

The Reconstruction of Sacredness as Seen in the Travel to Sacred Sites by the Elderly and Disabled: From an Investigation of Shrine Visit Volunteers at the Ise Shrines

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1. Introduction (situating the inquiry)

I recently had the opportunity to watch an NHK television program called “*Nippon Junrei*” (*Japanese Pilgrimage*). With Hirahara Ayaka’s unique vocals in the background, the screen showed a list of catch copies such as “prayer space that lives in the moment,” “mystical natural settings that move the heart,” “scenery of unforgettable memories,” and finally, “Japan has places for the heart to return” appearing alongside a crawling baby. During the program, we are introduced to famous shrines such as those of Izumo and Miwayama and to the seemingly “evident” fact that the sacredness of shrines is part of the “scenery that shapes the Japanese”. However, just as the etymology of the English word “travel” is said to be “trouble,” originally travel was a difficult undertaking and it might even be said that travel was a means for pursuing higher levels of sacredness. As a part of the development of modern societies much of the difficulty of travel has largely disappeared; we live in an age where most anyone can easily travel to sacred locations. However, there are still individuals who find these locations difficult to visit and small group of individuals are striving to support these people. Amidst a transformation where the sacredness of now easily accessible sacred places is less about “prayer” and more about “profit,” the prayers of these individuals are sincere, earnest and, at times, even poignantly tragic. Furthermore, by taking account of and drawing on these individuals and the people that support them, I strongly feel that it is possible to get a different perspective from that which suggests that the transformation of travel to sacred locations is one of an increasingly tourist-based sacredness.

While situating the inquiry in the extremely personal experiences of the individuals under question, this research will be an attempt to rethink the modern social issues involved with whether or not—or to what degree—anyone, including the elderly and disabled, can worship at religious tourist sites which have historically developed as sacred locations and, from examining the activities of supporting volunteers, reconsider the nature of the sacredness that sacred locations possess.

In response to this potential area of investigation, I have continued to take part in and observe the local non-profit organization Ise-Shima Barrier-free Tourism Center (hereafter BTC) which is involved in addressing the problems associated with creating a barrier-free environment at the Ise Shrines. Based on this, I direct attention to the “religious needs” exemplified by “everyone’s prayers” and the worship volunteers who represent “social welfare needs” by conducting an ongoing investigation of both worshippers and volunteers. Up until this point, the available research data was used to indicate the contradictory and flexible psychology of the volunteers who

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want to increase the “ease of worship” (accessibility) for the elderly and disabled while at the same time preserving the “Ise aesthetic” (authenticity) through such things as gravel and stone steps.²

In a separate inquiry, I also examined the possibility for shifting responsibility for worship volunteers from specific groups to local areas through cooperation on the behalf of shrines, government bodies, corporations and volunteers, with non-profit organizations operating as the middlemen.³

At this point, following a summary of preceding research on the relevant geographical areas, while giving attention to the elderly and disabled who visit the Ise Shrines (guests) and the volunteer guides who receive them (hosts), I (1) investigated the people who visited the Ise Shrines through a case study into how BTC responded to their needs and (2) in regard to the people who responded to those visitors, I conducted a survey of the volunteer tourist guides. From these results, I will address the reconstruction of the sacred as seen in the travels the elderly and disabled make to sacred locations by illuminating the nature of the “Ise aesthetic” as it is pursued by both guests and hosts.

2. Analytic viewpoints regarding the modern accessibility of sacred locations

In order to analyze the ease of visiting and worshipping at sacred locations as an issue for modern societies, in this paper I will reference and organize the relevant trends in research in the fields of religious studies, sociology and studies in welfare culture.

2-1. Research on tourism in religious studies

First, in regard to visits to sacred places, I would like to take a look at the research trends in religious studies. Research into sacred locations has conventionally been led by the fields of history and religious studies but, in recent years, research that takes into account the fact that sacred places also serve the modern role of tourist locations and clarifies relationship between sacred locations and tourism continues to make important strides forward. Yamanaka Hiroshi's *Shūkyō to Tsūrizumu kenkyū (A Study of Religion and Tourism)* is representative of this kind of research. Yamanaka and others explain the objectives of their research in a report entitled, “*Basho no seisei no hen'yō / saikōchiku to tsūrizumu ni kansuru sōgōteki kenkyū.*” (“A Comprehensive Study into the Transformation and Reconstruction of ‘Sacredness of Locations’ and Tourism.”)

This research is an attempt to illuminate the various facets of the transformation and reconstruction of sacred places by focusing on the “sacredness” possessed by the diverse “topoi” such as churches, shrines, temples, natural scenery, and locations where oppression or martyrdom occurred and by taking into account the relationship to “tourism” which is conceivably one of the largest factors in inducing this transformation.⁴

² Itai Masanari, 2006, “Nihon ni okeru shūkyōbunka to fukushibunka no setten—shakai fukushi no sabukaruchā,” in *Shūkyō to fukushi*, ed. Sakurai Haruo et al, Kogakkan University Press, 153-170.

³ Itai Masanari, 2007, “Chiikibunka no kachi to bariafurika ni kansuru ichikōsatsu,” in *Kogakkan daigaku shakai fukushi gakubu kiyō* 9: 47-55.

⁴ Yamanaka Hiroshi et al., 2007, “*Basho no seisei*” no henyō / saikōchiku to Tsūrizumu ni kansuru sōgōteki kenkyū, 1-2.

In the background of Yamanaka's ideas, we can distinguish the strong influence of tourism anthropology, which began to be more seriously debated in the late 1970s, as an offshoot of the American cultural anthropology.

Tourism anthropology began with Smith who suggested an analytical framework that addressed the phenomenon of tourism from the relationship between the hosts (the persons on the receiving end) and guests (the persons on the visiting side).⁵ In addition, in reference to religiosity, Grayburn describes tourism as a movement from the everyday to the extraordinary thereby illustrating the character of “sacred travel,” and MacCannel argues that, given this implication, travel experiences of this character are something distinct from and more genuine—such travel is a “pursuit of authenticity.”⁶

Based on this analytical framework, in *Shūkyō to Tsūrizumu kenkyū*, the so-called tourism boom of Japan is seen as something that “is not only transforming the ‘sacredness’ held by ‘locations’ such as churches, shrines, temples and places of martyrdom, but has also become a trigger for the reconstruction of new ‘stories’ and ‘traditions’ surrounding these locations.” Also, two actors who are playing a major role in this transformation and reconstruction have been given greater attention: “the middle-men who have a rich knowledge and affection for the places that have become the object of tourism,” and the tourist industry, which has opened up the genuineness and history of sacred locations as a new market. A flexible analysis that does not limit the meaning of sacred locations to the basic component of faith but presupposes a transformation and reconstruction of tradition from a newly rendered modern sense of meaning is extremely interesting as one point of view which connects religion and tourism—a connection that was until now difficult to illuminate.

In addition and in regard to the attempt “to frame the faith of local individuals from a new ‘perspective’ and to ‘heighten’ the tourist context”, in a process called ‘tourism representation’, *Shūkyō to Tsūrizumu kenkyū* uses MacCannel’s concept of “sight sacralization,”⁷ to analyze not only the unique appeal that locations worthy of tourism possess but also the way social processes influence this appeal.⁸

However, it must not be forgotten that the “guest” assumed by the research up until this point has been a healthy person; a new perspective which includes the elderly and disabled and which could give tourism new meaning has heretofore been missing. One gets the feeling that Yamanaka lacks something in the assumption of what kind of people might visit sacred locations when he indicates that modernity “renders the limited and concealed nature that ‘sacred locations’ originally possessed meaningless and makes possible the access of these locations to anyone.”

For example, Nebashi Shōichi, taking a sociological approach to the study of travel by disabled individuals, asks the question “why are the disabled and elderly removed from

⁵ Smith, Valenne L. eds., 1997, *Host and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁶ Yamashita Shinji, 1996, *Kankō jinruigaku*, Shin'yōsha, 4-13.

⁷ MacCannel, Dean, 1976, *The Tourists: A New Theory of Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books, 43-48.

⁸ Yamanaka Hiroshi, 2007, “Nagasaki katorikku kyōkai to tsūrizumu,” in *Tetsugaku Shisōronshū* 33: 155-176.

discussions on travel and tourism?” and argues that disabled persons have played an imperative role in the way travel developed in Japan. More specifically, the formation of modern attitudes toward work and the character of those attitudes have turned travel, “which was once monopolized by one portion of the leisure class, into an activity available to the working class masses”. Nebashi organizes his argument to show that the disabled have been labeled as society’s weak and removed from the contemporary leisure. Moreover, Nebashi goes on to indicate that contemporary attitudes toward travel are “not simply a suspension from labor or a type of leisure for the purpose of resting up to perform better at work, but are part of that most important activity of sublating labor.” The author further “criticizes modern society for being completely consumed by the principles of work and seriousness”, noting that “when one observes the history of humankind through play and culture, there is also the possibility that travel and tourism have an important role in the empowerment of disabled persons.”⁹ From Nebashi’s point of view, one becomes aware of the meaning of including the elderly and disabled among those who travel to sacred sites.

Finally, Tsurumi Kazuko, based on Yanagita Kunio’s folk studies, argues that the dynamics of society are composed of wandering and sedentary life and that historically, among those wanderers who set out to travel, there were disabled persons such as *zatō*, *goze*, *miko* and *misemono* who carried important social roles.¹⁰ The relationship between “sacred sites” and the weak of society is one with a long history to begin with and along with the salvational meaning that sacred locations possess, this relationship cannot realistically be ignored.

2-2. Research on the traveling elderly and disabled based on studies of welfare culture

Next, I would like to further isolate the trends in research on the traveling elderly and disabled by considering studies in welfare culture. It is said that research into this topic began with Ishizaka Naoyuki’s *Yōroppa kurumaisu hitoritabi (Europe A One Person Trip by Wheelchair)*¹¹ which was published in 1973. Following Ishizaka’s study, research was carried out on the topic of elderly and disabled travel using cultural theories of welfare. Kusanagi Iichirō became a leading authority by devoting the next twenty years after Ishizaka’s ground-breaking research to this issue and taking with his Japanese “Tourism for All” activities the first serious steps in this field of studies.¹² It is thought that at the backdrop of these developments lay, among other things, the revamping of the legal system and “the fact that travel as a cultural activity that should be enjoyed by all people became an idea shared by society.”

However, and despite the fact that social infrastructure improved, “the normalization of travel” does not merely mean an improvement in the physical dimensions of travel, but, as indicated in the following passage, requires also the participation of the voluntary sector:

The soft dimension of travel is most significant: for example, each citizen possessing a spirit of hospitality, lending a hand to people encountering difficulty

⁹ Nebashi Shōichi, and Inoue Hiroshi, 2005, *Hyōhaku to jiritsu—shōgaisha ryokō no shakaigaku*. Ryūtsūkeizai University Press.

¹⁰ Tsurumi Kazuko, 1993, *Hyōhaku to teijū to—Yanagita Kunio no shakai hendōron*. Chikumashobō.

¹¹ Ishizaka Naoyuki, 1973, *Yōroppa kurumaisu hitoritabi*. Nihonhōsō shuppanyokai.

¹² Kusanagi Iichiro, 1997, “Tabi to fukushibunka,” in Fukushibunkaron, ed. Ichibangase Yasuko et al. Yūhikaku, 184.

during travel; people involved in the tourism industry given accurate support; a social system that can secure manpower in the event that travelers are unassisted; the presentation of travel information about places where even people in wheelchairs can stay. But in these respects, it is fair to say that almost no progress has been made.¹³

At the “*Motto yasashii tabi e no benkyōkai*” (“More Friendly Travel Seminar”) hosted by Kusanagi, the “Co-existence of Historical Architecture and Nature and Barrier-free” was proposed as the theme for the fiscal year 2004. And at the “*Nihon fukushi no machizukuri gakkai dairokkai zenkoku taikai*” (“Sixth National Japan Welfare and Community-Building Symposium”) there was a particularly interesting presentation which introduced specific cases from overseas illustrating the seemingly contradictory balance between demands for the preservation of the value of culture assets (authenticity) and the acquisition of access for the handicapped to these sights.

For example, in the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) makes accessibility to buildings mandatory. However, in instances where the adherence to the conventional guidelines presents a threat to the historical meaning of a location, an alternative standard according to a different set of guidelines is used. This being said, although the requirements for accessibility are relaxed, the ADA is written so that not only all requirements are preserved but also so that the ADA itself cannot be used as a loophole impeding the access of those with disabilities. As a consequence, even in the case of historical and cultural properties, either the basic requirements must be met or, in the case where that is not feasible, “innovative alternatives” must be adopted.

Along with increasing the active social participation of the elderly and handicapped, the demand for barrier-free cultural properties is growing and one might say that “maintaining the authenticity of cultural properties while acquiring the maximum possible access to cultural properties” is a worldwide trend.

Moreover, Kusanagi indicates the necessity of “1) the legal establishment of the right to access cultural places by all people in the same way as in the laws produced in the United States and England and in the Kyoto Community Building Requirements. 2) The establishment of a special entity to carry out the examination of buildings during the time of their barrier-free reformation. 3) Conducting research into appropriate alternative methods for access—all points will likely serve as a future reference.”¹⁴

Up until this point, I have given attention to and summarized existing research into the traveling elderly and disabled from the perspectives of studies on welfare culture and the field of religious studies where research on tourism and religion has analyzed the modern accessibility to sacred locations. To reiterate the challenges that have appeared in these studies of religion and tourism: the relationship between the desire for “all people [to offer their] prayers” at sacred places which have undergone transformations, and the accessibility of the elderly and disabled who cannot visit these locations remains unclear. By adding the accessibility of historical wanderers and modern elderly and handicapped to the line of investigation, it is possible to achieve a more

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kusanagi et al., 2003, “*Kenzōbutsu no bunkazai to bariāfuīka*” *fukushi no machizukuri gakkai happyō shiryō*.

detailed grasp of the reconstruction of the sacred.

Finally, in the field of studies of welfare culture, despite the fact that since 1990, research has actively attempted to address the “elderly and handicapped,” a perspective that might address the themes of “religiosity” and “sacredness”, which lie at the crux of religious tourism, is conspicuously lacking. Thus, in this line of research, it is not possible to see the actual connection between sacred locations and accessibility. However, judging from the foreign precedent concerning architectural cultural properties, one can assume that there will be an effort to preserve authenticity while taking steps to create barrier-free environments.

3. Ise-Shima Barrier-free Tourism Center (NPO)

Based on the issues raised by the research trends of the last section, I will next examine the reality of travel to sacred locations by the elderly and disabled from the perspective of the activities of the Ise-Shima Barrier-free Tourism Center (BTC), an organization of volunteers that assist visitors to the Ise Shrines.

3-1 An outline of the BTC

The BTC is a non-profit organization founded in Toba in 2002, which, along with presenting tourist information on barrier-free accessibility and guiding handicapped travelers in Ise, Toba and Shima, aims at providing barrier-free hospitality in these areas. By being attentive not only to the facilities available for the handicapped but also to the human dimension of travel, BTC allows all disabled visitors to approach these areas more easily.¹⁵ The story of the foundation of the BTC is covered in detail in the works of the BTC’s chairperson Nakamura Hajime. Notable in this story is the mention that the original objective of the foundation consisted of getting an edge in a new market in order to combat the falling number of tourists.¹⁶

The following evidence backs up Nakamura's idea. The total number of tourists who visit Mie Prefecture every year amounts to over four million and, under closer examination, over one million of those tourists visit Ise-Shima. In recent years, in spite of the fact that the number of tourists has for the entire prefecture, as well as for Ise-Shima, fallen or leveled off, the trend for elderly and disabled tourists is running in the opposite direction and is, even if only slightly, steadily increasing. The results of a survey conducted by BTC into the number of elderly and handicapped that visited the major tourist facilities of Ise-Shima show that, compared to the 30,546 visitors in 2000, the number had increased by over 10,000, to 40,536, by 2004. Furthermore, it is evident that nearly all of those individuals were accompanied in some form or traveled with family members.¹⁷ In these numbers it is possible to perceive the potential market that Nakamura discussed.

The information in the surveys used by BTC to supply advice to its users is gathered by a

¹⁵ <http://www.barifuri.com/index.html>, accessed on Jan. 24, 2009.

¹⁶ Nakamura Hajime, 2004, “Atarashii kōkyō’ Ise-Shima bariafurī tsuā sentā no seikō ni miru kyōdō no arikata,” in *Chiiki seisaku* 13: 92-3. Also, Nakamura, 2006, *Koi ni michibikareta kankō saisei*. Nagasaki shuppan.

¹⁷ NPO Hōjin Ise-Shima bariafurī tsuā sentā, 2006, *Ise-Shima bariafurī tsuā sokushin puroguramu*. Chubu’unyukyoku. 2.

group of specialists made up largely of disabled persons who actually visit facilities and lodgings. As for the users themselves, BTC arranges it so that they can make reservations, consult and negotiate travel and lodging arrangements via telephone or email. Also, in the presentation of information, BTC employs a “personal barrier-free” formula to suggest a travel plan that matches each traveler and is unique to the traveler's disability and attitude. In this way, BTC can realize a travel plan that comes close to the wishes of each of its users.

The data possessed by BTC concerning the service of lodgings covers a variety of *ryokan* (Japanese inns), hotels and group services and, moreover, offers information on individual *rotenburo* (open air baths) with wheelchair access and barrier-free campgrounds. In addition, one can receive information or make reservations for restaurants, tourist locations and a wheelchair taxi service. After its foundation, BTC's activities have been praised highly even outside the prefecture and in 2008 they received the First Ministry of Land, Infra-structure, Transport and Tourism Minister's Commendation for Barrier-Free Promotion Efforts and the Cabinet's Special Administer Commendation for Barrier-Free Promotion Efforts. BTC functions as a reassuring interface for handicapped and disabled persons who consider traveling to Ise-Shima, and for their families.

3-2. The needs of those who travel to the Ise Shrines

Next, looking at the number of inquiries made to the BTC since the time of its opening in April of 2002, we find that there has been a monthly average of about sixty inquiries and, based on the information presented on the BTC's website, the majority of these—eighty percent of the total—are made directly by users to lodging facilities. In addition, the percentage of users that are wheelchair bound because of age is notably high and, as previously mentioned, these individuals are predominantly accompanied by family members or members of some large group.¹⁸

The nature of these inquires varies across a wide range of topics such as lodging and transportation but, after conducting a survey that targets these users, the service most desired for travel to Ise-Shima was reported to be “Ise Shrine Visit Support.”¹⁹ In other words, one can currently see that the majority of the increasing number of elderly and handicapped who visit Ise-Shima are accompanied, wheelchair bound and prioritize a visit to the Ise Shrines out of the rest of possible tourist destinations that Ise-Shima has to offer. The inquiry, “is it possible to visit the Ise Shrines with a weelchair?” is the BTC's most frequently received question; hence it is possible to gather that the Ise Shrines are a destination that these tourists wish to visit even if they have to ask for assistance.

At this point, I would like to compare the number of tourists for Mie Prefecture and the number of visitors to the Ise Shrines. The number of visitors to the Ise Shrines, when one considers both *Naikū* and *Gekū*, is over 5,500,000 annually. When compared with the number of tourists who visit Ise-Shima, this number indicates that over fifty percent of the tourists visit the Ise Shrines, thus accounting for over thirteen percent of the entire prefecture's tourism. From these numbers, one can tell that roughly one out of every four visitors who comes to Mie Prefecture

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

visits Ise-Shima and of that number half are visitors to the Ise Shrines—naturally, elderly and disabled persons are included in these numbers.²⁰

As for the actual number of wheelchair bound visitors to the Ise Shrines, the results of an investigation conducted by the Ise Shrines administrative office at the behest of the BTC shows a recorded 7,051 wheelchair bound visits to *Naikū* for the year 2007 (this included wheelchair rentals). When compared with the 3,720 wheelchair visits of 2001, the year the survey commenced, one can see a steady increase in the number of wheelchair visits. The percentage of the total number of visitors who made use of a wheelchair has increased from 0.09% (2001) to 0.13% (2007) and since these visitors do not come alone, when one includes the family, friends and people of other disabilities who accompany them one can estimate an even larger numerical impact.

4. The people who visit sacred locations

In this section, I will investigate the kind of feelings the people who visit the Ise Shrines actually bring with them. This section examines three separate instances of inquiries made to the BTC.

4-1 The case of a man bound to a hand-powered wheelchair due to damage in his cervical vertebrae, and of his family

The first case study is that of Mr X, who makes use of a hand-powered wheelchair, and his wife and daughter who accompanied (assisted) him on his trip to Ise-Shima. Mr X suffered damage to his cervical vertebrae when he was 46 years of age and following nearly two years of hospitalization, he now receives treatment at home but still spends about three months each year in the hospital for rehabilitation. Given that he has pressure ulcers over much of his body, Mr X spends most of his days at home. His main assistant is his wife who takes cares of all his daily needs. When he leaves the house, his means of transport is the family car (with no special adjustments) which his daughter drives.

Up until now, Mr X has made a total of six separate trips including visits to the family burial plot and travels with his family. Each of these trips took place in the Kanto area where Mr X resides and the means of transportation was the family car. As for long distance travel involving the use of train transfers, this trip to Ise-Shima is the first for Mr X since his injury. When travelling, Mr X normally never goes “where he wants to go” but “where he is able to go” and, until now, has largely been confined to simply going to and from his home to the lodgings and has not had a chance to see tourist locations or interact with local residents.

This time, on his trip to Ise-Shima, Mr X gave “a room with a bed and space for a wheelchair to maneuver,” “access by car,” “ease in making travel arrangements,” “visiting the Ise Shrines,” “someplace memorable for a thirty-year wedding anniversary,” and “family fun (fun for all ages)” as his criteria when he consulted with BTC. In response, the plan that BTC suggested was a trip that included visits to *Shinjukonshiki* on Mikimoto Pearl Island and to the Ise Shrines as the main attractions. For the visit to the Ise Shrines, BTC responded by coordinating its volunteers. After

²⁰ Itai, 2006, “*Nihon ni okeru shūkyōbunka to fukushibunka no setten*,” 153-170.

their trip, a letter arrived at the BTC expressing the following sentiments.

We all are feeling fine and are not even exhausted from our trip. It was incredibly reassuring to receive the kind advice we received from the BTC. Up until now, we tended to conclude right from the start “that’s impossible” without even trying, but feel like we have started to consider things more positively. Thank you for creating that “opportunity.” We had half given up but I think that making a trip to the Ise Shrines will give me greater confidence... I want to apologize to the assistant who broke a sweat helping with my wheelchair but I truly appreciate it. On this trip, visiting the Ise Shrines and attending the events at *Shinjukonshiki* were too much and I feel like we did not have enough time to relax and enjoy Ise. Thinking of the warm kindness, delicious food, beautiful scenery, I would like to travel there again at a more leisurely pace.

4-2 The case of an elderly woman who requires full assistance and makes use of a hand-powered wheelchair, and of her son

The second case study is that of Mrs Y (70 year-old female) who requires full assistance, makes use of a manual wheelchair and suffers from cognitive disorders and a mild linguistic impairment. Mrs Y was accompanied (assisted) by her son (age 40).

Mrs Y requires assistance in all aspects of her everyday life and, as a consequence, mother and son live together. On this trip to Ise-Shima, thinking of his mother, Mrs Y’s son set out the travel plans and selected Ise (the Oharaimachi area) on account of the fact that during the war his mother had been evacuated to this area. He also made a request to the BTC for volunteer assistance in visiting the Ise Shrines. Despite the fact that it rained and was a bit cold on the day of their trip, in response to Mrs Y’s son’s strong desire, they made a visit to the Ise Shrines. Even with the inclement weather, Mrs Y smiled stating that “the Ise Shrines has not changed since I was here”, when I was mentally and physically stable. It was memorable to see Mrs Y saying “that’s right,” and slapping her hands with a mischievous smile when a volunteer asked “in the summer did you jump from Eboshi boulder?”. Her son mentioned that he had “wanted to see this smile and that’s why I definitely wanted to visit the Ise Shrines.”

4-3. The case of an elderly man who cannot communicate, and of his family

The case study is that of Mr Z (80 year-old male) who makes use of a manual wheelchair and in addition to a cognitive disorder cannot communicate verbally. Mr Z was accompanied (assisted) on this trip by his wife (80 years-old), his son and his son’s wife—which makes of them a party of four. This trip was for them the last before Mr Z’s son and his wife leave for work overseas and because of the age of everyone involved they requested volunteer assistance from the BTC. On the day of their trip, after having visited the Ise Shrines, when the volunteers and travelers were paying their mutual respects, Mr Z who had up until that point shown no changes in attitude or facial expression suddenly attempted to stand up out of his wheelchair. For Mr Z, who had difficulty standing and walking on his own and could not communicate verbally, this behavior was unthinkable and it surprised his travel companions as well. Everyone present at the time was convinced that he had wanted to convey his appreciation for this visit to the Ise Shrines.

Each of these three cases incorporated a trip to Ise-Shima with a visit to the Ise Shrines as the main focus and each called on BTC for support during that time. As previously mentioned, inquiries related to visiting the Ise Shrines top the list of questions that the BTC receives, but one can see that the feelings associated with and reasons for praying at the Ise Shrines are different in each case and possess a diverse character. Moreover, one can observe the “strength of prayers” in the fact that the elderly and disabled expend more energy in visiting the Ise Shrines than would a healthy person, and in the desire to visit the Ise Shrines even in the rain. As a result, I believe that it is no exaggeration to conclude from the last case study where cognitive impairment was involved that the level of satisfaction of the people who call on the Ise Shrines is something that transcends words. In other words, while the “sacredness” that the Ise Shrines possess as “sacred sites” is multi-faceted, it is possible to conceive, against these various backdrops, of a formation of “Ise Authenticity” through the common “power of prayer.”

5. The hosts: tourism volunteers

In this section, I will consider the tourism volunteers who are the people hosting the visitors, and, after summarizing the activities of the institutions involved, I will examine the actual response to the elderly and disabled through the results of interviews with the guides.

5-1 Volunteer guides

Volunteer guides—volunteers who introduce people to and guide people around local areas for little or no money—have in recent years become more active. The activities of volunteers go beyond introducing the appeal of local history, culture and nature. They are also receiving attention as activities that lead to community building and that invigorate local areas. According to the Japan Travel and Tourist Association there are currently more than 1,100 to 1,200 active organizations throughout Japan and this number is increasing.²¹

Generally, volunteer tourist guides are largely composed of people who have attended training seminars offered by principalities or groups, have completed these courses and who, while conducting study groups, act as volunteers.

Furthermore, the Japan Travel and Tourism Association “with the goal of establishing appropriate activities, ensuring the smooth progress and contributing to the development of vital activities”, opened the “Japan National Local Introduction and Tourism Volunteer Guide Association” which gathers active volunteer guides throughout the nation, policy makers who are in the position of promoting the activities of volunteer guides, and individuals who have an interest in the activities of volunteer guides” for the purpose of “deepening dialogue and exchange of opinions.” In 2007, this association met in the city of Kanazawa and from the section meetings which discussed topics such as “Concerning Guidance at Cultural Properties such as Historical Buildings and Locations of Particular Scenic Beauty” and “Concerning the Guidance of Visual

²¹ The Website of Zenkoku kankō borantia gaido, <http://www.nihon-kakou.or.jp/index.html>, viewed on Jan. 24, 2009. Also, 2006, *Chiiki shōkai / kankō borantia gaido soshiki ichiran 2006 nendoban*, Nihonkankōkai.

Impaired Visitors”, one gets the impression that the way volunteers respond to cultural properties and the disabled was already beginning to receive attention.

An example that highlights the connection with the culture of local areas is that of the “ Study into the Promotional Policies for Volunteer Activities that Make Use of Local Resources,” which was conducted by the Mitsui Information Development Corporation Comprehensive Research Center, and which mentions the volunteer tourist guides of Nagahama as a progressive example of volunteer tourist guides in Japan. The Nagahama Tourism Volunteer Guide Association, founded in 1984, was, as one can see from the fact that it commenced with the rebuilding of Nagahama Castle, involved in more than simply presenting information on tourism; it was also well-versed in the history and culture of Nagahama and in order to preserve that history and culture it conducts repeated training. The Nagahama activities are unique in that they are involved in the preservation of traditional culture, which is the source of tourism, and in the renovation of communities; they thus demonstrate the possibilities of volunteer tourist guides.²²

5-2 Ise-Shima Area Volunteer Guides

The volunteer tourist guides of Ise-Shima, which are the focus of this paper, consist of seven different groups as shown in Table 1. Each of the seven groups offers its services for free and five of the groups are affiliated to the tourist associations of local municipalities.

	Name of organization	Location
1	<i>Oise-san</i> Tourist Guides ²³ (membership: 46)	Ise City Tourist Association, Ise city, Mie Prefecture
2	Committee of the History of Tamaki (membership: 17)	Tamaki town, Watarai district, Mie Prefecture
3	Volunteer Tourist Guides of Aisu no Sato (membership: 2)	Aisu Hall, South Ise town, Watarai district, Mie Prefecture
4	Association of Volunteer Guides of Toba (membership: 40) ²⁴	Toba City Tourist Association, Toba city, Mie Prefecture
5	Volunteer Guides of Daiō (membership: 3)	Shima City Tourist Association, Shima city, Mie prefecture
6	Volunteer Guides of the History of Ago (membership: 5)	Shima City Tourist Association, Shima city, Mie prefecture
7	Volunteer Guides of Saikū (membership: 25)	Tourist Association of Meiwa, Taki district, Mie prefecture

Table 1: List of Volunteer Tourist Guides in the Ise-Shima region

²² 2005, Heisei 16 nendo monbukagakushō itaku chōsa, “Chiiki shigen wo katsuyō shita borantia katsudō no suishin hōsaku tō ni kansuru chōsa kenkyū: borantia senshin jirei chōsa hōkokusho,” Mitsui jōhō kaihatsu kabusikigaisha sōgō kenkyūjō.

²³ For organizations 1,2 and 3, see website:

<http://www.nihon-kankou.or.jp/vg/ctrl?evt=SelBukkenInSArea&areaid=1758211>

²⁴ For organizations 4 and 6, see website:

<http://www.nihon-kankou.or.jp/vg/ctrl?evt=SelBukkenInSArea&areaid=1758212>

5-3 Interview research

I conducted research on the current state of volunteer activities and the barrier-free response by interviewing two of the above associations: the Oise-san Tourist Guides which was among the first of the Ise-Shima area volunteer tourist guide groups and thus has experience in conducting guided visits to the Ise Shrines; and the Association of Volunteer Guides of Toba which has a track record of dealing with the impaired. The following is a summary of what I heard during those interviews.

1) Oise-san Tourist Guides²⁵

Oise-san Tourist Guides was established through the cooperation of Ise city and the Ise Municipal Tourist Association in 1996 in response to the 2000 year enshrinement of the Ise Shrines. At present there are fifty members whose ages cover a wide span from individuals in their thirties to those in their eighties. However, most of the core members are individuals in their sixties. Once every two years there is a search for new volunteer guides who then start work after a year of training. In a year, there are about 1,500 requests for guides that occur primarily during the tourist season and on weekends.

A is a volunteer guide who has been affiliated with the Oise-san Tourist Guides since 1998 and has handled about 880 different cases. A became interested in becoming a guide as retirement approached, but was also influenced by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake which had just happened at the time. A then started participating in a variety of volunteer activities and after guiding people as an volunteer, he felt that money could not provide the profundity that receiving a handshake or a thank you letter offered him. A thus continues to be a volunteer.

As for handling cases that need barrier-free access, A has guided groups of cognitively impaired individuals on a number of occasions up until this point. A did not feel any significant confusion in the change of the basic approach used for handling ordinary tourists, but states that such groups are considered difficult by some volunteer guides. One of the points A brought up for guiding persons with cognitive disabilities is that it is important to allow them to experience things with their body to the greatest extent possible. For example, A uses quizzes like “Is it this kind of tree or that kind of tree used in that building?” or “Is the *kami* Amaterasu male or female?” or makes an effort to include simple sensational contents such as having everyone join hands around a tree growing along the path to the shrine. In addition to people with cognitive impairments, A also leads visitors with physical disabilities but as yet these numbers remain small.

2) Association of Volunteer Guides of Toba²⁶

The Association of Volunteer Guides of Toba was founded in 1999 and is currently made up of thirty to forty members. The Association does not possess a special record when it comes to guiding the elderly or disabled but starting in 2005 it has handled about 2 or 3 groups of disabled persons each year. Due to the high average age of the volunteer guides of the association, it is difficult to respond to cases needing physical assistance.

²⁵ Survey conducted on August 11, 2007.

²⁶ Survey conducted on October 24, 2005.

B, who was asked by the BTC to guide a visually impaired person in 2003, thought that such visitors would be interested in more than just guidance about routes and dangers and would also want to know about the history and culture of tourist sites. Moreover, being unsure that an explanation in words alone would suffice, *B*—much to the delight of the visitors that day—made a three-dimensional map to show the shape and position of far off islands. Subsequently, the word has spread among visually impaired visitors. At present, the program for the visually impaired, includes a three-dimensional map, abalone or turban shells to allow the visitors to not only touch but also listen to the ocean and, in order to feel the ocean, visitors are brought for a walk on the beach and have a chance to touch the ocean with their white canes.

In order to further improve services for the blind, *B* states that although a number of visually impaired have attempted to make arrangements directly with the volunteers guides, it would be better for them to make those arrangements ahead of time with the BTC.

Until this point I have focused on the volunteer tourist guides who receive the visitors and have considered the issues and current state of the barrier-free response and the contents of volunteer activities. As a part of the volunteer sector that makes active use of local resources, the potential of associations like the Association of the Nagashima Volunteer Tourist Guides were quickly praised and, in regards to barrier-free initiatives, the All-Japan Tourism Volunteer Assembly, which is hosted by the Japan Travel and Tourism Association, established a section meeting for “Guidance of Visitors with Visual Impairments.” I would like to pay attention to other national examples as well, but one can already gather just by looking at the Oise-san Tourist Guides, which conducts tours mainly at the Ise Shrines, that providing a barrier-free response has become an important preoccupation even though the proportion of visitors who might make use of it is small. In addition, it is interesting that this response is being carried about through a number of innovations. Furthermore, the motivation for continuing to work as a guide includes such diverse elements as “a desire to know the Ise Shrines,” “visitor appreciation,” “a fondness for guiding.” On the other hand, with an aging membership, guidance associations face several issues such as a lack of awareness of the new value placed on barrier-free response and a lack of the physical strength that is required from guides.

6. Survey of Ise Shrine tourism volunteers’ barrier-free awareness

Based on the interviews in the last section, in order to illuminate the challenges and current state of the barrier-free response of the tourist guides at the Ise Shrines, I conducted interviews to check the barrier-free awareness among the volunteer tourist guides of the Ise-Shima area. The following is a summary of the interviews.

Location: Ise Shrines *Naikū* and Surrounding Area

Date and Time: February 7th (Tuesday), 2006 from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm
(required time: three hours)

Informants: Seventeen Ise-Shima Area Volunteer Tourist Guides

(8 guides from Oise-san Tourist Guides, 3 guides from the Association of Volunteer Guides of Toba, 6 guides from the Ago no Okami Association, 2 Other)

Assistance: Wheelchair Users, Visually Impaired

6-1 Barrier-Free Imagination Game (BFIG)

In this interview, I used the BFIG which is a workshop developed by the BTC mainly to achieve a higher level of barrier-free awareness. The BFIG consists largely of two programs. During the first half, participants are paired up and one person becomes the visiting guest by using a wheelchair and other tools for simulation, while the other person plays the role of the Ise Shrines' volunteer tourism guide and strives to provide a barrier-free response. In actuality, the volunteers are accompanied by wheelchair bound or visually impaired persons and record on a worksheet their remarks and innovations for each of the standpoints.

In the second half, using the worksheet as a base, participants form groups of four or five individuals and write on a map of the area surrounding *Naikū* the places that might present a challenge (Barrier Card) and after that they write the strategies for response (Response Card). Lastly, each of the groups conducts a presentation where they share the challenges and responses they had.²⁷

6-2 Analysis of the Challenges and Responses

A count of the number of challenges and responses that each group presented reveals that in response to the sixty-five challenge cards there were forty-one response cards. The BFIG's goal is to assess the quantity and quality of the participants' barrier-free ability and looking at the quantitative analysis it is possible to see that sixty percent of the guides were aware of the potentially challenging areas in the chosen location.

Next, a qualitative examination of the contents of the cards shows that the most prevalent choice as a challenging area was the "approachway to the shrine", followed by the "main shrine" and the "purification font". For example, with the "approachway to the shrine," "gravel," "peripheral gutters," "hills (from the purification font to the hall of votive dance)," and "distance" were elements that related to "the difficulty in handling a wheelchair." Challenges regarding the "main shrine" were limited to the "stone stairs." As for the "purification font," the incline leading to the Isuzu River up until the "area for washing hands," the "bumps and gutter" caused by the stone pavement before the purification font, and the darkness caused by the roof, were all pointed out as obstacles for the elderly and visually impaired.

Methods proposed to overcome the challenges centered on suggestions related to the "approachway to the shrine" and the "main shrine." For example, for the "approachway to the shrine," environmental changes such as "building a path for wheelchair use," "getting rid of the incline for just the width of a wheelchair" and "using a better (automated) wheelchair" were suggested by participants; there were even some rather bold options such as arranging it so that one would sit just before Uji Bridge and travel automatically from there. Also, "placement of readily understandable guidance signs" to assist the visually and cognitively impaired, and "taking a short-cut" to reduce the burden of the distance from Uji Bridge to the main shrine, were also offered up as options. In regards to the "main shrine," and in addition to relatively simple

²⁷ Itai Masanari, 2008, "Shukuhaku shisetsu ni okeru bariāfurī kenshū puroguramu kaihatsu ni mukete no ichishiron," in *Fukushibunka kenkyū* 17: 83-94.

suggestions such as building a “slope” and “attaching a handrail,” more specific comments were also suggested such as “building stone steps of a consistent spacing for visually impaired users,” “building a wheelchair ramp in such a way as to preserve the scenery,” and “making a path available for New Year’s use.”. In these suggestions one can see a flexible awareness that only a host attempting to fulfill the needs of visiting worshippers while preserving the “authenticity of the Ise Shrines” must have. In addition, beyond material changes, “assistance” was also deemed important: suggestions included the gathering of “people with physical strength such as former police officers or special forces soldiers” and the cooperation of “everyone to help carrying [the person so that he/she] can enjoy the beautiful scenery.” In order to facilitate this “assistance,” ideas such as placing an “interphone at the bottom of the stairs” and “stationing a volunteer at the bottom of the stairs or making reservations possible” were offered. Furthermore, “the use of pamphlets” was introduced as an actual example of innovation wherein the Ise Shrines make use of pamphlets and picture postcards to give wheelchair users a more detailed image of the trip. By complementing the volunteer guides’ skillful explanation with plentiful photographic resources, there is a way to provide “hospitality” that allows visitors to enjoy the atmosphere to the maximum even if they may not be able to go to the actual site. In addition, for the benefit of the visually impaired, having the visitors directly touch the sacred gate just before Uji Bridge while adding an explanation such as “this pillar was the *munamochi* pillar of the previous main hall,” was one example of response suggested in order to provide to participants enjoyment that makes use of the five senses.

In conclusion

In order to illuminate the “authenticity of the Ise Shrines,” which is pursued by both its guests and hosts, I first examined the attitude of the guests through three case studies of visitors who made use of volunteers provided by the BTC for their visit to the Ise Shrines. The family whose father suffered an injury in his cervical vertebrae found new confidence during their visit to the Ise Shrines, which they had originally thought impossible to visit. The son of the elderly woman who required complete assistance, visited Ise where the woman had been evacuated during the war, and was satisfied to see his mother smile again. Finally, the visit to the Ise Shrines of a cognitively impaired father with the family of his son, who will soon leave to work overseas, left everyone moved by the father’s sudden attempt to stand. It is apparent from the case studies that the reasons for visiting the Ise Shrines were definitely not singular but diverse in nature. However, they all have in common the “power of prayer” expressed in the visitors’ wish to pay a visit to the Ise Shrines despite obstacles such as falling rain, and to spend more energy to worship than a healthy person would. As a result, each of the people who visited the Ise Shrines had a high level of satisfaction. From these observations, it is possible to conceive that the multi-dimensional “sacredness” which the Ise Shrines, as a “sacred location”, possess, forms the “Ise Shrines’ authenticity” through the visitors’ shared “powers of prayer.”

On the other hand, in regards to those on the receiving end of visits to the Ise Shrines, I was able to verify in my examination of the Ise-Shima area volunteer tourist guides, the flexible, if not somewhat contradictory, volunteer psychology suggested by opinions such as “building a ramp

for wheelchairs using methods that preserve the scenery”. Moreover, as a characteristic of volunteer tourist guides, age and strength play a role in the poor physical response to such things as “lifting wheelchairs,” but when it comes to possessing historical and cultural information about the Ise Shrine, it is possible to see a high level of response though the use of methods that address the unique needs of the disabled. An example would be the attempt to include simple activities that relay on sensation such as joining hands around the trees planted along the path to the shrines.

Lastly, in the process by which both “guest” and “host” pursue the multivalent “authenticity of the Ise Shrines”, one is able to witness the way in which the modern meaning of "accessibility" has penetrated this "authenticity" and created a new “discourse.” In contrast to the development of the debate within conventional tourism anthropology, which largely places importance on the guest by stating that between the two positions of “guest” and “host” the guest pursues “authenticity” while the host offers “mock events,” Ando analyzed various statements of authenticity made by hosts and concludes that “there is no single authenticity held by those involved in *matsuri* (religious festivals).”²⁸ In other words, to summarize the relevance of this in reference to my current research, the multi-dimensional “authenticity of the Ise Shrines” as seen in the motivations of the elderly and disabled and in the psychology of the volunteer guides, is something that transcends the guest and host, and accounts for the expansion of “sacredness.” Furthermore, in looking at the process by which contemporary host and guest flexibly integrate the social challenges (accessibility) and interact with each other, there is, in a context different from Yamanaka’s “tourism symbolization,” a renewed increase in meaning of the Ise Shrines as a “sacred place for everyone.” “In Japan there are places for the heart to return” was first introduced as a television catch copy but, in the future, I would like to fully examine the “way in which this heart returns.”

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²⁸ Ando Naoko, 2001, “Kanko jinruigaku ni okeru hosuto no gawa no ‘ōsentishiti’ no tayōsei ni tsuite—Iwate-ken morioka-shi no ‘chaguchagu-umako’ to ‘sansaodori’ wo jirei to shite,” in *Minzokugaku kenkyū* 66-3: 344-65.