

Noboru Hirayama

THE COMMUNITY OF “EXPERIENCE” AND “MOOD”:

**Pilgrimage Tourism to Ise Jingu in
the Early 20Th Century Japan**

INTRODUCTION

Recent research on modern Japan has discussed the importance of the “New Nationalism” in interwar Japan.¹ In this discussion, researchers stress that modern Japan’s nationalism entered a new stage in the 1910s, especially after WWI, and that this new nationalism was promoted and spread rather by capitalism (the amusement market) than by state policy (education). One of the most well-known examples is “King”, the most popular magazine in interwar Japan. Its motto was “Pleasant & Instructive (Educational)”, and therefore the majority of people – from the intellectual elite to non-elite ordinary people – read this magazine enthusiastically and absorbed the nationalistic and moral values it publicized.

1 山野晴雄・成田龍一「民衆文化とナショナリズム」(Yamano, Haruo, Narita, Ryuichi. Ordinary people’s culture and nationalism). In: 『講座日本歴史9 近代3』東京大学出版会 (*Lectures on Japanese History*, vol. 9, *Modern Times* 3, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press), 1985.

Although I basically agree with this view, I think that the research to date has focused mainly on the mass media² and has not sufficiently analyzed the impact of transportation and tourism. Having such a viewpoint in mind, I aim to analyze 1) the interaction between tourism and nationalism and 2) the formation and spread of mass nationalism based on feelings or emotions rather than reason, by looking at the Ise Jingu tourism in early 20th century Japan as a case study.

THE SPREAD OF “EXPERIENCE”

Ise Jingu(伊勢神宮), officially ‘Jingu(神宮)’, is dedicated to Amaterasu-Omikami(天照大神) and Toyo’uke-no-Omikami(豊受大御神), whereby the former is believed to have been the original ancestor of the Imperial Family. This shrine was already very popular among the populace during the Edo era, but it was in the 1910s, especially from 1917 onwards, that the number of people making a pilgrimage to this shrine increased dramatically.³ This increase was promoted with two parallel underpinnings—the ideological and the infrastructural (economical).

The Ideological Underpinning

In the 1910s, there emerged a certain type of discourse, which put supreme emphasis on the ‘experience(体験)’ of making a pilgrimage to the Ise Shrine. What was characteristic of this type of discourse was that it often stressed that spirituality based on ‘experience’ was far superior to ‘reason’ or ‘logic’.

(In order to educate people and make them good subjects,) it is essential to make them visit shrines, especially the Ise Shrine, and educate them based on the experience they have there. It is utterly of no use just educating them by using textbooks or lectures.⁴

This type of discourse started to stand out after the Taigyaku Jiken (High Treason Incident) – a socialist-anarchist plot to (allegedly) assassinate the Emperor Meiji in 1910, which led to the execution of 12 alleged conspirators the

2 佐藤卓己『『キング』の時代——国民大衆雑誌の公共性』岩波書店 (Sato, Takumi. *The Era of the Magazine “King”*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 2002.

3 Up until 1916, the number of people making pilgrimages to Ise Jingu in one year was, at most, 2,000,000, but after 1917, it began to increase almost constantly and eventually reached about 8,000,000 in 1940 (平山昇『初詣の社会史——鉄道が生んだ娯楽とナショナルリズム』東京大学出版会 (Hirayama, Noboru. *A Social History of Hatsumode: An Interaction between an Amusement Invented by the Railways and Nationalism*). Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2015, p. 182).

4 A comment made by a priest who belonged to a shrine in Hokkaido (『北海タイムス』(*Hokkai Taimusu*, newspaper), 1 January, 1912).

next year. This incident had a shocking impact on the country’s elite. Hiranuma Kiichiro(平沼騏一郎), who was the prosecutor during the closed court proceedings when the case was tried, later wrote:

The incident made me deliberate on the importance of education. Kotoku Shusui(幸徳秋水)⁵ mastered not only the Chinese (漢学) and the Japanese classics(国学), but also the French and English classics. He would not have made such a horrible attempt if he had mastered only the traditional Chinese classics.⁶

Hiranuma attributed the incident to Kotoku’s excessive acquisition of Western academic knowledge, and requested that people should be educated based mainly on traditional Chinese classics, not on Western disciplines.⁷ However, his plan was not easy to realize because by that time so many people had already been educated mainly in the Western method and so it was almost impossible for many school teachers to teach the Chinese classics. Not a few elite intellectuals, including Hiranuma, attempted to implement educational reforms in order to prevent similar incidents, but many of these proved to be impossible or rather difficult to put into practice.⁸

On the other hand, some school teachers began to promote educating children based on the ‘experience’ of visiting Holy Places(聖地) related to the Imperial Family, the most important of which was Ise Jingu. In 1911, the next year after the Taigyaku Jiken, an elementary school principal expressed his opinion based on his experience of visiting Ise Jingu.

When I made my first pilgrimage to Ise Jingu last year, I was so deeply moved that it took me not a little time to find myself weeping. ... A while later, an old man, who seemed to be a farmer, came with his two grandchildren. He began to pray for something and then seemed to be moved to tears. This scene moved me again and more deeply. ... We have to rejoice in his tears. We have to appreciate his tears. It is on these tears that we can lay the foundation of our country. If it were not for these tears, our country would be in serious danger. Can those who are contaminated by foreign dangerous thoughts shed these same tears?⁹

5 It was alleged by the prosecutor that Kotoku had been closely involved in the terror plot, which proved to be false after WWII.

6 橋川文三『昭和維新試論』講談社学術文庫、講談社 (Hashikawa, Bunzo. *An Essay on Showa Restoration Movement* (Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko). Tokyo: Kodansha), 2013[1984], p. 218.

7 Ibid., pp. 226–227.

8 有泉貞夫「明治国家と民衆統合」(Ariizumi, Sadao. Japanese Meiji Government and Unification of the People). 『岩波講座日本歴史17 近代4』岩波書店 (*Iwanami Lectures on Japanese History*, vol. 17, *Modern Times 4*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 1976, pp. 231–232.

9 『読売新聞』(*Yomiuri Shimbum*, newspaper), 30 July, 1911.

This principal identified his tears with the old farmer's, both of which originated from the same 'experience' of praying at Ise Jingu. Through these tears, he felt a spiritual sympathy with the farmer, and claimed that the national identity of Japan should be built by people sharing the same tears, suggesting that the persons allegedly involved in the Taigyaku Jiken lacked this sense of sympathetic unity. In his conclusion, he proposed making school students visit Ise Jingu in order to make them loyal subjects who could share these tears from the bottom of their hearts.

This proposal was brought into practice throughout the entire educational community. In relation to this movement, John Breen points out a notable change in the elementary school textbooks: before 1918, they stated that all subjects should respect Ise Jingu, but after that year, they began to say that they should not only respect the shrine but also visit it at least once in their lifetime. Breen says, "It should be understandable that school students' group travel (修学旅行) to Ise Jingu became increasingly common from around that period."¹⁰ Actually, school teachers themselves began to recognize the necessity of making students visit Ise Jingu, and various steps were taken to prepare for the implementation of group travels to the shrine. For example, in 1919, a group of teachers who worked for elementary schools in Tokyo made a trip to Ise. After returning from the trip, one of the participants said in his essay that he joined the trip in order to experience and feel the history of the nation without being obsessed with pedantic reason or theory.¹¹

The Infrastructural (Economical) Underpinning

Another reason for the increase of the number of people visiting Ise Jingu is that the tourism industry, mainly railway managers in both the government-owned railway administration and private railway companies, eagerly promoted the Ise Shrine as a tourist destination in order to make more revenue.

Let us look again at the case of the group tour to Ise Jingu by the school teachers. In this case, the National Railway (国鉄) gave them a superbly bound guidebook on pilgrimages to major shrines including Ise Jingu and offered them exclusive reserved cars, which, to their great pleasure, were very comfortable.¹² The NR offered them such great service because it hoped to increase its revenue by having more and more schools group tours visit Ise Jingu in the future.

10 ジョン・ブリーン『神都物語——伊勢神宮の近現代史』吉川弘文館 (Breen, John. *A Story of the Holy City: The Modern and Contemporary History of Ise Jingu*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan), 2015, pp. 82–84.

11 『都市教育』(*Toshi Kyoiku*), no. 179, 1919, pp. 1, 13.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

Furthermore, during the 1920s and 1930s, the NR became more active in encouraging not only school children but also adults to visit Ise Jingu. For instance, the NR organized group tours for local farmers. There were two main reasons for this, one arising from the need of the NR, and the other focused more on the needs of the local farmers. Regarding the former, the NR usually had much difficulty making revenue from sightseeing passengers in the summer and in the winter, when either the humid or the cold weather discouraged people from going on trips. On the other hand, the local farmers were constantly very busy from spring up until autumn, but in winter, after the harvest season, they were free for a while. Therefore, the NR aimed to induce comparatively rich farmers to go on winter vacation trips to various famous sights – including Ise Jingu.¹³

Private railway companies also struggled to take advantage of the pilgrimage tourism to Ise Jingu. The most prominent of these was Osaka Denki Kido (the Osaka Electric Tramway Co., Ltd (大阪電気軌道)), which opened a railway line from Osaka to Ise in 1930. By taking ODK trains, people could now get to Ise much faster and much more comfortably than by taking the NR trains. An extremely epoch-making development of this was that the ODK enabled busy people living in and around Osaka to make a one-day trip to Ise very easily. Interestingly though, although the NR was not a private company but a part of the government organizations, it eagerly improved its service for passengers in its rivalry with the ODK so that their revenue would not decrease, which led to a harsh competition in who would provide better service between them, making people feel more and more comfortable when taking trains to Ise.¹⁴

THE SPREAD OF “DISCOURSE”

Based on the two underpinnings shown above, more and more people made pilgrimages to the Ise Shrine. It is important to note that those who had this ‘experience’ in common, regardless of their individual backgrounds such as whether they were highly educated or not, created and spread a very similar type of discourse. In other words, the common discourse generating from the common ‘experience’ spread, which can be regarded as a certain popularization or equalization.

Let us take a look at one typical essay written in 1934 by a scholar of great authority:

Of course I know to whom Ise Jingu is dedicated. However, whenever I pray in this shrine, my mind and body is filled not with such knowledge,

¹³ Hirayama, *A Social History of Hatsumode*, p. 194.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 188–190.

but with a feeling of awe and respect without reason, just as Saigyō(西行) expressed in his poem, “I don’t know what holy being resides here, but I feel so blessed that I cannot help weeping.” ... When I pray there, I am filled with feelings of holiness, thankfulness, happiness, awe, respect, and so on, which are absolutely beyond words.¹⁵

Next, let’s take a look at a composition written in 1937 by two elementary school students.

(When I prayed in Ise Jingu,) I was filled with a feeling of respect and thankfulness, which I could not express in words.¹⁶

Ah! I was now so pleased to be able to make a pilgrimage to the Ise Shrine. (Saigyō said,) “I don’t know what holy being resides here, but I feel so blessed that I cannot help weeping.” After the passage of hundreds of years, I was now standing at the same point and feeling the same inspiration as the great poet.¹⁷

When we look at these three writings, one by a scholar of great authority and the other two by elementary school students, it is hard to make a clear distinction between them regarding the contents. Both stressed that they were moved (to tears) without reason and referred to Saigyō’s famous poem in order to justify their lack of vocabulary to express their feelings.¹⁸ Despite the extreme difference of education, age and social status, the scholar and the two children each wrote such a very similar, stylized discourse. We can understand that this situation was quite exceptional when we take into account that the Japanese society of those days was highly hierarchical – unlike present-day Japan. When more and more people went through the common ‘experience’ at a national Holy Place, they had no other means of expressing their feelings than using a limited number of keywords, which were emotional, unreasonable, and spiritual.

When we examine the process by which this typical discourse spread in society, we also have to look at the tourism industry. Railway managers took advantage of the ‘experience’ discourse in their marketing strategies. For example, the following essay can be found in a very popular magazine named *Tabi*, which literally means ‘travel’.

15 松波仁一郎「神前拍手の為否」(Matsunami, Niichiro. Shinzen Kashiwade no Seihi). 『神社協会雑誌』(*Jinja Kyokai Zasshi*), vol. 33, no. 8, 1934, pp. 1–2, 18. Matsunami was a Professor of Law at Tokyo Imperial University, and later became Dean of the Faculty of Commerce at Nihon University.

16 「参宮感想文」(A Composition on Impressions Made by Visiting Ise Jingu). 『瑞垣』(*Mizugaki*), 22, 1937, p. 17.

17 Ibid., p. 19.

18 Saigyō (1118–1190) was a famous Japanese poet of the late Heian and early Kamakura period. One can easily find very stereotypical discourses referring to this poet in books or on the Internet even in the present.

As we say “Seeing is believing”, the best way to take is to make a trip to a certain place in order to deepen your knowledge and realization. Though we learn geography in the classroom, we can hardly learn it just by seeing a map there. However, once you make a one-week trip to the places shown on the map, you can easily learn all of the one-year curriculum. ... You can never know that sacred and holy mood in Ise Jingu unless you yourself make a real pilgrimage there. “I don’t know what holy being resides here, but I feel so blessed that I cannot help weeping.” You can never appreciate this feeling without visiting there yourself.¹⁹

As this material written in 1939 shows, the tourism industry (mainly railway managers), took as much advantage as possible of the ‘experience’ discourse during the war, because by doing so, they were able to justify the necessity of traveling in spite of the wartime situation when unnecessary amusement activities were rigidly restricted. Thus the tourism industry continued to spread this type of discourse. It could be said that a discourse invented in the context of nationalistic ideology was spread and made use of by the tourism industry.

THE SPREAD OF “MOOD”: TOWARD EXCLUSION WITHOUT REASON

As more and more people joined the pilgrimage to Ise Jingu, they became inclined to talk about the ‘mood’ gained from their ‘experience’ by using several typical keywords such as ‘spiritually refreshing (清々しい)’ or ‘solemn (荘嚴, 森嚴)’.

In 1937, a round-table talk attended by ten ladies living in Tokyo was held, the record of which was published in a newspaper. Though the title of this article was “Let’s talk about the memory of New Year’s Day in each one’s birthplace”, they also talked about their common ‘experience’ of visiting the Holy Places of Meiji Jingu (明治神宮) and Ise Jingu, the former of which was a shrine founded in Tokyo in 1920 in memory of the late Meiji Emperor. (In the following excerpt, the letters at the beginning of each remark represent the first letter of the person’s family name).

O: I make it a rule to leave for Ise by train on every New Year’s Day.
(On January 2nd) I make a pilgrimage to Ise Shrine The time that my late husband and I went there in the last year of his life is unforgettable.

19 河田嗣郎「時局と旅の心構」(Kawata, Shiro. What Attitude Must We Have toward Travelling in the Present Wartime Situation?). 『旅』(Tabi), vol. 16, no. 12, 1939, p. 3.

I: I make it a rule to pay a visit to Meiji Jingu early in the morning on New Year's Day. Every year I'm deeply impressed by the solemn mood in that holy area, where nobody speaks a word. All we hear is the sound of people stepping on the sand as they approach ...

T: I totally agree with you. It is utterly solemn.²⁰

Before this part, these ladies had talked about their memory of New Year's Day in each one's birthplace, which of course was full of diversity. However, in this part they talked about the same 'mood' they each had during the same 'experience' of visiting Meiji Jingu or Ise Jingu, felt deep sympathy with each other, and thus were able to confirm that they belonged to one national community despite having come from different regions in the country. Presumably not a few people who read this talk in the magazine felt the same sympathy.

While the talk above was attended by ladies living in Tokyo, it seems that the same feeling had also spread into local societies. I would now like to look at a case from Fukaya in Saitama Prefecture. In 1934, a priest serving at the Nireyama Shrine in this area organized a group tour to Ise Jingu in order to offer prayers for overcoming the hardship throughout the country. The tour was conducted in February, when farmers were not busy, as is explained above. After they returned from the tour, they founded a friendship group named Mutsumi Kai(睦会). "Mutsumi(睦)" is a letter which means 'very peaceful' or 'close intimacy' and is often contrasted with 'quarrel' or 'fight'. This group was organized so that the participants of the tour would meet regularly and enjoy talking about the 'mood of visiting Ise Jingu(参宮気分)'. After the founding ceremony, a party was held at the Nireyama Shrine. Sake and various dishes were served. The priest later described the scene as follows:

Though at first the participants hesitated to talk to other people whom they hadn't known well, little by little they became less nervous, began to dance or sing merrily, and finally drank and talked with each other as if they had been intimate friends for a long time. I cannot express how happy all of us were to be able to become good friends with each other!²¹

It is no doubt that this success was due to the priest's zealous efforts, but we should not overlook the fact that this friendship group was also given a token of appreciation by the National Railway.²² Though the precise amount is impossible

20 「正月を語る座談会(下)」(Let's Talk about the Memory of New Year's Day in Each One's Birthplace). 『婦女新聞』(*Fujo Shimbun*, newspaper), 1 January, 1937.

21 柳瀬禎治『楡の木影』楡山神社社務所 (Yanase, Teiji. *A Shade of an Elm Tree*. Fukaya: Nireyama Jinja Shamusho), 1999, pp. 13-16.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

to ascertain, it would be correct to say that the NR presented them with this money as a small reward for bringing as many as 2,000 people to Ise by the NR train and meant to encourage this group to conduct the same tour repeatedly.

As we have seen above, more and more people, both from big cities and local areas alike, started going to the Ise Shrine. They were impressed by the ‘experience’ of making a pilgrimage to the holy place, talked with each other about the same ‘mood’ based on the same ‘experience’, and strengthened a certain feeling of belonging to a unity. It may seem that this process was just pleasant and peaceful. However, it was from within this context that a discourse emerged which requested the exclusion and suppression of all minorities who did not feel like visiting and praying at a shrine. Researchers to date have already pointed out that a tendency emerged during the 1920s and 1930s to ostracize people who would not accept the legitimacy of visiting a shrine, but have not taken into account the possibility that this tendency was strengthened by the spread of the same ‘experience’ and ‘mood’ based on Ise Jingu tourism.

As we have seen above, people who shared the experience of visiting the Ise Shrine heightened their impressions and excitement by using a limited number of emotional words. They always said that it was beyond description, and firmly believed that anyone who went to the same place would experience the same ‘mood’. However, they were not aware that they had one unsaid condition in mind: “as long as he or she is a normal Japanese subject”. In other words, from their point of view, if a person could not understand the ‘mood’, he or she must not be a real Japanese. The community of ‘experience’ and ‘mood’ could easily turn into justifying exclusion without any clear logic.

We can find a clue to this view by taking a close look at discourse materials. Until the 1900s, conservative intellectuals used to encourage people to visit shrines on the grounds that it was “right”. However, during the 1930s, one new keyword began to appear: “pitiful(気の毒な)”.

Unfortunately, there are some strange people who harbor cynical thoughts and seem proud of never visiting shrines. Those people cannot appreciate the solemn mood of visiting a shrine on New Year’s Day. They are so pitiful.²³

This essay was written by Kato Genchi(加藤玄智), a very famous State Shinto ideologue.

This author referred to the ‘mood’ of visiting a shrine and implicitly looked down on those who could not appreciate it, calling them ‘pitiful’. He was not an

23 村上重良『国家神道』岩波新書、岩波書店 (Murakami, Shigeyoshi. *State Shinto* (Iwanami Shinsho). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 1970; 島蘭進『国家神道と日本人』岩波新書、岩波書店 (Shimazono, Susumu. *State Shinto and Japanese people* (Iwanami Shinsho). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 2010.

exception. We can easily find the very same type of discourse among the other contemporaneous discourse materials, one of which, for example, goes as follows:

There are some people who cannot be willing to pay respect to Shinto Gods or who cannot feel humble and spiritually refreshed by doing so. They are utterly pitiful.²⁴

At first glance, the word “pitiful” seems controlled by reason to some extent. However, behind this word a tendency to eliminate those in the minority from the community of “good subjects” lay hidden. Kato Genchi’s essay quoted below was published almost at the same time as the one shown above.

If there is a Japanese who neglects visiting a shrine, we should say that he or she is not a genuine Japanese but a mentally broken Japanese, a Japanese who has a serious mental problem.²⁵

Originally, Kato was not an ultra-conservative fanatic. He graduated from Tokyo Imperial University, where he received a Ph.D. in Literature and was known for his academic erudition. However, sympathy for the ‘mood’ based on the ‘experience’ induced even such a highly intellectual person to exclude without reason or logic those who could not identify themselves with the ‘mood’. This type of discourse was repeated over and over again and became more influential than ever until the end of WWII.

CONCLUSION

We have seen the process of Ise Shrine tourism from the 1910s up to the 1930s. Now I would like to look back at the elementary school principal’s opinion in 1911, which we saw in the first section. I ended my quote at this phrase: “Can those who are contaminated by foreign dangerous thoughts shed these same tears?” To tell the truth, this passage preceded the following sentence:

I declare with total confidence that if you do not shed devout tears when you pray in Ise Shrine, you do not qualify as a Japanese subject.²⁶

As this opinion shows, the intent of exclusion had already appeared in the ‘experience’ discourse in the 1910s. As we have seen in the above sections, it was

24 加藤玄智「神社初詣での気分」(Kato, Genchi. The Mood of Visiting a Shrine on New Year’s Day). 『旅』(Tabi), 13, 1, 1936, pp. 2-3.

25 相原熊太郎『明治神宮に参拝して』母子の友社 (Aihara, Kumataro. *Impression of Visiting Meiji Jingu*. Boshi no Tomo Sha), 1938, p. 6.

26 加藤玄智「今回朝鮮に起つた神社不参拝問題を耳にして」(Kato, Genchi. After Hearing the Problem of Refusal to Visit a Shrine in Korea). 『皇国時報』(Kokoku Jiho), no. 587, 1936, p. 10.

always the case that people who attached supreme value to an 'experience' and the 'mood' derived from it tended to easily go so far as to exclude others who could not appreciate the same.

However, it does not mean that such discourse spread smoothly in a short time once it was produced. Researchers to date have been apt to come to conclusions too rapidly once they'd pointed out the 'beginning' of a certain ideology, often failing to distinguish the point of its origin and the process of its spreading. When we think about the real influence of an ideology, we definitely have to follow the long process in which the ideology spreads into a society, which consists not only of a very limited number of intellectuals but also the mass majority. In this sense, it is significant that it was the interaction between an ideological discourse and the activation of tourism from the 1910s up to the 1930s that enabled the ideology to spread widely throughout society. Also, we need to be aware of the fact that this process was promoted so effectively not by the authorities' means of education and instruction (which are always very, very boring and easy to forget!!), but rather by capitalist activities. As we have seen, both the national and the private railways struggled to make as much revenue as possible by taking advantage of this ideological discourse. Railway managers made most effective use of the 'experience' discourse in their marketing activities. Regardless of whether they themselves held such ideological values or not, their marketing activities strongly encouraged more people to join the 'experience' and share the 'mood'.

Modern Japan had created a progressive constitution, which was very exceptional in the non-Western world, and towards the 1920s, its society practiced constitutional and democratic politics in a trial and error fashion. In the 1930s, however, its society became more and more intolerant towards minorities, one of which was a group of people who could not accept the legitimacy of all Japanese subjects visiting shrines. Why did Japanese society arrive at such a turn? This question has been a very topical issue among those who are interested in the history of modern Japan, and so many researches have been made to answer it. Yet most of them have pursued mainly discourses, and have failed to examine the interaction between discourse and practice.

In this paper, I have presented the historical process in which a homogeneous spiritual community of 'experience' and 'mood' was formed and spread in Japanese society. By examining this case, I conclude that, in order to understand how influential an ideology has become in modern and contemporary society, it would be beneficial to take into account the interaction between ideology and capitalism, between discourse and practice (in this case, tourism).