

## Japan

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**Janine Anderson Sawada**

***Faith in Mount Fuji: The Rise of Independent Religion in Early Modern Japan***

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 294 pages. Hardcover, \$68.00; paperback, \$28.00. ISBN 9780824887889 (hardcover), 9780824890469 (paperback).

Janine Anderson Sawada's monograph provides intriguing insights into the relation between popular religions, mountain asceticism, and new religions in the early modern period at Japan's most famous mountain. Mount Fuji was an object of worship and the destination of many pilgrimages by commoners from the nearby metropolis Edo (today's Tokyo) and villages throughout the country in Japan's early modern Edo period (1603–1867). These associations of worshippers are commonly referred to as Fuji confraternities, or *Fujikō* in Japanese. In her book, Anderson Sawada discusses the origins and early development of these groups, their material and ritual culture, and their unique religious views that included a frugal work ethic and novel ideas about women's spiritual roles at Fuji.

The religious culture of Mount Fuji has experienced significant attention in the past by scholars such as H. Byron Earhart (2011), who provided likely the most comprehensive historical overview of Mount Fuji's religious and cultural significance in his monograph *Mount Fuji: Icon of Japan*; Miyazaki Fumiko (2005), who has studied women's unique role in the Fuji movement; and Royall Tyler (1993), who also translated some of the primary sources referenced in Anderson Sawada's book. Anderson Sawada, whose previous research was on vernacular religious and intellectual movements in the transitional period from the Japanese early modern to modern periods, brings new and interesting trains of thought to the study of Mount Fuji. Her monograph combines a deep dive into the topic of Fuji confraternities based on primary sources with an understandable and entertaining writing style. This makes it perfect for both readers experienced in the fields of mountain asceticism and popular religions and readers new to the subject.

The book can be divided into two parts that discuss the *Fujikō* movement during different stages of its development under two of its most influential figures. The first part, consisting of chapters 1 and 2, discusses the late medieval origins of the confraternities surrounding the mountain ascetic Kakugyō Tōbutsu, who is often seen as the Fuji movement's founder. Chapter 1 discusses the general religious landscape in which the Fuji movement developed. Chapter 2 highlights one important aspect of the Fuji movement's material and ritual culture, paper talismans called *ominuki*, which facilitated the early growth of the confraternities through their usage in healing rituals.

The second part discusses the *Fujikō* in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries, when Jikigyō Miroku systematized and expanded their spiritual and sociopolitical views into a cohesive religious system. Chapter 3 introduces Jikigyō's

concept of a Fuji deity, whom he saw as a creator deity. Chapter 4 discusses the relation between religious views of frugality in the Fuji movement and the prayer rituals associated with the talisman economy. While the Fuji movement seemed to criticize the established modes of this economy in early modern Japan, as Anderson Sawada points out, in reality they are only criticizing the fact that people rely on other deities for salvation, instead of the creator deity of Mount Fuji, who would bring more direct benefits. This chapter was especially interesting in dispelling the misconception that religion and economy are two separate entities. As others have also pointed out, understanding the close relation between these two entities is essential in understanding Japanese religion (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 256). Lastly, chapter 5 discusses the reform efforts that arose in the Fuji movement, which tried to advise the Shogunate on the proper way to govern the country. Anderson Sawada argues that Jikigyō Miroku's suicide in 1733 was the culmination of these cries for reform. She therefore argues that his version of Fuji devotionalism also includes a sociopolitical aspect.

Interspersed throughout these chapters, Anderson Sawada discusses a wide range of different topics that include popular religions, mountain asceticism, and new religions. From my own academic background in the study of Japanese new religions, I thought that the parallels Anderson Sawada highlights between the early modern Fuji confraternities and new religions, which are usually thought to have emerged during the nineteenth century, were very important for the study of Japanese new religions. There has been a trend in this field to question the dichotomy between new and established religions, and Anderson Sawada's book provides an important case study in this discussion.

Including a plethora of approaches, such as material and ritual culture, and fields in one study would be an easy way to overwhelm the reader. However, Anderson Sawada manages to combine these viewpoints into one comprehensive picture of the early *Fujikō* movement. She has also shown in her previous monograph *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Anderson Sawada 2004) that she is capable of effectively combining multiple themes in her research. Being able to utilize an interdisciplinary approach to research is an important skill that is especially valued in early twenty-first-century academia, and Anderson Sawada's book is a welcome example of how to do it.

That said, while her book works well as a guided tour on first reading, the inclusion of multiple themes and approaches can make the work difficult for later reference. The book sometimes lacks a clear sense of structure, jumping from one topic to the next. A good example of this is the section "Healing Practices in the Early Fuji Community" (69–76) in chapter 2. This section connects well with the previous section on talismans and showcases their usage in healing rituals but then turns into a general overview of the establishment of early Fuji communities midway through without any indication of this fact in the section's title or structure. The index somewhat remedies this structural flaw, and its usage while reading is therefore advisable.

Nonetheless, I can only warmly recommend Anderson Sawada's book to anyone interested in the religious culture of Mount Fuji or any of the book's broader themes, such as material culture, mountain asceticism, or new religions.

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