

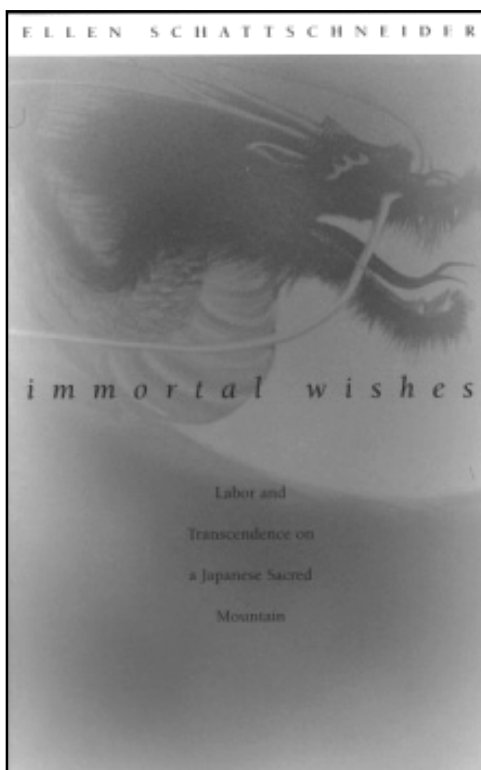
Immortal Wishes

Labor and Transcendence on a Japanese Sacred Mountain

Ellen Schattschneider

Immortal Wishes is a powerful ethnographic rendering of religious experiences of landscape, healing, and self-fashioning on a northern Japanese sacred mountain. Working at the intersection of anthropology, religion, and Japan studies, Ellen Schattschneider focuses on Akakura Mountain Shrine, a popular Shinto institution founded by a rural woman in the 1920s. For decades, local spirit mediums and worshipers, predominantly women, have undertaken extended periods of *shugyo* (ascetic discipline) within the shrine and on the mountain's slopes. Schattschneider argues that their elaborate, transforming repertoire of ritual practice and ascetic discipline has been generated by complex social and historical tensions largely emerging out of the uneasy status of the surrounding area within the modern nation's industrial and postindustrial economies.

Schattschneider shows how, through dedicated work at the shrine including demanding ascents up the sacred mountain, the worshipers come to associate the rugged mountain landscape with their personal biographies, the life histories of certain exemplary predecessors and ancestors, and the collective biography of the extended congregation. She contends that this body of ritual practice presents worshipers with fields of imaginative possibilities through which they may dramatize or reflect upon the nature of their relations with loved ones, ancestors, and divinities. In some cases, worshipers significantly redress traumas in their own lives or in those of their families. In other instances, these ritualized processes lead to deepening crises of the self, the accelerated



fragmentation of local households, and apprehension of possession by demons or ancestral forces. *Immortal Wishes* reveals how these varied practices and outcomes have over time been incorporated into the changing organization of ritual, space, and time on the mountainscape.

Ellen Schattschneider is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Brandeis University.

"*Immortal Wishes* reveals the deeply embodied nature of a religion which is physically labored at with a subtlety and intensity that is as sensuous as it is

spiritual. It is this aesthetics—personal, historical, collective—that Ellen Schattschneider captures with the delicacy of her prose and analysis."—Anne Allison, Duke University

"Ellen Schattschneider has given us an account of Japanese religious experience that is at once powerfully evocative and analytically sophisticated. *Immortal Wishes* is a remarkable book that should prove invaluable not only for students of Japan but also for anyone wanting to understand the transformative power of religious experience."—Bradd Shore, Emory University

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