
Historical and Folkloric Study of Rainmaking Customs in Northern Wakayama Prefecture

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Rainmaking in northern Wakayama Prefecture includes (1) prayers at Shinto shrines, temples, and small shrines, (2) prayers with Shinto/Buddhist images or statues and sacred treasures, (3) prayers at rivers and waterfalls, (4) prayers in mountains associated with water, (5) fire waving and fire burning, and (6) entertainment (sumo). During the Edo period (1603–1867), Shugenja were sometimes involved, but since the Meiji period (1868–1912), it has been carried out by the villagers. In this area, there is a widespread practice of rainmaking, in which people receive fire from Koyasan and build a fire with this. Upon analyzing the characteristics of rainmaking in this region, we can divide them into three groups: the Ito region, influenced by Koyasan and Amanosha; the Arida and Kaiso regions around Oishiyama; and the region around Wakayama City. Until the mid-Showa period (1926–1989), rainmaking was still practiced with fire burning, but after that, rainmaking was no longer practiced because of the improvement of water supply and changes in cultivated crops.

Key words: rainmaking, fire burning, Koyasan, Amanosha, Oishiyama, Shugenja