their erudition. This was not a new development in the Meiji period: guidebooks from earlier in the nineteenth century had related the local histories of monuments on the mountain, for instance. But in an age in which a familiarity with history, art, and culture increasingly marked a man as a knowledgeable subject of imperial Japan, many visitors valued their knowledge of the imperial ties and treasures of the shrine as evidence of

their participation in the broader "civilized" culture of the country's elite.

While schoolteachers and army officers increasingly toured Mt. Zōzu with guidebook in hand, thousands more travelers brought their money to Kotohira to offer to the god or pay for the women. The sheer economic power of these visitors encouraged many businessmen to focus on Kompira not so much as a site of sacred power or as a cultural treasure house, but as the basis for the economic future of the region. As in decades before, makers of amulet boxes and owners of brotels used Kompira's fame to advertise their wares throughout the Meiji era, supporting a flourishing economy rarely acknowledged by the guidebooks or the shrine.

In the late 1890s, the prefectural government began promoting the tourist business as well, seeing the drawing power of Kompira as a powerful engine for economic growth. Governor Tokuhisa, one of the most influential governors in the history of Kagawa Prefecture, spent more government money for the promotion of trade and manufacture per capita in Kagawa between 1896 and 1898 than did the governor of any other prefecture in the country. Around Kompira, this focused on tourism, not just for culturally minded elites but for any traveler with a coin to spend.<sup>27</sup> Soon after his appointment as governor, Tokuhisa toured the prefecture and gave his impressions to a reporter:

When I went to Kotohira Shrine, I learned that there are no fewer than three million pilgrims every year. Now, of these three million pilgrims, each person spends on an average 10 sen in the area, which adds up to 300,000 yen. If the pilgrims increased their spending to one yen each, that would be three million yen. Even if it were only one-third of that, it would be a large amount. It is the urgent work of this area to achieve that goal.

The first item of business is to get the pilgrims to spend more money. What industry would be most appropriate for this? At

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Nagata Soreji, *Kotohira Annaiki*, Osaka: Nagata Soreji, 1902.

<sup>27</sup> Saitō Osamu, "Meiji goki no fukun kangyō seisaku," *Keizai Kenkyū* 35, no. 3 (July 1984), 243.

Miyajima, they make plates and other items from the local pine trees and sell them. This brings in a significant amount of money. I notice that there are some nice dishes for sale in Kotohira. But these goods are not made in Kotohira; they are bought from Miyajima. ... If dishes were made, this would be a very profitable industry. In any case, if one made a souvenir in Kotohira, pilgrims would buy it and take it home.<sup>28</sup>

Business groups, both in Kotohira and throughout the prefecture, swiftly pursued this approach. They established a trade school in Kotohira to make chopsticks and other souvenirs patterned after Miyajima and Ise. The town built a park, and inn keepers constructed new inns and amenities at the nearby hot springs, advertising the new resort to military officers and their families. The journalistic and business community of Takamatsu increasingly spoke of Kotohira not as a beneficent deity but as a site of economic development. Proclaimed one editorial in 1897, "Kotohira! Use your god-given capital to make an entertainment fairyland! ... Add to the well-known spiritual sites and advertise yourselves to the world as a great paradise of entertainment."<sup>29</sup> The business leaders of Kagawa Prefecture thus joined together around the pilgrimage not as worshipers but as regional planners, eager to promote economic exploitation of the mountain and its pilgrimage.

As entrepreneurs promoted a growing tourist economy based on Kompira, then, they simultaneously provided fodder for new identities to be forged around the sacred mountain. While thousands of people still flocked to the shrine to ask for miracles and enjoy the surrounding entertainments, hundreds of others responded to the growing literature on Kompira's imperial culture and artistic history. At the same time, promoters themselves could publicly debate over the best way to exploit the "capital" of the site. By the turn of the century, when people as far away as Tokyo identified Kagawa Prefecture as "where

Kompira-san is,"<sup>30</sup> their conceptions of the site may as easily have included the cultural or economic assets of the mountain as the miracles of the god.

### An Intellectual Divide

Despite their differences in emphasis, however, members of the shrine's Reverence Association, cultural connoisseurs and promoters of tourism generally shared a basic respect for the gods. Indeed, it was not infrequent for people to espouse a variety of these approaches to Kompira at different times. Joining the Reverence Association to pray for prosperity to an imperial *kami*, they then toured the mountain, paying a small fee to admire the gold-flecked screens and renowned Buddhist images on display in the shrine's office and museum. Arriving at their expensive inns for the evening, many would summon a *geisha* or venture out to the red-light district for the evening. Upon returning home, they might read the calls for tourist development in the newspaper and discuss the merits of such a move for the townspeople of Kotohira.

The miracles of the deity remained an important element in the mixture of worship, cultural appreciation, entertainment, and trade that made up the practices of pilgrimage. Throughout the Meiji period and well into the twentieth century, people continued to believe in the magical powers of the gods. They prayed to Kompira and bought amulets from the shrine to save them from accidents, give them long-awaited children, or ensure their profits on the stock market. The Reverence Association itself capitalized on the continuing attraction of amulets and prayer rituals to prospective members.

Yet from the 1870s on, an educated chorus grew that denounced this so-called "superstitious" reliance on magic. Priests at the shrine repeatedly exhorted believers to revere the deity for its own sake instead of petitioning it for miracles.<sup>31</sup> Most

<sup>28</sup> "Tokuhiisa chiji no monogatari," *Kagawa Shimpō*, 23 July 1896.

<sup>29</sup> "Shin Kotohira," *Kagawa Shimpō*, 15 August 1897.

<sup>30</sup> Miyoshi Tsunesaburō, "Waga shin'ai naru Sanuki seinen shoshi ni hitogoto su," *Sanuki gakuseikai zasshi* 13 (May 1901), 3.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Muramatsu Sūei, ed., *Kotohira miyage*,



vocal, however, were the growing numbers of journalists who prided themselves on their critical, logical, Western-style ideas. Even in the most conservative newspaper in Takamatsu, which wholeheartedly supported the formal worship of Kompira as an expression of civic virtue and upstanding social status, journalists ridiculed the "superstitions" of less educated believers. Articles and cartoons poked fun at a man who waited at the shrine to hear the voice of the god (and who was finally sent on his way by the train conductor speaking over the telephone), or a military recruit who buried his books on the mountain, praying that Kompira miraculously transfer the knowledge into his head.<sup>32</sup> In this way, regional elites reinforced their own idea of superiority based on their approach to the deity as an imperial grantor of respectful petitions, not the object of magical rituals revered by the majority of worshipers. Business leaders of the prefecture shared this bias, focusing tourist promotion efforts on well-heeled and educated visitors, despite the fact that, as one writer remarked, "those so-called gentlemen who wear Western-style clothes and beards are the customers who will not appreciate Kotohira, no matter what. Kotohira's everyday prosperity is due to the people in straw raingear (*minokasa*) and leggings."<sup>33</sup> Intellectual biases, translated into economic action, supported an increasingly negative image of rural folk and their faith.

Journalists and intellectuals from major cities outside the prefecture were even more critical. In 1912, when the priests of Kotohira Shrine and entrepreneurs of Kagawa Prefecture sought to attract large numbers of people to a great, three-month-long festival, they invited journalists from newspapers around the country to write about the town and shrine. In a series of articles in the *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, one journalist held up not just the worshipers but the entire town of Kotohira for ridicule. A prime example of the townspeople's stupidity, he wrote, was "the case

of Kotohira's useless bus," which operated briefly from the railroad station to nearby Kotaki Springs:

According to the talk of people in town, a salesman said that a simple bus was not interesting enough, and instead proposed the latest, best, clog-wearing bus. On each of its wheels were attached what looked like several wooden clogs. . . [An operator in Kotohira] happily bought and drove it. He kept taking off his own clogs and putting them on the wheels, until after a short while, he went out of business.<sup>34</sup>

Whether or not the tale was based on even a small grain of truth, it dramatically illustrated the viewpoint spread in national newspapers that Kotohira was a place of stupid entertainments left untouched by modern civilization: a site treasured only by a poor, uneducated rural population still steeped in ignorance. Whereas regional promoters had extolled Kotohira as a cultural repository and thus, in some respects, a picture of the past, these journalists depicted it as an uncivilized backwater. Such critical views established a series of tensions defined according to religious practice and location. Urban journalists and intellectuals despised the rural folk not only because of their beliefs but because of their location in the countryside.

Meanwhile, rural residents looked askance at the urban visitors, dolled up in their top hats. In the eyes of many, denigrating remarks about Kompira -- the famous symbol of Kagawa Prefecture as a whole -- reflected upon regional identity as well. The Chamber of Commerce in Takamatsu, for instance, was appalled when these ridiculing stories hit the presses, finding in them not just a criticism of the ignorant peasants, which they had perpetuated themselves, but a dismissal of the entire region.<sup>35</sup> Kompira, after all, was the pride of the prefecture, and much of the area's income was reliant upon its image on the national scene. Just as intellectuals in Tokyo

Kotohira: Kyokuō Gakkai, 1897, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> "Denwa o kakeru Kompirasen," in *Kagawa Shimpō*, 10 June 1911; "Kimyō no shingan," in *Kagawa Shimpō*, 7 February 1908.

<sup>33</sup> Ezawa Shō, "Kotohirachō no shūeki," *Kagawa Shimpō*, 22 October 1898.

<sup>34</sup> "Kotohira mairi" 4, *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, 4 March 1912.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., "Manzoku suruya ikan," *Kagawa Shimpō*, 17 March 1912, 1.

and elsewhere joined a fellowship of urban skeptics through their criticisms of Kompira and the gullibility of rural worshipers, then, so too did worshipers, vendors, and many regional boosters unite against the comments of their attackers.

Worship sites such as Kompira, then, functioned not only as arenas for the formation of new identities, but also as standards by which different interest groups measured themselves and others. Both religious centers and regional symbols, these sites anchored the identities of the people who worked and lived nearby, as well as those who prayed and made pilgrimages from farther away. How someone approached the shrine in many ways defined who he or she was -- an urban intellectual and skeptic; a cultural connoisseur; a respected leader of the community; a devout believer blessed by the *kami*; or someone simply eager for a break from the routine, out on an adventure. Many of these identities overlapped, which is what gave Kompira and other sites like it the power to become both unifying and divisive symbols of various social, economic, as well as intellectual communities.

As Kompira changed in the eyes of its beholders, so, too, changed the beholders themselves. When the sacred domain became an official organ of the Meiji state, associates of the new shrine were incorporated into a hierarchy that culminated in Tokyo. When urban intellectuals defined the shrine no longer as an institution of present power but as a site that enshrined either an imperial or an uncivilized past, they defined themselves as self-consciously modern, civilized imperial subjects.

As may be expected in the modern period, the language and iconography of the imperial nation-state became an important part of much popular interaction with shrines such as Kompira. But the story of modern Japan is far more than the dominance of the nation-state. It is how village elites vied for status in the shrine association or led their communities on pilgrimage during wartime, dramatizing their own positions of leadership through the performance of semi-official rituals. It is how regional promoters used local shrines to maintain their place on the cultural, touristic map of the nation. It is how urban intellectuals used pilgrimage sites and their worshipers as a foil against which to define their own,

self-consciously skeptical, supposedly "Western" identity. And it is how the majority of the rural population continued to seek in the gods the answer to problems beyond their own capacity to solve.

The localized history of famous places like Kompira reveals the processes through which people reshaped early modern into modern Japan using familiar, site-specific strategies in a changed context. It highlights the ways in which they established their places in the modern nation: as members of communities defined in part by their approaches to the sites of the gods. It was not just through action at the local level, then, but through interaction with the specificities of the local landscape, that the people of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japan shaped the complex webs of community and identity that characterize local, regional, and national society as we know it today.

