Chapter 4

World Cultural Heritage and women's exclusion from sacred sites in Japan

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Introduction

Who or what do heritage designations privilege? Alternatively, who or what is excluded? Can the study of a premodern religious tradition or a putative religious tradition inform our study of the modern formation of cultural heritage? Scholarship from a range of disciplines has exposed the invented and contrived aspects of tradition, the highly constructed and contested nature of heritage, and the labor involved in producing and maintaining sacred space. In parallel, scholars in history and cultural studies have raised important questions concerning understandings and negotiations of the past after the advent of modernity. Western scholarship on Japan mirrors these larger moves to deconstruct tradition, heritage, and modernity, but key aspects of their interconnections and *in situ* contours remain underexplored. Little published scholarship to date, for example, has scrutinized the discrepancies between the religious and historical record of Japanese heritage sites and their presentation in scholarly and public discourses.

The present endeavor queries this contradiction: women's exclusion from sacred sites (*nyonin kekkai*, *nyonin kinsei*) appears frequently in scholarly and public discourses as a time-honored cultural practice in Japan and can be observed on the ground, yet it is consistently deleted from the nation's official heritage narratives. Women's exclusion is actively enforced at two Japanese sites recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage: Mt. Ōmine of "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" (designated in 2004) and Okinoshima of "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region" (designated in 2017).[1] Proponents of the ban at both sites claim legitimation from ancient sources, and many advocates boldly present the custom as a special determinant of the sacredness of the place. At the same time, World Heritage documentation written by Japanese authorities expunges altogether or greatly diminishes the fact of male-only access in its presentations of the sites. In contrast to the Japanese cases, the religious exclusion of women from another sacred mountain site recognized as World Heritage, Mt. Athos in Greece, is clearly stated in all documentation.[2] I begin this chapter with a brief consideration of tradition, heritage, and the place of women's exclusion in those discourses.

Tradition, heritage, exclusion

"Tradition" (*dentō*) forms part of the discourse on Japan's entry into modernity in the Meiji period (1868–1912), a time of great social and political upheaval when practices of the past—many religious in nature—were either carefully protected and maintained or redefined and reformulated in the interests of a new juxtaposition of past and present. Since the 1980s, a robust body of research has made strides in clarifying the dynamics of tradition-making (e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger et al. 1983; Graburn 2001), but many studies by Japanese authors that mention tradition remain largely under the purview of folklore studies, with concomitant limitations, and critical perspectives are often ignored by tradition-makers—not least those who create heritage. The nativist ethnological work of Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) marks the beginning of Japanese discourse on tradition and, as part of it, the first study of women's exclusion. Traversing a landscape of great social change and intermittent warfare, Yanagita longed to find the origins of Japanese culture. In remote mountain communities, he claimed to have found an original, unadulterated, and unrecorded Japan that was grounded in "ancient communal beliefs that local people held firm in their hearts" (Yanagita 1936, 232). Behind Yanagita's efforts looms a strong consciousness of Japan's modern nation-state and a clear aim to excavate a "Japanese" ethos. The Yanagita folklore mentality has been vulnerable to methodological criticism on numerous grounds, but parts of it have not yet been unraveled.

The earliest Japanese works on tradition per se (e.g., Hariu 1966; Dentō to Geijutsu no Kai et al. 1968) focus on clarifying the "Japanese mentality" of the performing arts using sociological methods. More recent works by philosopher Umehara Takeshi (2010) and literary critic Ōtsuka Eiji (2004) claim to take a distanced historical approach to studying tradition. Umehara argues that much of what has been recognized as "Japanese tradition" since the late nineteenth century is little more than nationalism in disguise. Ōtsuka traces the indigenous consciousness of "Japanese traditions" to the early Shōwa period (1926–1989), in connection with the scholarly lineage of Yanagita. Yet these works, too, indulge in a kind of modernist nostalgia in their attempt to parse the foreign from the Japanese. In 2001 Suzuki Masataka wrote, "since its inception, [the field of folklore studies] has firmly upheld the standpoint of Japanese observing and reflecting upon themselves" (2001, 69). Critical studies of tradition in Japan have been impeded by these particularizing and emic approaches to understanding Japanese cultural practices.

Most global research on heritage, on the other hand, has referred to Western contexts and concepts. A few recent works by international scholars have contributed important insights on heritage in East Asia, but they contain scant discussion of religion, gender, or World Heritage Sites.[3] In contrast, a wealth of scholarship in Japanese addresses the technical aspects of tangible heritage objects—often religious in nature—such as buildings, statues, and paintings within fields like archaeology and architectural conservation. In these works, there is little room for issues like gender, social setting, religious practice, or sacrality. Studies of this kind, and those published under the auspices of national research institutes or government-sponsored World Heritage promotional committees, represent "authorized heritage discourse" (Smith 2006, 299). As a general observation, most Japanese research fails to critically engage the meanings and practices of "tradition" and "heritage" or the historical conditioning of those meanings and practices.

Nearly all Japanese scholarship that mentions women's exclusion, for instance, presents the phenomenon as an ancient and unchanged fact of Japan's religious and cultural landscape.[4] Women's exclusion is generally conceptualized in terms of two similar-sounding four-character phrases: *nyonin kekkai* and *nyonin kinsei*. The terms convey a variety of gender-based proscriptions, including barring women's entry from certain sites (e.g., shrines, temples, festival floats) or from certain occupations (e.g., sumo wrestling, sake brewing, kiln firing, sushi chef). Of course, some of the foregoing gender differentiations are not unique to Japan. Many global sporting, fishing/boating, and hunting cultures, for example, either did or still do maintain exclusionary practices. In Japan, some evidence of exclusionary practices can be found at nearly every mountain site with historical ties to Buddhist and/or Shinto worship traditions, but most territorial proscriptions were dissolved in 1872, when a Meiji government edict legally opened all mountain shrine and temple land to women.[5] The two focal points of this chapter, Mt. Ōmine and Okinoshima, are often touted as the last bastions of women's exclusion in Japan.[6]

Mt. Ōmine

Unlike Mt. Fuji, immediately discernible for its grand conical shape, Mt. Ōmine denotes a surreptitiously vast assemblage of peaks in southern Nara Prefecture. The name Mt. Ōmine is also synonymous with Sanjōgatake, a 1719-meter peak located in the central part of the range.[7] The term "religious tradition" (*shūkyōteki dentō*) is ubiquitous at the mountain; one finds it on signboards and it recurs often in conversation to describe and explain the ban on women. This mode of historical summation presents the practice of restricting access to the Sanjōgatake peak as ancient and little changed since the time of En no Gyōja (634?–701?), a layman who legendarily "founded" the mountain by establishing a body of ascetic practices and beliefs later defined as Shugendō.[8]

Shugendō practitioners revere Sanjōgatake as their spiritual heartland, for on its craggy precipices En no Gyōja is said to have summoned the wrathful deity Zaō Gongen. Extant diaries, and also objects found at the peak such as bronze sutra containers and gold buddha statues, confirm that the peak was a pilgrimage destination for elite male courtiers since the late Heian period (around the year 1000).[9] Local literature and scholarly accounts routinely cite a tenth-century Chinese encyclopedia, known in Japanese as the *Giso rokujō*, as even earlier—and continental—substantiation of the mountain's exceptional and exclusive features. The Chinese account characterizes Sanjōgatake (here called Kinpusen) as a "supreme other world" where the bodhisattva Zaō resides; it then enumerates austerities men must undertake in preparation for climbing it (three months without alcohol, meat, or sex) and states in no uncertain terms that women cannot ascend the holy peak (Yichu and Fushu 1979, 459).[10] Yet this account provides little evidence of whether an ancient practice of women's exclusion actually existed, and some even question the authenticity of the entire *Giso rokujō*.[11]

Previous scholarship on women's exclusion focuses on origins and early development, presenting a range of theorizations based on a small body of premodern texts (e.g., literary sources, hagiographies, temple regulations), which includes the *Giso rokujō*.[12] We know very little about the broader context of these sources, however, such as for whom they were written, who was aware of them, or how they reflected practices on the ground. All we really know is who penned them: aristocratic men and male clerics. Material evidence (e.g., stone pillars, steles, halls) related to *nyonin kekkai/nyonin kinsei* at Mt. Ōmine traces back only as far as the eighteenth century. A stone pillar on the Yoshino side of the mountain dates to 1865 and bears an inscription noting that it replaced a stone from 1754, but a mountain guidebook from 1671 that describes the same place makes no mention of the ban or the stone marker. As far as I am aware, the Meiji government edict that legally abolished women's exclusion in fact constitutes the first documentary evidence that discusses the practice in contemporary terms, neither locating it in the past nor referring to it as an ancient custom. In short, owing to a paucity of historical and material sources, many of the premodern contours of women's exclusion from Sanjōgatake and other mountain locales remain shrouded in mystery (e.g., its origins, enforcement, reception, and fluctuation over time).[13]

At the same time, women's exclusion is not simply a poorly understood relic of the past—it is also immediately discernible in the present. Wooden boundary gates and stone pillars stand at the four trailheads to Sanjōgatake, accompanied by bilingual signage warning women against advancing further toward the summit (see Figure 4.1).[14] The mountain's male-only access was a topic of lively and sometimes heated debate throughout the twentieth century. The ban was also regularly contested by both men and women on various occasions. The three main Shugendō-affiliated temples (Kinpusenji in Yoshino and Shōgoin and Daigoji in Kyoto) even attempted to lift the ban in 1999, as part of commemorative efforts related to the sacred founder En no Gyōja's 1300th Death Anniversary in the year 2000.[15]

A movement to designate a collection of sacred sites in the Kii Peninsula (Nara, Wakayama, and Mie Prefectures), including Sanjōgatake, as a World

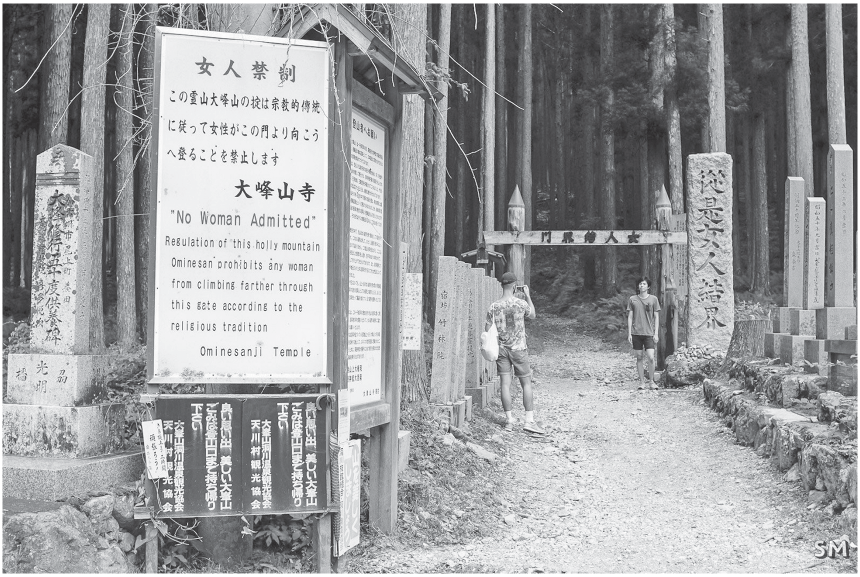
女人禁制
この霊山大峰山の掟は宗教的傳統に従って女性がこの門より向こうへ登ることを禁止します
大峰山寺
"No Woman Admitted"
Regulation of this holly mountain Ominesan prohibits any woman from climbing farther through this gate according to the religious tradition
Ominesanji Temple
女人結界門
従是女人結界
SM

Figure 4.1 Sanjōgatake trailhead, Mt. Ōmine. Photograph courtesy of Sebastian Mayer on assignment with the author, 2015.

Heritage Site took shape in the early 2000s. Wakayama prefectural authorities first sought to promote Nachi Waterfall and Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine (one of the three Kumano Sanzan shrines) to World Heritage status in the early 1990s (Fujii Yasuo, in discussion with the author, 10 January 2017). Following the 1995 designation of "Routes of Santiago de Compostela: Camino Francés and Routes of Northern Spain" (the routes in France were added in 1998), however, which set a precedent for including pilgrimage routes in addition to single properties, priests at Kinpusenji (a Buddhist temple in Yoshinoyama and one of the aforementioned three main Shugendō-affiliated Buddhist temples connected to Mt. Ōmine) and local authorities concocted a new plan to include the shrines of Kumano, Mt. Kōya, Yoshino-Mt. Ōmine, and six pilgrimage routes connecting them (McGuire 2013, 331). Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō, hereafter ACA) added "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" (*Kii sanchi no reijō to sankei michi*) to its tentative list in 2000; the nomination was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List the following year.

The World Heritage campaign received broad support from religious devotees and local community members, but not all supported the endeavor—some people, in fact, mobilized in opposition to it. In 2001, the Nara Women's History Research Group (Nara Joseishi Kenkyūkai, founded in 1996), for example, organized a symposium with local residents, mountain devotees, and the tourism board of Dorogawa, a small village at the southern base of Sanjōgatake, to discuss gender discrimination in the context of tradition and custom at the mountain (Okura 2001, 32). In 2003, the I-Net Women's Association of Nara (Ai-netto Josei Kaigi Nara, founded in 1962) called meetings with Nara prefectural authorities, the World Heritage promotional committee, and the three Shugendō temples cited above to discuss women's exclusion in the context of the World Heritage designation (Usui 2005, 208).

That same year, scholar and advocate Minamoto Junko launched an association with the specific aim of lifting the ban on women at Mt. Ōmine ("Ōminesan Nyonin Kinsei" no Kaihō o Motomeru Kai). Minamoto's group collected more than twelve thousand signatures protesting the designation, ranging from women who had flaunted the ban and climbed Mt. Ōmine to Dorogawa local people and even male temple priests. The signatures were sent along with a petition to review the legality of women's exclusion to various national, prefectural, and local parties engaged in the World Heritage effort, as well as to the World Heritage Centre. A large sum of public tax money had been used to promote the World Heritage campaign, the petition asserted, and several roads and trails within the restricted realm occupy public land and had received public funds for repairs.[16] The document also charged that the ban on women violated the United Nations Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted in 1979 and ratified by Japan in 1985), the Japanese Constitution, the 1999 Fundamental Law on Gender Equality (*Danjo kyōdō sankaku shakai kihonhō*), and numerous other prefectural and local regulations.[17] On the ground, moreover, small protests erupted at the trailheads to Sanjōgatake and on the temple steps in Yoshino and Dorogawa. Others opted for less polite means of expressing disapproval, as evidenced by the vandalization of the gates and signposts meant to stop women from climbing the restricted peak.

None of the opposition efforts were effective in halting the bid. Citing "tradition" and rejecting the notion that exclusionary practices were discriminatory or illegal, Mt. Ōmine's managing bodies, local community leaders, prefectural authorities, and other major stakeholders in the effort responded by reaffirming with a united voice that the mountain would remain closed to women. In the months leading up to the World Heritage decision, the managing bodies of Sanjōgatake (a collective of five area temples) installed a new signboard at all four gates of the bounded realm declaring that the ban would "resolutely" remain in place. Women's exclusion, the notice read, was a religious tradition constructed by a myriad people—including many women—over the course of a thousand years and must be respected.[18]

Whereas parties on both sides of the issue openly acknowledged the existence of (and ongoing controversy over) women's exclusion, the 260-page nomination dossier for "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" authored by the ACA and accepted by the World Heritage Committee makes not a single mention of it (Government of Japan 2004). The document describes Mt. Ōmine as "the most important sacred mountain" whose reputation "had reached as far as China" by the tenth century, clearly referencing the Chinese encyclopedia (ibid., 21). The carefully crafted dossier, which marks the culmination of over a decade of planning and approval at various levels of authority, consciously omits one of the most significant features of Mt. Ōmine.

Okinoshima

We find a similar state of affairs in the case of Okinoshima. Okinoshima rises from the rough waters of the Genkai Sea roughly sixty kilometers from the coast of northern Kyushu, a tiny speck of land barely four kilometers in circumference (see Figure 4.2). The island is small, remote, and uninhabited, save for a single male priest of Munakata Grand Shrine, yet it occupies a central node in current representations of Japan's cultural and religious heritage. The twentieth-century excavation of a massive cache of archaeological remains on the island catapulted it to global fame, inspiring grand narratives about Japan's premodern polity and modern nation.[19] Unlike many other ancient sacred sites in Japan, moreover, the significance of Okinoshima and Munakata in the mythology of the early Yamato rulers' imperial-style sphere (fifth to eighth centuries) can be documented. Japan's official dynastic history, the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, compiled 720), and two other premodern texts purported to record

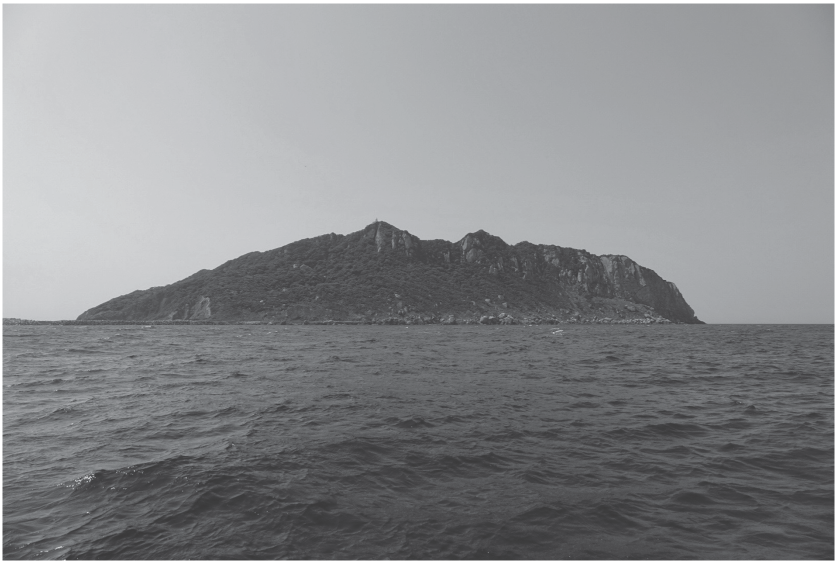

Figure 4.2 Okinoshima photographed by the author, a woman who received permission from Munakata Grand Shrine to circle the island by boat from a distance of two kilometers, 2017.

ancient histories of the gods, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, compiled 712?) and the *Kujiki* (Record of Matters from the Past, compiled tenth century?), characterize Okinoshima (here referred to as Okitsushima) as the abode of one of the three Munakata goddesses who are today worshipped at the three locations of Munakata Grand Shrine: Okinoshima, Ōshima, and Tashima.[20]

Munakata Grand Shrine presently enforces a set of religious taboos on the island: taboos regarding water purification, speaking about the island, removing anything from the island, and women accessing the island. Okinoshima's least understood and most sensitive taboo concerns the exclusion of women. Female deities are worshipped at the three Munakata Shrines, yet shrine authorities prohibit all women from landing ashore. According to one popular perspective, women's bodily impurities would defile the island, anger its female deity, and provoke calamities. Lore concerning jealous and angry female deities can also be heard at other sacred sites in Japan that did or do prohibit women, including Mt. Ōmine. Although it is a binding regulation today, and despite the widely repeated claim that no woman has ever touched foot on Okinoshima's rocky shores, this taboo is surprisingly difficult to historicize. To my knowledge, no premodern sources (including detailed accounts of the island and its associated taboos written in the eighteenth century) make any mention of women's exclusion from the island. Available sources, drawn mostly from oral accounts, suggest that the ban crystallized in the modern period and has more to do with the professions of fishermen and military matters than anything else. In contrast, the other taboos associated with Okinoshima that are indeed attested to in historical documents from the Edo period have been continuously and egregiously broken throughout the twentieth century.

A World Heritage promotional committee ("Munakata, Okinoshima to Kanren Isangun" Sekai Isan Suishin Kaigi) formed in 2009, when the serial nomination "Munakata, Okinoshima and Associated Sites" (*Munakata, Okinoshima to kanren isangun*) was added to Japan's tentative list of candidates for World Heritage consideration.[21] The committee sponsored more than twenty conferences, symposia, exhibitions, and study reports, which encompassed a wide range of disciplines (e.g., archaeology, history and prehistory, politics, topography, regional exchange and comparison, religion and ritual).[22] A manga titled *Umi no tami Munakata: Genkainada no mamorigami* (Munakata, people of the sea: the gods who protect the Genkai Sea) was published in 2015 under the auspices of the promotional committee as well.

Little evidence of discussion or debate—disclosure even—regarding women's exclusion can be found in materials related to Okinoshima's World Heritage effort. Within the 1092 pages of study reports published between 2011 and 2013, for instance, women's exclusion appears only a handful of times. Historian Hattori Hideo wrote that "the Munakata goddesses are tender to women" (Hattori 2011, 197), yet questioned why premodern texts articulate all other taboos except for the prohibition of women. Kawakubo Noriko of Munakata Grand Shrine acknowledged that "it is difficult to find answers about the psychological and chronological origins of the system of not allowing women on the island according to the religious faith in the Three Goddesses of Munakata" (Kawakubo 2011, 335). Shinto scholar Norman Havens offered the intriguing proposition that female shamans (*miko*), who held an important role in "proto-Shinto," may have been riding on board ships with male priests and could have even had a presence on Okinoshima in the early ritual phases, but were subsequently banned from the island after the introduction of Buddhism (Havens 2012, 90–91). The ban on women is mentioned in passing on four other occasions in the extensive study reports (Akimichi 2012, 164; Kaner 2012, 52; Mori 2011, 285; Mori 2013, 103).

The 2015 promotional manga discusses women's exclusion in the most detail. One episode weaves together a historical event—the offering of Munakata Amako no Iratsume, daughter of Munakata no Kimi Tokuzen, as a consort to Prince Ōama no Miko (631–686), a young man who would later ascend the throne as the Heavenly Sovereign Tenmu (r. 673–686)—with a fictional account of a young girl learning the "rule" (*okite*) of women's exclusion from Okinoshima. The girl's father refuses to take her to the island, instructing her to learn from her mother how to cook while he and the other men go to sea. The episode climaxes with the girl standing alone, looking out to sea, with tears streaming down her face. "Why was I not born a boy?" she asks the gods (Ōga and Munakata City World Heritage Promotion Committee 2015, 172) (see Figure 4.3).

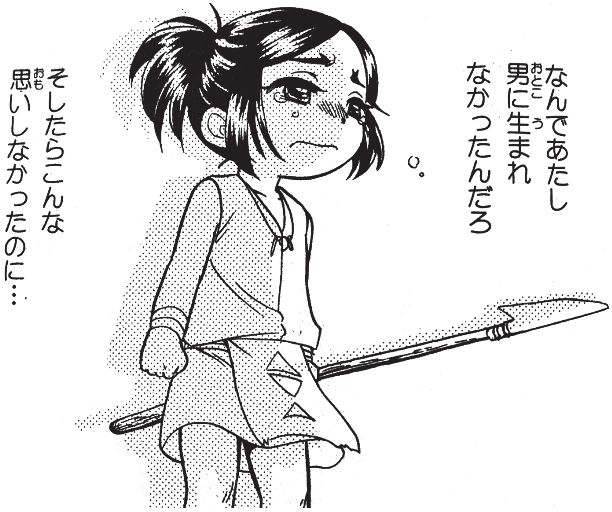
なんであたし男に生まれなかったんだろ
そしたらこんな思いしなかったのに…

Figure 4.3 Iratsume lamenting her female birth. In *Umi no tami Munakata: Genkainada no mamorigami* (Ōga and Munakata City World Heritage Promotion Committee 2015), 172. Photo courtesy of the promotion committee.

In other forums unrelated to the World Heritage effort, the shrine's access policies gained steady attention from July 2015, when Okinoshima's tentative World Heritage status was publicly announced. Countless news reports, domestic and international, questioned outright whether a male-only island should be confirmed as World Heritage. As an example, the US-based Universal Society of Hinduism issued a written appeal to the World Heritage Committee, urging them to reject the inscription unless women were permitted the same status as men on the island. The society's president, American-Indian Rajan Zed, pointed out that gender equality is one of UNESCO's two "Global Priorities," and that the organization ought not reward sites that "refused to treat women with [the] equality and respect they deserved" (*Eurasia Review* 2017).[23]

In July 2017, the World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region" on the World Heritage List. The external advisory body evaluation by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) noted twice that no women are allowed on the island (ICOMOS 2017, 137, 147). Two passing mentions of women's exclusion can be found buried within the 291-page nomination text, which was prepared by the ACA and accepted by the World Heritage Committee. First, the description of the nominated properties notes Okinoshima's taboos and states that "women are not allowed to visit the island" (Government of Japan 2017, 32). Second, the section titled "Faith and taboos today" states that "historical documents from the seventeenth century mention the island and its taboos, such as the prohibition of women visiting the island, and the prohibition of visitors removing any object from the island, even a tree branch or a pebble" (Government of Japan 2017, 92). To my knowledge, no historical documentation about Okinoshima and Munakata shrine exists from the seventeenth century at all. In the early eighteenth century, Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714) published two new histories of the Chikuzen region (present-day Munakata) and the shrines, and in those histories stipulated taboos associated with Okinoshima, but women's exclusion is not included among them.[24]

Neither the "Executive Summary" of the site's nomination file written by the Japanese government nor the "Statement of Outstanding Universal Value" adopted by the World Heritage Committee—in short, the official World Heritage descriptions of Okinoshima—disclose the fact that women specifically are excluded.[25] The "Executive Summary" notes that "the people of the Munakata region today still uphold strict taboos limiting access to the island and worshipping it from afar" (Government of Japan 2017, 5). The "Statement of Outstanding Universal Value" states only that "[e]xisting restrictions and taboos contribute to maintaining the aura of the island as a sacred place" (UNESCO 2017, 19).

At the forty-first session of the World Heritage Committee in July 2017, just before the inscription of Okinoshima was affirmed, the Japanese delegation was asked to explain the island's male-only access. The response, read by Satō Kuni, the sole female Ambassador of the Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO, was brief: "As a matter of principle, the access to the island of Okinoshima has been restricted to the priests of the Munakata Grand Shrine and priests are male by its tradition."[26] Men's access to Okinoshima is indeed also strictly limited today, but this was not always the case. From the late nineteenth century until 1952, the island was owned by the Japanese government and used for military purposes, to which end more than two hundred soldiers were stationed on Okinoshima at points during the Russo-Japanese and Pacific Wars. From 1963, men were permitted on the island once a year (27 May) to commemorate a 1905 naval battle. Munakata Grand Shrine canceled this event in perpetuity on 15 July 2017, six days after the World Heritage inscription was confirmed, stating that they would like to plan a commemorative event open to all.

Creating heritage, erasing tradition?

How can we account for the paradoxical exclusion of women's exclusion from World Heritage documentation on Mt. Ōmine and Okinoshima? Although a full explanation for the omission is beyond the scope of this chapter, here I will briefly explore two avenues of investigation, one specific to women's exclusion and one more general concerning the meaning and practice of heritage.

First, I draw attention to the predominant framing of women's exclusion by academic, religious, and political authorities in Japan. The interpretive model put forth by Yanagita Kunio, the famous folklorist mentioned above, continues to influence scholarly and public perspectives. Yanagita argued that "natural and universal" (Yanagita 1916, 1) differences exist between men and women, and that a fundamental gender divide dictates which realms men and women can inhabit. Furthermore, Yanagita contended that, on the one hand, men fear women's power and so suppress their role in religious rituals, while, on the other hand, sacred space itself (or the deities that occupy it) possesses supernatural powers and a woman's transgression could literally turn her into a stone or a twisted tree. The "history" of women's exclusion that followed, penned by a string of male Japanese folklore scholars following Yanagita's lead, highlights these underlying symbolics and relies upon traditional literary accounts to explain and in some cases defend women's prohibition from certain "traditional" practices and sites.[27]

Palpable traces of Yanagita's essential (and essentializing) views of gender and space continue to circulate, especially at conservative religious establishments. Consider, for example, the framing of women's exclusion by Buddhist and Shinto authorities who participated in the World Heritage campaigns at Mt. Ōmine and Okinoshima. Gojō Kakugyō, former chief abbot of Kinpusenji (a Buddhist temple in Yoshinoyama and one of three main Shugendō-affiliated Buddhist temples connected to Mt. Ōmine) who also served a term as head priest of Ōminesanji (the temple on the restricted peak Sanjōgatake), writes of the prohibition as a religious matter rooted in gender distinction (*kubetsu*) rather than discrimination (*sabetsu*) (Gojō 1998, cited in McGuire 2013, 347–348). According to Tanaka Riten of Kinpusenji, the former head regent of the temple and chancellor of religious affairs of the Kinpusen lineage of Shugendō who led the drive for Mt. Ōmine's 2004 inscription, it is the man's role to conduct "training" (*shugyō*) at Sanjōgatake and then return home and bestow religious purification upon his wife and children (Tanaka 2015).

Nearly a century earlier, in 1936, Miyagi Shinga, former head priest of the temple Shōgoin in Kyoto (headquarters of the Honzan lineage of Shugendō), advanced a similar argument. In 1936, Miyagi described Sanjōgatake as a physical domain that mirrored "heavenly endowed differences between men and women" (Miyagi 1936, 3). He stated that stripping the mountain of its defining characteristic—a 1200-year-old religious tradition of male-only access—would destroy its sacredness and uniqueness. At the time Miyagi wrote this, Sanjōgatake (and the entire Ōmine mountain range) had just been designated as part of Yoshino-Kumano National Park (designated in 1936), a process that sparked heated debate over the mountain's access policies. Shortly after the designation, local residents and Shugendō devotees decided to recognize female climbers to Sanjōgatake so long as they did not enter the main hall at the mountaintop, but the decision was stopped by area mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*) who, armed with swords, formed a human chain to block the passage of women (Masutani, in discussion with the author, 19 July 2014). Then, after two newspaper articles falsely claimed that the mountain would be open to women for the first time that climbing season, powerful proponents of the ban (thirty-one men, including temple priests, leaders of powerful climbing guilds, headmen of the towns of Yoshino and Dorogawa, and National Park officials) banded together and with the approval of the governor of Nara Prefecture established women's exclusion as a "mountain rule" (*sanki*) in April 1936 ("Ōminesan nyonin kaihi mondai to kinsei iji ketsuji" 1936, 7). With eerie similarity to the events of 2004, National Park officials chose not to disclose women's exclusion in park literature, thus rendering invisible one of the park's most famous (and infamous) features.[28] Other conflicting matters, including private land ownership, logging on proposed park grounds, and industry interests, were resolved by simply redrawing the park map to exclude affected areas.

We can gauge the framing of women's exclusion on the Shinto side by looking at the position taken by the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō), a religious organization founded in 1946 with the explicit aim of "preserv[ing] Japanese religious tradition" (Jinja Honchō 2018). The Association wields considerable power, acting as a political lobbying group and as a religious organization that administratively guides the majority of the nation's shrines through such activities as setting ritual standards and appointing priests (the current head priest of Munakata Grand Shrine, Ashizu Takayuki, received his appointment from the Association). Through its affiliate political group Shintō Seiji Renmei (Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership), Jinja Honchō actively lobbies to repeal the 1999 Fundamental Law on Gender Equality. It strongly advocates for "distinctions based on sexual difference" (*danjokan no seisa no kubetsu*) and opposes the 1999 law because it promotes gender equality "without regard to sex" (*seibetsu ni kakawari naku*) (Hardacre 2005, 241–242).[29]

Women's exclusion is presented as a neutral form of differentiation—not discrimination—in publications from UNESCO as well, despite the fact that the organization "promises" gender equality. *UNESCO's Promise: Gender Equality, a Global Priority*, a digital publication, emphasizes that UNESCO employs an approach of "gender mainstreaming in all programmes and activities" (UNESCO 2014, 3) and defines gender equality as situations in which "women and men equally enjoy the right to access, participate and contribute to cultural life" (UNESCO 2014, 14). In the preface to "In Focus: World Heritage and Gender Equality" (UNESCO 2016), a special edition of *World Heritage*, the journal of the World Heritage Centre, Centre Director Mechtild Rössler writes of "separate access for men and women only" at Japanese mountains (UNESCO 2016). In the same publication, mountaineer and comparative religion scholar Edwin Bernbaum recounts his journey up sacred Sanjōgatake and his wife's trek up a nearby peak, Inamuragatake, which is occasionally (although not historically) referred to as "Women's Ōmine" (*Nyonin Ōmine*) (Bernbaum and Inaba 2016, 23). Bernbaum fails to mention that Inamuragatake is enjoyed as a popular day hike by men and women alike, or that, unlike Sanjōgatake, no worship facilities or ritual sites can be found along the trail or at the summit (see DeWitt 2015, 152–155). In a second piece on Mt. Ōmine, heritage studies scholar Nobuko Inaba states that "Shugendo makes gender distinctions that place restrictions on women" and argues that the ban "should be dealt with primarily by its religious administration and their supporting local communities and followers" (Bernbaum and Inaba 2016, 24). Yet the claim of gender restrictions in Shugendō is false. Female Shugendō practitioners are widely acknowledged as a substantial (and continually rising) demographic today, comprising between thirty and fifty percent of instructors at Daigoji, Shōgoin, and Kinpusenji (Bunkachō 2018b). The head priests of those same temples even attempted to lift the ban on women in 1999, as noted above.

Echoing Yanagita and the folklore studies approach, the foregoing modes of interpretation reify the persistent and problematic perception of women's exclusion as an ancient and unchanged—indeed, unchangeable—religious tradition. By presenting women's exclusion as a strictly religious matter (as opposed to a social or political matter), religious and political authorities, who are simultaneously powerful heritage stakeholders, can explain the ban away or circumvent discussion of it altogether.

Second, we can cast light on the erasure of women's exclusion by zooming out and looking more generally at the forces at work in the promotion and maintenance of cultural heritage. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Gaimushō) defines cultural heritage as "a symbolic presence that integrates the history, traditions and culture of a country, region, or community" (Gaimushō 2016). The UNESCO definition of cultural heritage sites spans "works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view" (UNESCO 2008). Yet the realities of cultural heritage, in Japan or elsewhere, extend far beyond "symbolic presence" and "outstanding universal value." Countless studies of cultural heritage in Western contexts have clarified the deeply intertwined nature of heritage, power, and wealth.

Today, Japanese governmental agencies pour substantial resources into creating heritage. Funding from the ACA allocated to "preservation, utilization and succession of Japan's precious cultural properties," which supports tangible World Heritage Sites and domestic designations, amounted to 4.6 billion yen for the 2017 fiscal year and 4.7 billion yen for the 2018 fiscal year (Bunkachō 2018a). Prefectural and municipal as well as corporate and private revenues supplement national efforts and vary from case to case. As noted above, the three prefectural governments involved in the 2004 "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" inscription, which includes Mt. Ōmine, contributed roughly 182 million yen of public tax money to the effort over the three years leading up to the designation. Considering both the substantial financial costs and the expected financial rewards of a successful World Heritage designation, the disregard or silencing of oppositional voices might be expected.

Furthermore, because an elite cultural accolade like World Heritage status secures soft power and prestige for the nation, States Parties (in UNESCO terminology) tend to present selective and aggrandized visions of history, in particular those that reinforce national narratives and identities. As an example, Korea was largely marginalized in the World Heritage presentation of Okinoshima, but many of the ancient artifacts found on the island originate from the Korean peninsula, and transregional and transcultural interaction can be documented from the earliest phase of Okinoshima rituals.[30] In short, state instruments support and manage the vast majority of established cultural heritage resources, and thus cultural heritage ends up serving state interests. As a consequence, alternative or competing aspects of history that do not aid in and could in fact jeopardize the ultimate goal of securing World Heritage status are frequently airbrushed or ignored. Heritage and geography scholars John Tunbridge and Greg Ashworth discuss this as "dissonance" and argue that it forms an intrinsic part of heritage, one that "keeps at the forefront the ideas of discrepancy and incongruity" (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 20). Notably, heritage studies scholar Sophia Labadi's examination of World Heritage nomination dossiers discerns a clear marginalization of women, finding them positioned "at the margin of the text, history and heritage" and rendered "invisible, secondary and forgettable" (Labadi 2013, 92).

In addition to women's exclusion, the dossiers on Mt. Ōmine and Okinoshima omit other important elements of each site's biography. As noted above, the World Heritage presentation of Okinoshima privileges a particular narrative about Japan and diminishes the significance of Korea. The dossier on

Mt. Ōmine ignores key historical moments, such as the Meiji government's forced separation of Buddhist and Shinto practices (*shinbutsu bunri*) in the late nineteenth century and its devastating effects on Mt. Ōmine, and disregards the matter of discontinuous and unsubstantiated pilgrimage routes, which have been a topic of interest in Japan and appeared in the ICOMOS evaluation as potentially impinging upon the integrity of the nomination (ICOMOS 2004, 39). The ACA and Nara Prefecture have resisted bestowing domestic heritage status on the trail because it cannot be sufficiently documented as a historical route, largely due to the Meiji-era prohibition of Shugendō and the loss of the original routes (McGuire 2013, 331; DeWitt 2015, 35, 113–114). Here, as documented in many other general studies of heritage, cultural continuity supersedes historicity. Why, then, omit women's exclusion, which supporters consider as a valuable marker of cultural continuity?

Conclusion

Sketching the modern trajectory of women's exclusion within social and political discourses on tradition and heritage allows us to discern two distinct yet overlapping mobilizations of the past. First, the past denotes that against which the modern is measured: women's exclusion represents an anachronistic and inappropriate custom, precisely as charged by opponents. Second, specific cultural practices from the past come to be regarded as bearers of cultural continuity: women's exclusion represents a unique and unquestionable Japanese tradition, the position taken by religious and political authorities. Curiously, however, both mobilizations of the past can be observed simultaneously in contemporary cultural heritage discourse. On the one hand, the handling of women's exclusion in World Heritage documentation recalls the Meiji government's legal abolition of it (and of other religious practices, too) as a means to position Japan favorably vis-à-vis Western nations. On the other hand, by permitting the practice on the ground and framing it as an accepted form of religious gender differentiation, the current administration's understanding of religion (as set apart, beyond the realm of politics) contrasts the Meiji situation and instead recalls the Shōwa-era folklore studies perspective.

Just what do the cases presented in brief here enable us to say about religion, tradition, and the assessment and designation of Japan's cultural heritage, especially at the level of UNESCO World Heritage? Three points stand out. First, they divulge a disjuncture between putative ancient origins, historical and material records, observable present-day practices, and selective heritage presentations. Second, they demonstrate how certain aspects and agents of history and culture are highlighted and others softened (if not erased completely) in the creation of a coherent and compelling heritage narrative. Third, they reveal the lingering presence of early-twentieth-century conceptions of "tradition," and specifically "Japanese tradition," which have in other contexts been exposed as problematic and nationalistic. Further research will, I hope, enrich our understanding of how the documented history and scrutiny of a single religious practice, women's exclusion, can inform our study of broader discourses on modernity, tradition, and heritage—and vice versa.

Notes

1 The material presented here forms part of a larger manuscript project, which includes two additional case sites: Mt. Fuji, where women were banned from religious pilgrimage until 1860 by male climbing guilds and shrine authorities, and Sēfa Utaki in Okinawa, where men were banned from religious ritual sites until the late twentieth century. On the latter site, see also the chapter by Aike P. Rots in this volume.

2 Mt. Athos is a remote, mountainous peninsula home to an Orthodox monastic community of more than two thousand monks. The twenty monasteries are only accessible by boat, and with advance permission. Athonite monks uphold the *avaton* rule, a prohibition of women (and female animals), as a longstanding religious tradition they trace back to the Virgin Mary herself, who purportedly claimed exclusive rights to the area. See, e.g., Alexopolous and Fouseki (2016).

3 See, for example, Brumann and Cox et al. (2010), Pai (2014), Akagawa (2015), and Matsuda and Mengoni et al. (2016).

4 To my knowledge, the phenomenon of men's exclusion developed only in the Ryukyu Islands, where female spirit mediums (*yuta*) served as ritualists. These women were classed with prostitutes by the Meiji government following Japan's annexation of Okinawa in 1879. See Barske (2013).

5 According to Grand Council of State Edict 98 (*dajōkan fukoku dai 98 gō*) of 4 May 1872, "Any sites of women's boundaries on shrine and temple lands shall be immediately abolished, and mountain climbing for the purpose of worship, etc., shall be permitted" (Naikaku kanpōkyoku 1974, 82). For more on the edict and its reception, see DeWitt (2015, 59–88). Note that female climbers were already permitted at Mt. Fuji by 1860; they were not welcomed at the sacred Buddhist Mt. Kōya in Wakayama Prefecture until 1906.

6 This widely repeated claim of exceptionalism is not entirely true. Mt. Ushiro in Okayama Prefecture, Mt. Uzō in Ōita Prefecture, and Mt. Ishizuchi in Shikoku also officially maintain male-only policies in certain areas and on certain occasions.

7 Adding to the confusion, both Mt. Ōmine (a region and a route) and Sanjōgatake (a single peak) in today's Yoshino District appear in premodern sources as the "Gold-Peak Mountain" (Kinpusen) or "Peak of Gold" (Mikanenotake).

8 Shugendō is a practice of spiritual attainment. It roughly translates as a way (*dō*) of a method (*shu*) to attain "signs" or "evidence" (*gen*). Whether classified as "Shugendō" or not, Shugendō-like practices and beliefs have long proliferated in Japan's mountains. They embrace gods and nature, esoteric Buddhist rituals and deities, and Daoist elements, all selectively emphasized and locally adapted.

9 Four sutra containers belonging to Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1028) and his successors have been excavated from the peak and are today recognized as National Treasures (*kokuhō*). On Mt. Ōmine in the premodern period, see Blair (2015).

10 The encyclopedia is also known as *Shishi liutie* (Jp. *Shakushi rokujō*). See Yichu and Fushu (1979). For the Chinese original, see Yichu (1990).

11 As an example, Kyōtani Tomoaki, head of the Tenkawa Study Club in Dorogawa, believes that much of the text is exaggerated, if not fabricated, and most likely a product of later generations. Kyōtani, interview with the author, 2 August 2015.

12 See Suzuki (2002); Ushiyama (2009); Katsuura (2009); Taira (1992).

13 Caleb Carter's research on women's exclusion from Mt. Togakushi in Nagano prefecture, for instance, similarly finds a "highly ambiguous picture of the policy, its physical boundaries and the degree of consensus" (Carter 2014, 40).

14 A four-meter-tall stone pillar inscribed with the words *kore yori nyonin kekkai* ("women's restricted zone from this point on") stands at the main trailhead to Sanjōgatake. Accompanying it is a wooden gate approximately three meters tall bearing the words *nyonin kekkai mon* ("women's restricted zone gate") and a two meter-tall signboard stating in English and Japanese, "'No Woman [sic] Admitted': Regulation of this holly [sic] mountain Ominesan prohibits any woman from climbing farther through this gate according to the religious tradition."

15 For more on this attempt to open the mountain to women, see the official publication of the temple consortium (En no Gyōja 1300-nen Go-onki Kiroku Hensan Iinkai 2003). See also DeWitt (2015, 116–129, 166).

16 As charged in the petition, the prefectural budgets for World Heritage Site promotion and related commemorative projects amounted to roughly eighty-two million yen in 2002, seventeen million yen in 2003, and eighty-three million yen in 2004 (DeWitt 2015, 110). See also www.on-kaiho.com/action/20040828.html.

17 For a list of the other regulations noted, see the website of the association: www.on-kaiho.com/action/action_top.html.

18 At the time of writing (July 2019), the notice remained posted at all four gates. The full text of the notice, titled "Request to Mountain Climbers," has been posted online on various personal blogs, including https://ameblo.jp/tribune-ns0731/entry-11554757994.html.

19 Three intensive rounds of archaeological excavations (1954–1955, 1957–1958, and 1969–1971) yielded some eighty thousand artifacts that date from the fourth to the ninth century and attest to robust and flourishing trade between the archipelago, the Korean peninsula, and the continent. The ritual goods range from a miniature golden loom to gilt-bronze horse trappings, bronze mirrors, iron swords, comma-shaped beads, ceramics, and much more, the entire lot of which is collectively designated a National Treasure.

20 Okitsumiya on Okinoshima enshrines Takiribime no mikoto. Nakatsumiya on Ōshima, eleven kilometers off the coast, enshrines Takitsuhime no mikoto. Hetsumiya in Tashima on the Kyushu mainland enshrines Ichikishimahime no mikoto.

21 The campaign to make Okinoshima World Heritage gained speed from 2002, when Waseda University archaeologist Yoshimura Sakuji affirmed publicly at a symposium held in Munakata that "Okinoshima is worthy of World Heritage" (Maeda 2017). The same year, the locally formed "Committee to Realize 'The Okinoshima Story'" (Okinoshima Monogatari Jikkō Iinkai) organized the "Munakata Grand Shrine Great National Treasures Exhibition" (*Munakata Taisha dai kokuhō ten*). When the ACA sought proposals from local governments for candidates to be added to the World Heritage Tentative List in 2006, Fukuoka Prefecture, Munakata City, and Fukutsu City submitted "Okinoshima and Associated Sites" (*Okinoshima to kanren isangun*) for consideration.

22 See, for example, "Munakata, Okinoshima to Kanren Isan-gun" Seikaiisan Suishin Kaigi (2011–2013).

23 Zed, an outspoken American Hindu man who delivered the first ever Hindu prayers at the United States Senate in 2007, has been a vocal critic of gender inequality in India and of the misappropriation of Hindu symbolism.

24 See Kaibara (1709, 1973 [1711]).

25 "Outstanding universal value" (OUV) the central concept of the World Heritage Convention, has been rigorously questioned and challenged over the past thirty years. On contested definitions of OUV, see Jokilehto (2006) and Cleere (2001).

26 Video recording from the 41st Session of the World Heritage Committee, Krakow, Poland, 9 July 2017, morning session, 1:14:06–51. https://youtu.be/-qz3hmdMiMg.

27 See, for example, Iwashina (1968), Miyake (1988), and Suzuki (2002). At the same time, Yanagita and others also wrote idealistic and exotic accounts of female ritual power (*onarigami*) in Okinawa. On this, see Wacker (2003) and Kawahashi (2000).

28 The official line celebrates Mt. Ōmine as a "profound" and "protected" mountainous area, regarded since ancient times as "the sacred dwelling places of holy spirits and ancestral souls," where "pilgrims ascend" and many ruins and cultural artifacts can be found. See www.env.go.jp/park/yoshino/guide/view.html. For a detailed account of the National Park campaign and the setting of women's exclusion as mountain rule, see DeWitt (2015), 92–120.

29 According to Hardacre, the Association also seeks to bar married women from using their maiden names, to prevent the enthronement of a female emperor, and to thwart gender equal education (2005, 242).

30 The Republic of Korea delegation, dismayed at the nationalist presentation of Okinoshima at the World Heritage Committee session, openly questioned whether "politically motivated purposes" lay behind the campaign. Nevertheless, the Korean delegation did favor the World Heritage inscription in the end on the condition that Japan make "every effort to implement recommendations made by this committee." Video recording from the 41st Session of the World Heritage Committee, Krakow, Poland, 9 July 2017, morning session, 1:15:40–19:08. https://youtu.be/-qz3hmdMiMg.

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