

Article

Constructing and Contesting the Shrine: Tourist Performances at Seimei Shrine, Kyoto

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Abstract: Japanese Shinto shrines are popular pilgrimage sites not only for religious reasons, but also because of their connections to popular culture. This study discusses how tourism is involved in the construction of the shrine space by focusing on the material environment of the shrine, visitor performances, and how the shrine is contested by different actors. The subject of the study, Seimei Shrine, is a shrine dedicated to the legendary figure Abe no Seimei (921–1005), who is frequently featured in popular culture. Originally a local shrine, Seimei Shrine became a tourist attraction for fans of the novel series *Onmyōji* (1986–) and the movie adaptation (2001). Since then, the shrine has branded itself by placing themed statues, which realize the legend of Abe no Seimei in material form, while also attracting religious and touristic practices. On the other hand, visitors also bring new meanings to the shrine and its objects. They understand the shrine through different kinds of interactions with the objects, through performances such as touching and remembering. However, the material objects, their interpretation and performances are also an arena of conflict and contestation, as different actors become involved through tourism. This case study shows how religion and tourism are intertwined in the late-modern consumer society, which affects both the ways in which the shrine presents and reinvents itself, as well as how visitors understand and perform within the shrine.

Keywords: shinto shrine; popular culture; tourist performances; material religion



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1. Introduction

In Japan, Shinto shrines are popular destinations for both domestic and inbound tourists¹. Not only the traditionally famous shrines, but also smaller, more local shrines have become popular through tourism. Travel to religious places is not a new phenomenon, as Japan has a long-lasting tradition of pilgrimage (Nakanishi 2018). However, as society changes, so does the role and form of religion and travel. Some forms of religious tourism², such as *hatsumōde*, the first visit to the shrine after New Year's, and pilgrimage tourism, such as bus tours in Shikoku island, were born through the involvement of the tourism industry and the development of transportation systems (Hirayama 2015; Kadota 2013). Nowadays, Shinto shrines are often visited because of images created by mass media. Since the 2010s, a nation-wide power spot boom³ and the collection of seal stamps (*goshuin*) have made visiting shrines a popular past-time (Suga 2010; Okamoto 2019a). In addition,

¹ For example, in a Kyoto tourism survey, shrines and temples were given as the most popular reason for traveling to Kyoto for both Japanese as well as foreign visitors (Industry and Tourism Bureau 2019).

² In Japanese, tourism in religious places is called *shūkyō tsūrizumu* (literally, religion tourism), which is not the exact equivalent of religious tourism. The term itself does not take a stance on whether the tourist is traveling for religious reasons or not, whereas the English term includes religious motivation behind travel. This can be seen as a major difference in the focus of the field in Japan.

³ The term power spot refers to a location in which one can feel a strong, invisible spiritual power, energy or *ki* (Japanese for *qi*) (Horie 2017, p. 192). While the idea of power spots emerged in the mid-1980s via the global New Age movement (Carter 2018), it entered the vocabulary of mainstream Japanese society in the 2010s through media representations, such as women's magazines (Tsukada and Omi 2011). Many pre-existing religious places, such as Shinto shrines, have been reframed as power spots by the mass media (Okamoto 2019a).

as shrines are frequently featured in popular culture, many fans want to visit the places connected to their favorite movies or games (Yamamura 2015). This is why the Japanese word for pilgrimage (*seichi junrei*) has received new connotations within anime and games—not just religion. Thus, it can be said that shrines have become tourist attractions for people with various motivations, which combine both secular and religious meanings.

In recent years, the study of religion and tourism, as well as modern pilgrimage, has become a growing field worldwide (Collins-Kreiner 2020), and also in Japan, where the touristic use of religious practices and places has been discussed by scholars of religious studies and tourism studies since the 2010s. In fact, scholars of religious studies have taken up the topic of tourism, not only as proof of the secularization of religious traditions but as a legitimate object of research that reflects the state of modern religion (Suzuki 2020). In previous studies, tourism in religious places has been described as the consumption of representations (Yamanaka 2012, 2015), where religious places and practices are given new value and meaning, as ‘something worth visiting’ not just in the religious sense. In particular, mass media has a great influence in the process of recontextualizing traditionally religious places and emphasizing the spiritual side, making them easier to add to travelers’ itineraries (Okamoto 2015). Using various strategies, such as branding and collaborating with well-known characters and celebrities, religious organizations in contemporary Japan are using, reshaping, and updating their religious sites and traditions in order to compete in a secularized world (Porcu 2013, 2014). It can even be argued that market engagement is crucial for the continuation of religious practices such as pilgrimage (Reader 2014). Moreover, the consumption of religion outside of its conventional context has been seen to reflect the emergence of a new spiritual market, where the line between the religious and the secular is fluid. Within the spiritual market, not just religious institutions, but also actors from the cultural industry (including tourism) provide products such as religious tourism to satisfy the consumers’ spiritual needs (Yamanaka 2016, 2017, 2020).

The touristification of sacred places has also been emplaced within a wider process of sacralization, in which the reinvention of shrines as power spots is not driven by religious institutions themselves, but rather by outside actors (Rots 2017). This movement, however, is paralleled with attempts to de-privatize Shinto and to redefine and reconfigure beliefs, practices and institutions previously classified as ‘religion’ as Japanese traditional culture and heritage (Rots 2017, p. 190). On the other hand, the involvement of outside actors has also been problematized when it comes to using religion as a tourism resource. For example, as the government is not legally authorized to promote religious rituals, in the promotional materials of the Gion matsuri in Kyoto, the ‘cultural’ side has been emphasized as a strategic move to gain UNESCO recognition (Porcu 2012). In addition, Foster (2020) discusses how the Namahage tradition of Akita prefecture has been stripped of its religious characteristics when being rebranded as intangible cultural heritage. However, in the tourism-oriented Namahage Sedo Matsuri, the religious dimensions of the practice have been highlighted, even more than the actual New Year’s Eve ritual of the locals. Kadota (2013) argues that when designated as heritage, the concept of value is brought to religion, as the meaning of religious places, things, and practices are evaluated from the outside. As certain religious practices are included, whereas others are excluded, criteria of so called ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ faiths are created (Kadota 2013, p. 73). Thus, the same tradition is treated, practiced and used differently depending on the context and the actors involved.

The perspectives discussed above can be used as a way to explain *why* Shinto shrines become tourist attractions and how secular actors, such as local governments, UNESCO and the tourism industry, have become involved with their different policies and agendas. However, these approaches focus mostly on the macro level and tend to dismiss the material and corporeal side of tourism and religion in favor of the representational. Therefore, in this paper, I will focus on the material aspect of religion and tourism in order to analyze the *how* of tourism in Shinto shrines. Through the case study of Seimei Shrine, Kyoto, I will explore how shrines become tourist attractions: how do visitors perform and understand

the shrine? How is tourism emplaced and enacted materially within the shrine? What kind of conflicts occur in this process?

The article is structured as follows. The first part introduces the process through which different media representations have changed Seimei Shrine from a local shrine to a tourist attraction. The following part will then analyze how this has affected the construction of the shrine space by focusing on the material environment, visitor performances, and how the shrine is contested by different actors. The last part emplaces the case study within a wider discussion about religious change in the late-modern consumer society.

2. Research Methods

This paper focuses on tourism in Seimei Shrine observed in the material environment and different visitor performances. It is based on qualitative data gathered through two periods of fieldwork in January and September 2018, during which the author paid regular visits to the shrine and conducted interviews with its visitors within opening hours. Newspaper articles, the official website, and social media accounts of Seimei Shrine and TripAdvisor comments were used as secondary data.

Participant observation was conducted within the shrine premises through photography and fieldnotes of how visitors interacted with the objects. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one hundred visitors in front of the shrine. The interviewees were not participants in tours, but individual travelers, either traveling alone or with a partner or a family member, mostly from outside of Kyoto. Most of them were in their 20s and 30s. The interviewees were asked various questions, including the reason for their visit, their previous image of the shrine and their experience at the shrine. The interviewees were also asked to show the route of their visit, in which order they interacted with different objects. Through content analysis, the interview data were divided into themes, such as the reason for visiting, one's prior image of the shrine, purchases and interactions with objects. These themes were used as the basis for the analysis in Part 4.

As Nelson has pointed out, it is not unproblematic to make definitive statements about the motivations behind an individual's visit to a shrine only by watching or conducting interviews (Nelson 2000, p. 27). This is why it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the interview data and especially the relative shortness of individual interviews (spanning from 5 to 15 min). However, due to the involvement of the tourism industry and the popularity of power spots, similar changes and performances can be observed in other shrines as well. Therefore, this current study can be used as a reference for further research.

3. The Case of Seimei Shrine, Kyoto

First, let us take a look at how Seimei Shrine has become a tourist attraction, and how it has been represented in the media. Seimei Shrine is a relatively small shrine located in the Kamigyō ward of Kyoto. It is a shrine dedicated to Abe no Seimei (921–1005), an *onmyōji*⁴ of the Imperial office during the Heian period (794–1185). As a local shrine, Seimei Shrine itself is known for its benefits of preventing danger (*yakuyoke*). Every year the shrine brings residents and other people involved together for different festivals, such as the Seimei Festival (*Seimei-sai*) in September, during which the shrine is decorated with lanterns and events such as a parade are organized⁵. The presence of the shrine can also be observed in

⁴ *Onmyōji* is a practitioner of Onmyōdō, which can be translated as 'The Way of Yin-yang'. In the Heian period, *onmyōji* were civil servants in the Onmyōdō bureau in the *ritsuryō* system of governance. They were experts in astrology, calendar studies and divination. There are debates whether Onmyōdō should be considered a religion or a technique (see Hayashi and Hayek 2013).

⁵ On recent discussion about tourism and festivals (*matsuri*), see the Special Issue of *Journal of Religion in Japan* Vol. 9 (2020).

the surrounding area, as many residents and local businesses place paper talismans (*ofuda*) purchased at the shrine close to their entrance⁶.

While Seimei Shrine was established a thousand years ago, its career as a tourist attraction started in the early 2000s. Originally a mystical figure, Abe no Seimei's legends have been preserved in traditional tales⁷. In the early 1990s, he became a household figure in popular culture, when he was featured in Baku Yumemakura's novel series *Onmyōji* (1986–) and later Reiko Okano's manga series based on the novel (1993–). However, the so-called Seimei boom reached its peak when *Onmyōji*, an NHK television drama, starring Goro Inagaki, a member of the boyband SMAP, and a movie⁸ starring the actor Mansai Nomura, were released in 2001. These depictions turned Abe no Seimei from a 'grave, middle-aged man exemplary of Heian-era masculinity' to a beautiful young man (*bishōnen*), suitable for the aesthetic tastes and desires of young women (Miller 2008, pp. 31–32). This 'extreme makeover' led to young female visitors visiting Seimei Shrine and writing their messages to Abe no Seimei on wooden votive tablets (*ema*).

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, overlapping with an increase in visitor numbers to Kyoto, a national power spot boom occurred. This time, Seimei Shrine's sacred tree (*goshinboku*) caught the visitors' interest, as it was said to have special spiritual energy. The tree was also featured in articles covering the boom and a picture of visitors touching the tree was published in the Asahi Shimbun newspaper (Asahi Shimbun 2010). Fitting the image, the shrine placed a sign encouraging touching the bark of the tree as well as the construction of a platform to protect the tree's roots from the damage caused by the increasing number of visitors.

Recently, Seimei Shrine has also been linked to the figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu, who won an Olympic gold medal for performing to music of the movie *Onmyōji* in 2018. Hanyu's visits to the shrine have been covered by the media and have led to Seimei Shrine becoming a pilgrimage site for the skater's fans. Sports magazine Nikkan Sports, for example, writes about Hanyu's visit as follows⁹:

On the 2nd of July, [Hanyu] visited Seimei Shrine in order to get a deeper understanding [of Abe no Seimei]. Immediately after entering the shrine premises, he showed wariness and said 'I can feel *ki* [energy]'. He suddenly realized that he will perform the actual presence of a god. He was shown the portrait of Abe no Seimei from the shrine's private collection. Also by placing his hands on it, he received power from the 300 year old sacred tree. Almost as if he was asking Abe no Seimei for permission [to perform], he walked around the shrine premises for an hour, although it would normally take only ten minutes.

(Takaba 2015)

This kind of coverage resulted in Seimei Shrine becoming a pilgrimage site for the skater's fans. The same way as before, this can be seen in the visitors' personalized votive tablets dedicated to the skater's success. Seimei Shrine has also embraced the attention both virtually, as the main priest of the shrine congratulated Hanyu's success on Seimei Shrine's

⁶ This paper focuses on visitors from outside of the shrine. However, the special relationship between the local community and the shrine should be noted, as many neighborhoods are closely linked to the area's Shinto shrine. As the local deity (*ujigami*) of the neighborhood is revered in the shrine, the 'group from the land surrounding the areas dedicated to the belief in and worship of one shrine; or, the constituents of that group' are traditionally referred to as *ujiko* (Sano 2007). For more on *ujiko* and the role they play in for example local festivals, see (Porcu 2012; Sonoda 1975). In addition, the term *sūkeisha* is used, but 'the two are distinguished by a geographical classification with *ujiko* referring to the person from that shrine's *ujiko* district and *sūkeisha* referring to the person from outside the district' (Sano 2007). Ishii has noted that the role of *sūkeisha* will become greater due to the weakening of the consciousness of belonging to one's local shrine (Ishii 2010). In fact, Seimei Shrine established an organization (*sūkeikai*) for patrons outside of the local community to which anyone can participate by paying a membership fee.

⁷ In popular culture, Abe no Seimei has become a sorcerer-type hero figure, who protects the Heian court from evil spirits and other enemies. For details of Abe no Seimei's life based on historical records, see for example Shigeta (2013). For more on the so-called Seimei boom, see Miller (2008). This paper will not focus on the worship of Abe no Seimei or the practice of *Onmyōdō*, but the process through which the shrine has become a tourist attraction.

⁸ The movie was released outside Japan under the title of *Onmyōji: The Yin Yang Master* (2001). With a box-office gross of approximately 3 billion yen, the movie was the fourth most popular movie of the year 2001 (Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan Inc 2001).

⁹ All the translations are by the author.

official Twitter site, as well as physically at the shrine with congratulatory messages paired with the selling of an amulet for winning (*katsu mamori*).

Through this brief overview, we can see how Seimei Shrine turned from a local shrine to a tourist attraction due to different media representations and fan performances. As [Shinde \(2013\)](#) pointed out, religious narratives and the various media they are presented in occupy an important position in the service of religious tourism, as they also reflect contemporary religious tastes. From one boom to another, Seimei Shrine has been reframed several times by the mass media, making it a pilgrimage site for several fandoms. While the impetus for tourism originally came from outside, Seimei Shrine also started actively changing its own image and material environment through branding in the 2000s. This is why focusing solely on media representations does not give a full picture of the process through which Seimei Shrine has become a tourist attraction.

4. Constructing, Performing and Contesting Seimei Shrine

How is the shrine space produced and how do we understand tourism within that process? When discussing the poetics and politics of American sacred spaces, [Chidester and Linenthal \(1995\)](#) introduce three features through which sacredness is produced: (material) construction, rituals, and contestation by different actors. The production and contestation of tourist space has also been the focus of the performative turn in tourism studies ([Bærenholdt et al. 2004](#); [Edensor 1998, 2001](#); [Haldrup and Larsen 2010](#); [Urry and Larsen 2011](#)). The performative turn has emphasized the corporeal and material aspect of tourism—opposed to previous representational approaches which privileged the visual experiences of tourists, such as the notion of ‘the tourist gaze’ ([Urry 1990](#)). Tourist places are not just seen as passive stages for performances, but as produced places, which tourists co-produce through their performances ([Bærenholdt et al. 2004](#), p. 10). The performative turn thus draws attention to how tourists experience and construct places in multi-sensuous ways, which include different interactions with the material world ([Haldrup and Larsen 2010](#)).

In this article, special focus will be given to the role of material objects and the practices they are involved in at Seimei Shrine. This is aligned with the interests of the study of material religion, a perspective on religious studies, which has gathered popularity since the 2000s ([Hirschkind 2006](#); [Keane 2007](#); [Meyer 2009](#); [Morgan 2010](#); [Vásquez 2011](#)). Within the study of material religion, the focus has shifted from studying texts and meaning to the material forms and embodied practices of religion. Through this shift, the role of material objects has changed from vessels of underlying meaning to actors within various contexts and practices. To quote the editors of the journal *Material Religion*, ‘the meaning of an object is not understood to reside singularly inside in it, but to also draw from its circulation, its local adaptation, from what people do with it, and from the affective and conceptual ways whereby users apprehend an object’ ([Meyer et al. 2010](#), p. 209). In addition, in the context of Japan, the study of materiality has been gathering interest among scholars¹⁰. For example, Daniels has explored objects of good luck (*engimono*) and spirituality in the domestic environment ([Daniels 2003, 2012](#)). In addition, Rambelli’s work has showed how materiality is an intrinsic part of Japanese Buddhism, not only in popular practices but also in scholastic and doctrinal themes ([Rambelli 2007](#)).

However, in tourism studies, the discussion of the material side of religious tourism is quite recent. Focusing on materiality allows us to grasp the improvisational side of religious tourism, for example the different understandings of religious places and experiences ([Terzidou 2020](#)). Through this we can understand that visitors’ actions are not confined to symbolic meanings but also the shapes and sizes, surfaces and locations of objects. However, religious sites and experiences are not confined to fixed places, as the portability of material objects enhances a sense of connectedness and *communitas* even for those who are not physically present ([Higgins and Hamilton 2020](#); [King 2010](#)). Therefore, instead of separating the representational and material aspect, the relationship between religion and

¹⁰ For example, a Special Issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 45/2 (2018) was dedicated on the topic.

tourism should be understood as a form of experiencing religious sites through interaction between people, objects, and the environment.

Using Chidester and Linenthal's (1995) three aspects as a framework, in the following analysis I will trace the role material objects take as the shrine is constructed, performed, and contested by various actors. Through this, I aim to shed light on the different ways in which religion and tourism are entwined within the shrine and the tourists' performances and interactions with material objects.

4.1. The Construction of Seimei Shrine—Theming the Shrine

Since the mid-2000s, Seimei Shrine has established itself as a tourist attraction in Kyoto. In order to adapt to the growing number of tourists, the shrine has not only improved its infrastructure with multiple parking areas and a new bus stop, but also implemented strategic branding and image management (Einstein 2007; Porcu 2014). This can be observed both in the virtual presence (official website, social media), as well as the physical environment of the shrine. The most apparent aspects are theming and merchandising (Bryman 2004), as the theme of Abe no Seimei and his legends are present in the overall visual look of the shrine, from their website and pamphlets, to bronze statues as well as other paraphernalia that can be purchased at the shrine.

Let us start with the material construction of the shrine. Seimei Shrine is divided to two areas with torii gates, the outer and inner part. The inner part, which contains the main altar (*honden*) and the shrine office, hosts objects which are common to most of the shrines in Japan. An example of this is the *temizusha*, where one can ritually purify oneself before entering the shrine premises. While being the religious part of the shrine, the inner part also has objects that cannot be found anywhere else other than Seimei Shrine. These include objects, such as a bronze statue of a peach, which is said to ward off evil, a statue of Abe no Seimei, and a pentagram-shaped well¹¹. There are also more touristic objects, such as picture boards, which explain the different legends, as well as a cardboard cutout of Abe no Seimei, which visitors can use to take pictures¹². The outer part has the official souvenir shop Kikyōan and various themed stone statues, such as the replica of the famous Ichijō bridge and beside it a statue of a *shikigami*, a gremlin-like character, who is also featured in the legends.

The various statues are explained to have special religious meaning and spiritual power. The water of the pentagram-shaped well, for example, is said to have healing properties. On the other hand, the same objects are also given distinct stories—it is said that Abe no Seimei used his magical powers to make water burst out of the ground, which was then where the well was built. These stories and meanings are conveyed through signs, which are placed next to the objects to explain their meaning to the visitors. Despite the fact that the statues have been built recently, the signs emphasize the objects' authenticity by contextualizing them as history and folklore. For example, the bronze statue of the peach is explained as follows:

Since ancient times, in China as well as in the practice of Onmyōdō, the peach has been told to be a fruit that protects against misfortune. Even in Kojiki and Nihonshoki, the peach has been described as warding off evil. This can be seen as the origin of the folktale Momotarō, too. Everyone has their own bad luck and misfortunes. By stroking away the bad luck onto this peach, you can feel refreshed.

(Sign explaining the statue)

¹¹ Onmyōdō is a Japanese esoteric cosmology, which is based on ancient Chinese philosophy. The pentagram (*gobōsei*) is said to symbolize the five elements (*gogyō*), which are the basic principles of Onmyōdō along with yin-yang (*onmyō*). It is also used as the logo of Seimei Shrine and can be found in different forms around the shrine.

¹² Interestingly, while the statue is made based on a Heian-era portrait of a middle-aged Abe no Seimei, the illustrations on the picture boards feature Abe no Seimei as a handsome young man, adapting to the current image of the wizard.

For most visitors, the different signs act as the main source of information. They are ‘on-site markers’ (MacCannell 1999), which also affect the visitors’ interpretations and behavior, showing them what is ‘worth seeing’ at the shrine. The explanations use different narrative elements in order to convey the official interpretations of the objects as well as the general theme of the shrine. Connecting the peach statue to famous folktales enhances the story-like theme of the shrine, whereas by encouraging physical engagement, the peach is given a certain spiritual status as an object that wards off evil, thus combining mythical elements with a concrete suggestion of action (Figure 1). The sign also has a commercial function, as below the explanation the shrine promotes a special peach amulet sold at the shrine office.



Figure 1. Visitor touching the peach statue while reading the sign.

While the statues were built in the 2000s, the sacred tree has been growing within the premises since long before the tourists arrived. However, the touristification of the shrine and the nationwide power spot boom made it into a popular attraction among the visitors. In fact, the tree has been reframed as a power spot (both by the mass media and the shrine itself), and is frequently featured in guidebooks and magazines. Most visitors engage with the tree by touching it. Seimei Shrine also encourages this kind of behavior: ‘The bark of the tree has a unique feel to it. Press both of your hands on it to feel the power of the great tree.’ In addition, when asked what was memorable at the shrine, many of the visitors answered the sacred tree. While touching sacred trees is not allowed in all shrines (sometimes even explicitly prohibited, such as in Ise Shrine), it is a common practice at many so-called power spots (Horie 2019). It can be said that this kind of physical engagement is a way through which visitors understand places and objects as power spots. This also brings about certain expectations of a place to which shrines have to adapt.

The nationwide power spot boom has also changed the ‘imaginary geography’ (Larsen 2006) of Shinto shrines. Much of this can be attributed to the influence of celebrity spiritual counselor Hiroyuki Ehara, who published a series of books that introduced Japanese shrines as power spots (Horie 2019, p. 178). Magazines and television shows feature power spots in mysterious locations, usually surrounded by nature—something one could find in a Hayao Miyazaki movie. This image was also held by the interviewees—while some

explained that the shrine is easy to approach due to the fact that it is a power spot, some commented on the shrine being too urban compared to the natural image they had. For example, the interviewees below compared Seimei Shrine to Shimogamo Shrine, another famous shrine in Kyoto:

Visitor A: Shimogamo Shrine has a lot of green. It's a forest, so I received power [energy] there. I wonder what the difference [with Seimei Shrine] is? It feels more sacred there. It might be because Seimei Shrine has too many visitors? And the trees are all planted.

Visitor B: It feels more sacred, when there's nature.

Visitor A: Of course [Seimei Shrine] is sacred. But because there are a lot of people here, Shimogamo Shrine feels more soothing.

(Visitors in their 30s)

For visitors, the natural environment plays a great role in the construction of the power spot. That is also why the built environment and other people feel distracting. The demand for a soothing atmosphere reflects the image of power spots being places of healing and relaxation—the emphasis is not on the religious but on the spiritual side. They are not places where one would necessarily engage in institutional rituals, for example. Instead, the visitors 'receive energy' and feel refreshed by visiting natural environments and touching various objects—similar performances can be observed in other power spots as well.

Not all shrines are positive towards the power spot trend, as they fear that visitors might neglect the actual place of worship. This represents a gap between what institutions and visitors regard as the object of worship (Okamoto 2019a, p. 136), which at times contests the official interpretation of the shrine¹³. This is not only seen on the level of performances, however; it can also be observed in the material environment of the shrine. To adapt to visitors' needs, religious places have started using various management techniques, such as zoning and limiting entrance (Kadota 2016). Seimei Shrine has limited the flow of visitors so that the inner part of the shrine can be entered during the shrine's opening hours (9:00–16:30). The shrine has also built a platform around the sacred tree to protect its roots from the growing number of visitors wanting to touch it.

Furthermore, it can be argued that since the 2000s, Seimei Shrine has gone through a reflexive process, which can be observed in the increase in various objects. Through the theming of the environment and objects, the shrine has strategically branded itself in order to suit visitors' needs, as well as to distinguish itself from other tourist attractions in Kyoto. While visiting a shrine includes physical engagement with the environment, such as washing one's hands and mouth with water, Seimei Shrine has turned touching certain objects into a special activity. Engaging with the objects, the visitors' actions enhance both the objects' and the shrine's new meanings. On the other hand, the shrine has also used various management techniques in order to control the visitors' actions and interpretations. Thus, by encouraging and limiting certain behavior, the shrine actively produces the experiences of the visitors not just as a religious institution but as a tourist attraction (Paine 2019; Shinde 2020).

4.2. Performing the Shrine—The Different Meanings People Bring to the Shrine

Without people, there would be no shrine. When entering from the main street, the visitors are welcomed by the first torii gate, which has the pentagram symbol on it. After taking pictures of the gate, most of the visitors walk straight to the inner shrine. They purify themselves at the *temizusha* located close to the entrance before paying their respects

¹³ Not only between individual Shinto shrines and visitors, this gap can be observed on a national level. For example, the umbrella organization for Shinto shrines, Jinja Honchō, has dismissed the popularity of power spots as a short-term trend that does not support long-term engagement (Carter 2018, p. 162). Carter argues that by delineating power spot related practices, the organization attempts to establish a set of norms for shrine worship, which points to an underlying concern regarding Jinja Honchō's authority over ritual and practice (Carter 2018, p. 163).

at the main altar. After that, they engage with the more unconventional objects by stroking the bronze statues and the sacred tree. The visitors also purchase different religious objects, such as amulets. Before leaving the shrine, many take a look at the souvenir store located in the outer part of the shrine.

In this way, the shrine is constructed through different practices. However, it is not just the religious rituals but also the different tourist performances that produce the space (Edensor 1998, 2000). While tourist performances are greatly influenced by different narratives, the performative processes themselves reconstitute the symbolic value of the site. In fact, sites 'tend to be fluid entities whose meanings and usage change over time and are apt to be contested by different tourist groups' (Edensor 2000, p. 326). Thus, different meanings and media representations are emplaced not only by the shrine, but also through the visitors' performances. However, the representational side is only one part of the story, as the performances are bound in a network of material relations between people, objects and the environment.

While Shinto lacks strict doctrines, and practices in shrines are relatively free of restrictions (Nelson 2000), in Seimei Shrine there are certain 'disciplined rituals' (Edensor 2000), common practices based on social etiquette. These actions are produced through socially acquired knowledge, the presence of other visitors, and the engagement with the material environment of the shrine, producing the flow of performances. However, this kind of common knowledge applies only to objects, which can be found in other shrines. Regarding the special objects, such as the themed bronze statues, the visitors tend to partake in more improvisational performances. Many, for example, made funny poses and took pictures with the peach statue, and laughed when talking about it. So-called post-tourist performances (Edensor 1998) could also be observed, especially with the more overtly touristic objects, such as the Abe no Seimei picture board and Instagram panel, with which some visitors took funny poses and commented on sarcastically.

However, while improvisational, the performances are not completely arbitrary, as they 'rely on contexts and instructions to provide a broad framework within which some improvisation may take place' (Edensor 2000, p. 335). In the case of Seimei Shrine, the context also relies heavily on popular culture. As mentioned above, Seimei Shrine became famous through movies and TV series, and therefore is visited by members of several fandoms. Thus, so-called popular remembrance, such as that of different media representations, influences the ways in which people understand and talk about the shrine. It has been said that through the consumption of different media representations, visitors connect to, and enhance their experience of the place (Timm Knudsen and Waade 2010, p. 12). In fact, when asking about where the interviewees first heard about the shrine, while some mentioned the shrine's connection to the movie *Onmyōji*, most talked the figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu. They connect its popularity with the figure skater—not the religious aspect or the deity of the shrine:

[Seimei Shrine] has become a famous shrine. Compared to before, this is all thanks to Hanyu (laugh). I do not think that people really knew much about *onmyōji* or Abe no Seimei, that is why [it became famous].

(Visitor in their 50s)

The connection to Yuzuru Hanyu can be observed in material objects within the shrine. For example, the shrine displays a wooden tablet written by the figure skater for fans to see, and some of the interviewees specifically came to see his autograph. The shrine also sells a winning amulet connected to the skater's success in the Olympic games. However, Hanyu's presence is most visible in the wooden votive tablets (*ema*), through which fans express their devotion to the skater.

Ema are wooden votive tablets to which one can write their wishes or vows. Usually, visitors purchase and personalize the votive tablets 'on the spot' and leave them at the shrine. They act as a medium through which the wishes or needs are made known to the deity enshrined in a shrine or temple (Reader 1991, p. 23). Moreover, they have also become an intrinsic part of Japanese fan culture. Although often connected to anime pilgrimage,

other fandoms express themselves through votive tablets as well. Reader, for example, pointed out that votive tablets ‘provide a scope and setting whereby baseball fans can bear witness to their support for their favorite team’ (Reader 1991, p. 37). This communicative aspect has been discussed by Andrews, who noted that instead of fans communicating face-to-face, their ‘communication is anchored in the material plane through the medium of the *ema*’ (Andrews 2014, p. 220).

Who are the messages meant for, then? In anime pilgrimage, it seems to be more towards the fans than the deities worshiped in the shrine, as sometimes they act as a physical forum through which fans communicate with each other (Andrews 2014, p. 221). This can be seen in the illustrations and messages addressed to other *emas* hanging on the rack. In her work on the Seimei boom among Japanese schoolgirls in the 2000s, Miller also noted that instead of addressing their messages to Abe no Seimei, visitors wrote messages to the novelist Yumemakura Baku and manga artist Reiko Okano, who made the wizard popular in the first place (Miller 2008, p. 37).

In addition, in the case of Yuzuru Hanyu, *emas* connect their writers not only to the shrine but also to the figure skater, as well as the wider fan community. This can be seen as being rooted in, as Reader explains, the humorous and ludic dimensions to *ema*, as well as their accessibility and the freedom they provide to the writer to determine the extent and nature of their request (Reader 1991, p. 46). This flexibility is also based on the material characteristics and the anonymity of writing *ema*. The material characteristics (shape, size, placing of the printed illustrations) afford various kinds of ways to personalize *ema*—in anime pilgrimage, the emphasis is on the fans’ drawings. At Seimei Shrine, the fans personalize the tablets by writing messages and decorating them with drawings and stickers in order to pray for Hanyu’s success (Figure 2). In addition, anonymity can be seen as a factor in the flexibility of *ema*, as while some people write their full name, many only write their first name or initials, while some do not write their name at all. These factors enable fans to express themselves freely.



Figure 2. A decorated *ema* that wishes for the health and victory of the figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu.

Furthermore, through *ema* writing, the shrine becomes not only a shrine for Abe no Seimei, but through the fan’s performances, it also enters a new network of sacred sites for Hanyu Yuzuru. In fact, the skater’s presence can be seen in the votive tablets in other shrines dedicated to Abe no Seimei, such as the Abe no Seimei Shrine in Osaka.

Sometimes material objects themselves act as an attraction, as in the case of seal stamps (*goshuin*). Originally acquired as a proof of praying at a shrine or a temple, visitors collect the stamps in a special stamp book (*goshuin chō*) that one can purchase at temples or shrines.

Recently, the collection of seal stamps (*goshuin atsume*) has become a popular hobby and a reason to visit shrines and temples. In fact, many consider collecting *goshuin* a ‘must’ when visiting a shrine, as one can observe from the several guide books and websites dedicated to the topic. These kinds of media representations provide an example of how to perform at shrines (Okamoto 2020). In addition, due to the popularity of *goshuin* collection, one can purchase the stamp books in stationary shops and bookstores—this reflects how religious objects are produced and consumed outside of the original religious setting.

For many, the *goshuin* is the reason why they visit Seimei Shrine. One family, for example, looked up other tourist attractions around Nijō castle, and chose to visit Seimei Shrine because of the *goshuin*—they only had a vague image of the place before. Thus, while the shrine was not the primary attraction, *goshuin* collection acted as a pull factor for the visit. It can be said that the performance of *goshuin* collection produces a flow of material objects and people, as visitors move from one shrine to another. Another prominent feature of *goshuin* collection is photography. As the stamp as well as the stamp book in Seimei Shrine features the pentagram symbol, many want to take a picture at the shrine. Figure 3 shows how a visitor takes a photograph of the stamp book with the pentagram-shaped well in the background. This way, the visits are materialized both within the stamp books, which visitors use to remember their visits, and in photographs of the actual place.



Figure 3. Visitor taking a picture of the *goshuin* stampbook with the Seimei well.

However, the materiality of the stamp raises the question of authenticity. While some of the parts of the *goshuin* are stamped, usually the name of the shrine is written by hand. In Seimei Shrine, however, the name is also stamped, which replicates the characters written by Haretake Tsuchimikado, Abe no Seimei’s descendant and a prominent figure in the history of Onmyōdō in the 1800s. Therefore, the characters are seen as meaningful in the context of the history of the shrine. While the meaning of the characters is explained on the pamphlet one receives when acquiring the *goshuin*, the fact that the characters are not written by hand has been criticized by some visitors. A comment on TripAdvisor says:

“(Seimei Shrine is) a power spot I have wanted to visit. I was surprised by the constant flow of visitors. I wanted to get the *goshuin* but it was pre-written.”

(Posted by [Eightwalker](#) 2018)

For this visitor, the fact that the *goshuin* was not handwritten led them to the decision not to acquire one. On the other hand, the following comment shows the perceived importance of the appearance of the *goshuin*:

“No part of the *goshuin* was handwritten, even the date was a stamp. At least they were honest about it when they confirmed whether it was ok that it was all stamped. You cannot tell whether it is handwritten or not from the quality of the *goshuin*. At least is better than the poor *goshuin* written by a part-timer with a dried up calligraphy pen at the famous Tenjin-san¹⁴.”

(Posted by (418ken 2017))

From these comments, one can see that the visitors have their own criteria of authenticity apart from the religious context. From the shrine’s point of view, the *goshuin* are authentic—handwritten or not. However, the visitors think that the actual act of writing is a vital part of the authenticity of the *goshuin*. This can be said to reflect the way visitors perceive shrines and the objects there as something traditional, opposed to something seemingly premade or mass produced, such as a stamped *goshuin*. The fact that the shrine staff ask whether it is ok that the *goshuin* is stamped or not, shows that the shrine has also adapted to the visitors’ needs.

Although the consciousness of belonging to one’s local shrine has weakened, people tend to connect and find meaning in other shrines through their personal interests and memories. Some visitors talked about their personal connection to the shrine by sharing their life histories. These kinds of performances of personal remembrance are often expressed through material objects. A visitor from Tokyo, for example, talked about how they turned to Seimei Shrine when they had trouble at work:

As I said before, I got a favor from the shrine a while ago. When I started working at my company, I had an unkind colleague. When I bought a talisman and placed it beneath my desk every day, the colleague went away [from the company]. I was very grateful because of that. Based on this experience, I can say that [the shrine] is very effective.

(Visitor in their 40s)

Originally bought for a certain need, the talisman helped the visitor to overcome an obstacle, which then acts as evidence of the shrine’s power. The visitor’s action reflects the custom that religious objects, such as amulets and talismans, are usually brought back to the shrine where they have been purchased. In addition, if the visit or object has been beneficial, some people pay another visit to show their gratitude (*orei mairi*). For this visitor, however, visiting Seimei Shrine has also become a part of their routine in Kyoto, and the story of the talisman acts as a link between the visitor and the shrine. Although the visitor does not have the talisman anymore, the experience brings them back, ‘contributing to their narratives and performances of self’ (N. Morgan and Pritchard 2005, p. 45). The story of the talisman connects the visitor and the shrine, past and present events, as well as giving meaning to future visits.

These examples of the performances and views on votive tablets, seal stamps and talismans reflect how people connect with Seimei Shrine. While the shrine provides a certain framework, it also provides a setting for a range of other interpretations and performances, as visitors actively engage with it and its objects. It can be said that visitors understand the shrine through performances of popular and personal remembrance, which is materialized in the interactions between people and objects. These interactions reflect national trends (Porcu 2013), such as the *goshuin* collection and power spot boom. New meanings and interpretations are emplaced and enhanced through visitor performances.

¹⁴ It is not clear which shrine the commentator is referring to, as the name Tenjin-san is often used to refer to shrines of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), nowadays revered as Tenman-Tenjin, the god for learning. From the context, the comment could be referring to Kitano Tenmangū Shrine in Kyoto, located fairly close to Seimei Shrine.

They also connect individual shrines to broader networks of people and goods. Sometimes these performances lead to conflicts, as I will discuss in the next section.

4.3. Contesting the Shrine—The Souvenir Dispute

As Chidester and Linenthal (1995) argued, sacred space is not inherently sacred. Instead, the sacredness of the space is constructed and therefore in constant flux. This can be seen in the way Seimei Shrine has actively adapted and participated in tourism instead of rejecting the outside media representations and new visitors. However, as new meanings are attached to the place through representation and contestation, the production of sacred space raises questions about authenticity and the process of authentication.

The discussion of authenticity has been central to tourism studies since the 1970s (MacCannell 1973; Cohen 1979) and has developed from object-based authenticity to a social constructivist approach (Bruner 2005), and further to discussions of existential authenticity (Wang 1999). However, lately, the focus has shifted from authenticity to the process of authentication. The study of authentication is the study of the social and political processes behind authenticity, i.e., the social process by which something (thing, site) is deemed real, true, or authentic (Cohen and Cohen 2012). As Cohen and Cohen (2012) discuss, authentication is not only based on formal authority and certification but also the informal performative processes of creating, preserving and reinforcing authenticity. Thus, not only official certifications, but also the practices of visitors can be seen as a means of authentication. In addition, as Jones (2010) in the context of material culture argues, authenticity is a product of the relationships between people, objects, and places—therefore, authentication is produced through the meanings people give, as well as embodied practices involving objects.

Souvenirs are an essential part of tourism. Seimei Shrine has also produced religious and touristic paraphernalia, which can be purchased at the shrine office and the official souvenir shop Kikyōan¹⁵. However, in 2011, Seimei Shrine appeared in the newspapers, as it had taken action against a neighboring souvenir shop called Onmyōji honpo. The unofficial souvenir shop had produced and sold souvenirs, such as good luck charms and a small Abe no Seimei mascot character called Seimei-kun. This led to Seimei Shrine publicly accusing the souvenir shop of the desecration of the deity revered in the shrine. The following announcement was posted on the shrine's official website on the 27th of October, 2011. Signs with the same contents were also placed within the shrine premises.

The 'Onmyōji goods' and 'Good luck goods' sold close to the shrine by the Tajima orimono kabushikigaisha¹⁶ (Onmyōji honpo), have not been purified or blessed at the shrine. We have nothing to do with them.

Selling these kinds of objects close to the shrine is inappropriate and desecrates the divine virtues of Abe no Seimei considerably and we have asked the shop to stop selling them. However, the problem has not been solved and the situation is getting serious. For everyone visiting the shrine, please understand the situation and be careful of the following things.

1. Do not use the 'Onmyōji goods' or 'Good luck goods' when visiting the shrine.

¹⁵ Miller has noted that Shinto shrines dedicated to Abe no Seimei started producing and selling religious paraphernalia targeted especially towards young girls during the Seimei boom (Miller 2008, p. 36). Seimei Shrine sells both souvenirs and religious objects within its premises. The religious objects are mainly sold at the shrine office, whereas souvenirs are sold at Kikyōan. At the time of my fieldwork, religious objects, such as 16 different types of amulets (*omamori*), three types of talismans (*ofuda*), and purifying sand were sold at the shrine office. There are also special amulets, only available during certain periods or events. However, the shrine office also sells seemingly secular items such as a small comic book about Abe no Seimei's life, as well as special stationery.

¹⁶ The textile company, which owned the souvenir shop.

2. These ‘goods’ cannot be called *ofuda*, *omamori* (amulets, charms). Do not place them in the return box¹⁷.
3. We might inquire about these acts from a legal and religious position. We ask for your cooperation.

(Seimei Shrine 2012)

From the official announcement, we can see that souvenirs and their authenticity are in the center of this conflict. The official announcement also tells us that there are three different actors involved in the dispute—the shrine, the souvenir shop and the visitors. All of these actors involved had their own meanings and sense of authenticity, which is constituted in different ways.

First of all, the statement used religious rhetoric to emphasize the shrine’s authority over the objects as well as Abe no Seimei. The unofficial nature of the souvenirs was based on the fact that they had not been officially purified, blessed or produced by the shrine and therefore the souvenirs were seen as desecrating and offending Abe no Seimei. The souvenirs were also seen as dangerous, as the description of the Seimei Shrine’s official souvenir shop seems to imply: ‘We sell memorabilia and souvenirs at Kikyōan. As everything is authorized by Seimei Shrine, one can purchase them *with peace of mind*.’ (Italics added by the author.)

The authenticity of the objects was also related to the practices they were involved in. The souvenir shop, for example, sold the souvenirs by using Abe no Seimei’s story in order to make profit. According to the owner, they ‘just wanted to spread Abe no Seimei to the world by making him into a cute character’ (Murakami 2012). From their perspective, the souvenirs were not even meant for religious practices. While many shrines and temples are using mascot characters in their branding, (see Porcu 2014), the shrine decided not to embrace the new character. From the shrine’s point of view, Seimei-kun and the other souvenirs had a blasphemous and non-authentic status. This was enhanced further by the fact that the visitors had used the unofficial souvenirs as religious objects within the shrine premises, as implied in the official announcement. From the visitors’ point of view, though, the souvenirs were a part of the overall experience at the shrine. A souvenir can become a religious object and vice versa, as the same object can have multiple meanings and uses during its lifetime (Kopytoff 1986; N. Morgan and Pritchard 2005).

Through their performances involving the unofficial souvenirs, the visitors unconsciously contested the shrine’s official meanings and interpretations, as well as its authority. The shrine reacted to this by controlling and banning unwanted behavior by using its authoritative status within the religious context. However, by mentioning the possible legal consequences, the announcement implies that the souvenirs were seen as a problem from not just a religious perspective but also a secular one. In fact, the official souvenir shop called Kikyōan sells souvenirs similar to the ones of Onmyōji honpo. However, the official souvenirs have a sticker of approval to distinguish their authenticity. From this, it is clear that the unofficial souvenir shop was a business rival, which threatened Seimei Shrine’s brand. That is why the problem was not the inherent authenticity of the objects but the authority over who is able to tell the story of the shrine (Bruner 2005), whether it be the shrine, the souvenir shop, or the visitors. In the end, Onmyōji honpo closed its store in 2016, but still continues to sell its items online.

The dispute can be seen as an example of how the dynamics of the shrine changed through the involvement of tourism. When the shrine and souvenirs enter the touristic context, the authority of the shrine as well as the status of the objects become relative. While the physical movement of the objects as well as the involvement in the visitors’ practices were the igniting factors, within the dispute the objects became a part of the authentication process—a way to show authority and control the interpretations and

¹⁷ The *osamefudadokoro* is a box in which old religious objects are placed when brought back to the shrine. There is a custom that old religious objects should be ritually disposed of at a shrine. Many of the visitors interviewed in January 2018 brought back their old amulets to Seimei Shrine.

practices of visitors. However, the mixing and matching of different narratives and practices shows that within the individuals' experiences they themselves are the upmost authority regarding authenticity, which reflects the individualization of modern religion as well as tourism.

5. Discussion

The relationship between religion and tourism reflects the change and transformation of religion in the late-modern consumer society, which can be seen in both the way in which religious institutions adapt to, and visitors understand, religion. By focusing on material objects and the interactions they are involved in, one can observe how the boundaries between the religious and the secular are shifting in individual performances as well as the shrine itself.

One way to explain this is through the metaphor of a spiritual market, proposed by Yamanaka (Yamanaka 2016, 2017, 2020). According to Yamanaka, in the traditional religious market, religions used to offer goals which are considered demanding to attain, such as salvation and pilgrimage. Opposed to this, nowadays, consuming religion is linked to so called 'self-reflection' or 'finding oneself'—themes which are more easily approachable and relatable to modern people. The needs which this consumption establishes are then fulfilled with different products, such as those of religious tourism. Referring to Zygmunt Bauman's notions of liquid modernity and light capitalism, Yamanaka calls this phenomenon light religion (*karui shūkyō*). The lightness refers to a situation, where the religious and non-religious markets merge, and religious ideas and practices are displaced and consumed outside of their original contexts within a new spiritual market. In the case of Seimei Shrine, this religious transformation can be seen in the way the shrine has changed its image through branding and commodification, as well as accommodating the visitors' various needs. These needs are reflected in the material environment of the shrine as well as the visitor performances, in which popular culture and media representations have permeated.

While most interviewees mentioned Seimei Shrine's connection to popular culture, some visitors came for the shrine's religious benefits or services. As Seimei Shrine is famous for preventing danger (*yakuyoke*), some visitors chose the shrine because it was their dangerous year (*yakudoshi*)¹⁸. However, the visitors interviewed did not participate in any special rituals and their visit did not differ from the average tourist's. Seimei Shrine also offers life counseling services (*jinsei sōdan*), which are based on fortunetelling. This is peculiar to Seimei Shrine, as not all Shinto shrines offer this kind of service. Some visitors had come to the shrine because of that (some even specified that they had found the shrine when searching for 'uranai', which means fortunetelling).

For most, however, the visits were not part of a 'finding oneself' narrative—instead, most of the visitors enjoyed the peculiarity of the shrine's material environment as well as the narratives attached to it. In fact, most of the visitors did not see the visit to Seimei Shrine as religious nor spiritual, and it was understood in a touristic context. From an etic point of view, they however participated in seemingly religious practices, such as prayers and *goshuin* collection. One reason for this, as Nakanishi (2018) argues, is that Shinto has permeated in the daily lives of the Japanese and visiting a shrine is often not consciously recognized as a form of religion¹⁹.

What makes visitors engage in these kinds of practices at Seimei Shrine? While some researchers have argued that practices reflect so-called 'affective belief', which functions on an emotional level, as opposed to cognitive or doctrine-based belief (Reader and Tanabe

¹⁸ *Yakudoshi* are certain ages when people are thought to be especially open to misfortune. The years before and after are also considered dangerous. According to Reader and Tanabe, 'praying for the eradication of dangers is a major category of benefit seeking, and *yakudoshi*-related prayers and actions are one of the most prevalent occasions when this occurs' (Reader and Tanabe 1998, p. 62).

¹⁹ From a historical point of view, this can also be linked to the separation of the religious and the secular in the modernization of Japan, especially with the formation and use of the term religion (*shūkyō*). As a political choice, to distinguish Shinto (or specifically State Shinto) from Buddhism and Christianity, Shinto was classified as morality instead of a religion (Isomae 2012). As an in-depth discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this article, see for example (Isomae 2012, 2014; Josephson 2012; Krämer 2013; Rots and Teeuwen 2017).

1998), in the study of material religion, the assumption of underlying belief has been problematized. Keane (2008) argued against taking practices or material objects as expressions or evidence of prior beliefs. Okamoto (2019b) also talked about how seemingly religious practices at power spots cannot be taken as evidence for a new religious consciousness, as there is no set belief system behind the practices. Instead, the main reason behind the practices seems to be whether or not the places enable these kind of practices (Okamoto 2019b, p. 98). Additionally, Kadota (2016) discussed how the instructions and management techniques at sacred sites produce so-called artificial belief (*jinkōteki shinkō*), which can be seen in the form of prayers in places where one is *supposed* to pay one's respects. Additionally, in Seimei Shrine, it can be said that most just follow the examples of the different media representations and instructions provided at the shrine. Many touched the sacred tree because they were *supposed* to—in the context of power spots.

Okamoto and Kadota discuss the practices as reactions to the material environment. As we have seen in the examples in Part 4, objects such as the seal stamps and *ema* act as intermediaries through which the visitors connect with Abe no Seimei, the shrine, as well as other people, including their idols. However, while the meanings are varied, the performances themselves are not something completely new. To explore how mediations bind and bond believers with each other and to the transcendental, Birgit Meyer has coined the notion of 'sensational form', by which they mean 'relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between believers in the context of particular religious power structures' (Meyer 2009, p. 13). These include both religious content (such as beliefs, doctrines, sets of symbols) and norms. According to Meyer, 'sensational forms can best be understood as a condensation of practices, attitudes, and ideas that structure religious experiences and hence "ask" to be approached in a particular matter' (Meyer 2009, p. 13). As mentioned above, while Shinto shrines do not have certain doctrines, there are certain ways to interact with the material objects within the shrine.

While Meyer's discussion is focused on new media, tourism can also be seen as a phenomenon which has an impact on established sensational forms. In fact, many people engage with and understand religious themes and narratives through tourism and popular culture, which is apparent in the case of Seimei Shrine. While Porcu has noted that 'the market and media have acquired a privileged position in creating meaning for contemporary religious practices' (Porcu 2013, p. 292), tourism is involved in the reconstruction and negotiation of practices, not only meanings. As we have seen, tourism brings about images and expectations which are projected onto the material objects and the performances involving them. Within these interactions, as Rambelli has noted, 'sacred objects function as interfaces, and the realm of materiality in general can be defined as a space of interplay between the secular, the sacred, and their respective economies (systems of production, exchange, and representation)' (Rambelli 2007, p. 273). Value is also important, such as the multiple criteria of authenticity seen in the examples of stamped *goshuin* and the souvenir dispute.

While it is true that 'the relevance of the shrines is not in their religious messages but in the considerable freedom they provide individuals to use its precincts for different pursuits' (Nelson 1996, p. 117), in the case of Seimei Shrine, the relevance seems to lie in the active adaptation to new meanings and situations. Not just passively providing a set for visitor performances, the shrine has actively changed its material environment and image to suit the needs of the visitors. It also encourages the visitors to connect physically with the objects within the shrine. Through these interactions, the shrine and its objects provide the visitors with feelings of enjoyment and sometimes also connectedness, whether it is to a deity, a favorite character in a movie, or a community of fans. These experiences are enhanced by different mediations, be it the media representations or tangible amulets bought at the shrine. For fans of Yuzuru Hanyu, visiting Seimei Shrine and purchasing religious items are a way to express one's identity as a fan, not necessarily expressing an underlying belief.

Furthermore, tourism also brings about contestation and conflict, as seen in the case of the souvenir dispute. In Chidester and Linenthal's view, religious actors are often opposed to the entanglement of so-called 'profane' forces (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, p. 17), which was also the case with Jinja Honchō's response to the power spot boom. However, as we can see in the case of Seimei Shrine, not all religious actors are necessarily opposed to these forces, as many religious institutions are responding to national and global trends by actively participating in various aspects of tourism. Seimei Shrine has unarguably done this and much more—it has established itself as a popular tourist attraction in Kyoto.

Yet, as the boundaries of religious and secular institutions are becoming fluid through the involvement of tourism, religious institutions have to face situations which they have not had to worry about before. Different actors are bound to get involved in religious places, and as Kinnard argues, 'it is precisely the competing conceptions and motivations of the various actors involved in a particular place . . . that constitute it' (Kinnard 2014, p. 2). While the shrine has embraced a seemingly 'soft' image through its connections to popular culture (Porcu 2014), during the souvenir dispute it pleaded to its status as a religious actor to protect its status. This goes against the fact that the shrine does not normally impose a strict doctrine on its visitors. This shows that the shrine has entered a new touristic market, in which it has to protect its status in order to differentiate itself from other shrines as well as other tourist attractions of Kyoto. In this context, the religious aspect is just one of the many meanings of the shrine—Seimei Shrine has to balance its attractiveness as a tourist attraction as well as its integrity as a religious institution.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, I have analyzed tourism at Seimei Shrine through the three aspects of constructing, performing, and contesting sacred space. Since the 2000s, Seimei Shrine has adapted to the touristic context through the theming of its premises as well as its media presence. With the use of material objects, such as bronze statues and other paraphernalia, the shrine has adapted to the outside media representations and the visitors' expectations. This can be seen as a reflexive process, where the shrine has had to re-evaluate its position within the religious as well as the touristic market. By embracing tourism, the shrine has adapted to the late-modern consumer society, in which it is no longer the center for religious life but has to compete with other shrines and tourist attractions in Kyoto.

Visitors consume the shrine through different performances. It became clear that while there is not much variety in the practices, the interpretations and meanings are connected to personal and popular remembrance. While some understand the material objects through personal memories, for many, the context in which the shrine is consumed is highly mediatized. Thus, the material objects provide an interface for self-expression and the construction of personal ties, as different fandoms have found their place within the shrine. Therefore, the case of Seimei Shrine reflects the overlap between religion and popular culture in a concrete way.

It also became clear that Seimei Shrine has several roles—as a religious actor, as well as a tourist attraction. The souvenir dispute revealed that Seimei Shrine is not only a vessel for different outside representations; it is also an active participant in the process. While the situation brings about new challenges regarding authenticity as well as authority, the involvement in tourism can be seen as a way to respond to the shift of the place of religion in modern society as well as the diverse needs of the visitors. Another great challenge for Shinto shrines is the COVID-19 pandemic, as festivals are cancelled (Amada 2020) and visitors are not physically able to visit the shrine. Moreover, many shrines, including Seimei Shrine, have changed the shape of the *temizusha* so that the visitors do not have to use a ladle when purifying themselves. While seemingly small, this change affects the way visitors interact with the material environment and the objects within the shrine. That is why the exploration of the shrine's secular connections as well as the material changes they impose can be seen as the key to placing Shinto shrines in the context of wider societal change.

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