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Mt. Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan, representing spirituality, calmness, solemnity, and unparalleled beauty in the world. Japanese people have adored the spirituality of this mountain for centuries. It has tacitly taught us to strive to be beautiful, pure and broadminded.

As a matter of fact, Mt. Fuji is a Japanese ideal image, having the tremendous divine power of heaven and earth within itself. The mountain's beauty and purity is a symbol of our Japanese peace-loving mind. This spiritual mountain warmly welcomes whoever visits. Everyone is moved by the spirituality of this mountain. Once one sees this spiritual mountain, they sense something magnificent beyond human power and are struck by its solemnity. Mt. Fuji is not considered merely a mountain, but a sublime being. It has something beyond our knowledge. It is a god itself. Early poets, namely the Manyo poets already thought of Mt. Fuji as a god. Japanese people have been worshipping Mt. Fuji which has been the source of power and the salvation of souls for centuries. Konohana-no-sakuyahime-no-mikoto models all Japanese women and is the main deity of Fujisan Hongu Sengen Shrine. Even the meaning of her name itself represents beauty and her character symbolizes a very gentle spirit. We Japanese believe that we should walk together in harmony with the spirit of Holy Mt. Fuji, which represents cooperation, beauty and kindheartedness. We should make ourselves pure in mind and soul, and pray that the god grants our petition.

1 . WHO IS WORSHIPED HERE ?

Many Poets referred to Mt. Fuji as a god in their poems. The goddess enshrined in the Shrine is Asama-no-ohkami, called Konohana-no-sakuyahime-no-mikoto. According to the legend she was the daughter of Ohyamazumi-no-kami and became the spouse of Ninigi-no-mikoto's who came down from the heavens. She has been a model for all Japanese women for her chastity and worshiped by Japanese people. This deity has been worshiped as a guardian deity, especially for fire prevention, safe delivery, ocean voyages, fishing, farming, weaving and so forth.

2. THE ORIGIN OF SENGEN SHRINE

At the time of the 7th Emperor Kohrei the eruptions of Mt. Fuji frightened people and made them scatter. As a result, the whole land was devastated for years. The 11th Emperor Suijin enshrined Asama-no-ohkami at the foot of the mountain to pacify its rage. This is the origin of this shrine. In the reign of the 12th Emperor Keikoh, Yamatotakeru-no-mikoto conquered the eastern parts of Japan, despite the wild fire set by his enemy in the district of Suruga, by praying to Fuji Asama-no-ohkami for his life, he escaped without any harm. After he subdued his enemy, he deified Asama-no-ohkami at Yamamiya (about 3.8 miles north of the present Sengen Shrine). After that, in the first year of Daidoh (806), the 51st Emperor Heizei ordered Sakanoue-no-tamuramaro to build a new grand shrine at the present site of Fujinomiya in place of Yamamiya . Since then, for over a thousand year, this shrine has been the Head shrine among more than a thousand Sengen Shrines throughout all over Japan. This shrine is honored nationwide as a celebrated shrine in the Tohkai (Shizuoka, Aichi) district.



Since ancient times, this shrine has been highly honored in the Imperial Court and was promoted to one of the most eminent shrines by the Code established in the Engi period. The Court sent Imperial messengers and presented some offerings and land to the Shrine, the most important one in the Suruga district.

Under the Samurai Government, Minamoto-no-Yoritomo dedicated more land to the shrine. In addition, Hohjo Yoshitoki , Ashikaga Takauji and Yoshimochi restored the main building, while Takeda Shingen and Katsuyori presented many other treasures. Toyotomi Hideyoshi also presented farther property.

In the 9th year of Keicho (1604), Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu built the inner shrine, the front shrine, the tower gate, etc. and dedicated them to the shrine. Because he wanted to pay homage to the shrine in appreciation of the Emperor's acknowledgment that he had subdued the turbulence in the country. As a result he was appointed to Shogunate. In addition he dedicated to the shrine the area above the 8th station of Mt.Fuji in the 11th year of Keicho (1606).

After that the Tokugawa shogunate heartily revered the Shrine and Iemitsu dedicated farther property. Ietsuna, Tsunayosi, Ieharu, Iesada and Iemochi also offered donations and repair cost to the Shrine.

Pilgrimages to Mt.Fuji date back to the Muromachi period and has become more and more

popular since the Edo period. Ohmiya, the former name of Fujinomiya, in which the Shrine is situated, was once called 'Fujisan Omoteguchi' or the entrance to the mountain. Needless to say, this was the nearest climbing base for worshipers from the Kansai area. Quite a few devout people from the Kanto and Tohoku area journey here to take this route. So do worshipers from the Kai (Yamanashi) and Shinano (Nagano) area. The visitors to this Shrine after getting accommodations, before climbing, would purify themselves at the Wakutama Pond in the shrine precincts.

The Shrine was ranked second by the government on May 14 in the 4th year of Meiji (1871) and was authorized to be one of the most important grand shrines by the Imperial Household Agency on July 8 in the 29th year of Meiji (1896).

3. FESTIVALS

There are more than sixty festivals held each year. The chief ones are as follows:

SETSUBUN FESTIVAL Feb.3 or 4

This is also called the festival for warding off evil spirits and praying for good fortune. On the day of the festival, we have the ceremony of Meigen (picking the strings of a bow) performed to get rid of evil spirits. Mamemaki is the ceremony where men born under the sign of the Chinese zodiac as the current year throw beans toward the crowd. The precincts are crowded with thousands of people.

YABUSAME FESTIVAL May 4,5 and 6

According to the record of Sengen Shrine, Yabusame Festival comes from the episode of Minamoto-no-Yoritomo's hunting at the base of Mt. Fuji in the 4th year of Kenkyu (1193). These ancient events were recorded in the Fuji Ohmiya Shinto Ritual Documents in the 5th year of Tensho (1577) and in the Fuji Hongu annual festival programs in the 3rd year of Keian (1650). The Festival is held for 3 days. The middle day is called Yabusame Festival. It is performed before the inner shrine in traditional rites. After that, Shinto Priests, samurai, children and others parade along the main streets on over 60 horses, and the ceremony of Yabusame follows on Sakura-no-baba, the riding grounds in the shrine precincts.



RICE PLANTING FESTIVAL July 7

The event of rice planting is held at the paddy called Kanda near the shrine. After the ceremony in the central Sengen Shrine, Shinto priests, together with chief rice planter, tillers and saotome (young girls) form a procession and walk playing court music to the paddy where they hold the ceremony of rice planting after the saotome's dance. This day falls during farmer's leisure period in this area. And so there are many people coming from the surrounding area.

The Opening ceremony of the Mt. Fuji climbing season July 7

The Closing ceremony of the Mt.Fuji climbing season Sep.7

The Mt. Fuji climbing season begins on July 11 and ends on August 31. The mountain is solemnly opened at the shrine on July 7, 4 days early before its opening and Shinto priests pray for the climbers' safety. On September 7, a week after the close of the season, a solemn declaration of a successful season is made together with thanks for the protection of the god.

THE ANNUAL AUTUMN FESTIVAL Nov. 3, 4, and 5

The Fuji Ohmiya Shinto Ritual Documents from the 5th year of Tensho (1577) and also the program of Fuji Hongu Annual Festivals from the 3rd year of Keian (1650) state that this festival is Tai-Sairei, the Big Festival and they also say that it used to be held in April, September and November. But now it is held just in November. The programs of the festival run three days; the eve, the main, the closing. This three-day festival (Taisai) is the biggest celebration in Fujinomiya. Young and old dressed in gorgeous finery, parade through the whole city, playing bamboo flutes and taiko (drums) on dashi (floats). This festival is the most well-known in the eastern parts of the Suruga (Shizuoka) district.

4 SHRINE BUILDINGS

The present buildings were built in the 9th year of Keicho by shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, to offer his thanks to the shrine.

The inner shrine, the front shrine, the Noh stage, the tower gate etc. were magnificent, but some of them were destroyed by the great earthquakes in Kanei and Ansei period (1855). We can see only three original buildings – the inner shrine, the front shrine and the tower gate.

INNER SHRINE

This is a two-storied building each with its own roof. It is about 14 meters high. Here we can observe what is called Sengen architectural style. We have no other examples like this in Japan. The first floor is 9 x 9 square meters and is in the style called 'Hohden-zukuri' with wide eaves. The second floor is 5.5 x 3.6 square meters with the curved roof called Nagare-zukuri. Both are thatched with bark of hinoki (white cedar). It was designated as a special conserved building by the law for preservation of old temples and shrines on May 27 in the 40th year of Meiji (1907). Since then this building has been treated as one of the national treasures or important cultural properties.

FRONT SHRINE (for general worship)

This building is 9 x 9 square meters, and built in a style of 'irimoya-zukuri' peculiar to Japan. Its roof spreads down in four directions, and is thatched with the bark of white cedar.

TOWER GATE

This gate is about 13 meters in height, about 7 meters in width, 4.5 meters in length and its roof is covered with white cedar. At either side of the tower gate there are two statues that are called guardians. The inscriptions on the backs of the statues show that they were carved in the 19th year of Keicho (1614). The framed letter was written in the 2nd year of Bunei (1819) by the Buddhist priest Einin. He is Imperial Highness, Prince Shohgoin.

5. PRECINCTS

The area of main shrine precincts is roughly 56,000 square meters. In the center you can see both a magnificent shrine and an imposing tower gate. In its sacred area, where the beauty of both art and nature is skillfully arranged around these buildings, we can feel the Greatness of the God.

THE SACRED PRECINCTS

This is located on both sides of the 150 meter approach to Kagami (mirror) pond from the first Torii. The crystal clear Kanda Stream flows on the east side, and there is a playground among trees. About 1,500 cherry trees are planted all over the precincts in honor of the main deity.



KAGAMI-IKE (Mirror Pond)

In front of the main gate there is Mirror Pond which is also called Spectacles Pond. The arched bridge across the pond was rebuilt of stone in commemoration of Emperor Taisho's enthronement in the 4th year of Taisho (1915).

SAKURA-NO-BABA (Horse Riding Grounds with Cherry Trees)

In April the cherry blossoms are in full bloom here, and add great beauty to Sengen Shrine. And in May Yabusame (Horse-back archery) is held here in this place in the traditional rite. Thus the name, Sakura-no-baba amongst cherry trees.

HOKOTATE-ISHI (Halberd-Stand Rock)

The rock on one of the stone steps in front of the tower gate is called Hoko-tate-ishi. It was used as a stand for the sacred halberd. In ancient times two grand festivals were held here in April and November, commemorating the visit of god of Yamamiya Shrine to Sengen Shrine, and he put his halberd here.

WAKUTAMA-IKE (Wakutama Pond)

When you go out of the small east gate after visiting the main shrine, you will see the Wakutama Pond.

A poem written by Taira-no-Kanemori (?~990) in the age of Heian goes like this : “ Out of the bottom of the stream of Mitarashi in Sengen Shrine springs clear water more than enough to wash my hands.”

This pond has been designated as one of the special natural treasures. The melting snow of Mt.Fuji springs out into this pond. An elegant vermilion Mizuya-Shrine is built on a rock at the source of the spring which flows from the



foot of Mt. Kantate. In former times people climbing from Ohmiya purified themselves in this sacred water.

KANTATE-YAMA (Kantate Knoll)

This spot located northeast of the main shrine is called Kantate-Yama, and fronts on Wakutama Pond. Here and there some azaleas dot the knoll, making its rocky and rugged surface of it beautiful. This is also where Prince Taisho, a son of Emperor Meiji took a rest when he visited the shrine in the 27th year in Meiji.

Tenjin-Ja is at the starting point of climbing Kantate-Yama on the pond side of the Mizuya Shrine.

MITARASHI GAWA (Mitarashi Stream)

Clear spring water of Wakutama gradually forms the gentle stream of Mitarashi, which eventually becomes Kanda River, dividing the city district from the shrine precincts. Itsukushima-Shrine stands on a tiny islet in Mitarashi and on the western side of the stream there is Inari Shrine.

6. OKUMIYA (The shrine on the top of Mt.Fuji)

The area of Okumiya includes everything above the 8th Station of Mt. Fuji. That ranges to more than 4,000 sq.km.

This is a very holy area and has been worshiped as the place where the body of the deity of Sengen Shrine dwells.

There are some spiritual grounds and training places for ascetic practice.

Main places are as follows:

DAINAI-IN

This is an older crater of Mt. Fuji, and called Yukyu. Its bottom reaches as deep as the 8th Station.

OKUMIYA

This shrine is at the end of the mountain trail from Fujinomiya. Mt. Fuji itself is the principal object of worship; therefore it has no inner shrine, and has only a front shrine and a middle shrine.

KUSUSHI SHRINE

This shrine stands at the end of the mountain trail from the starting points of Yoshida, Subashiri and Kawaguchiko. It is a branch of Okumiya.

KINMEI-SUI AND GINMEI-SUI (Golden and Silvery water)

Ginmei-sui is located at the beginning of the descent to Gotenba and Kinmei-sui northwest of Kusushi shrine. These spots are at the top of Mt.Fuji where the blessed water drops down and worshipers take this water as a gift from Asamano-ohkami.

HASSHINPO (Eight Sacred Peaks)

There are eight sacred peaks named Ken-ga-mine, Hakusan-dake, Kusushi-ga-take, Johju-dake, Asahi-dake, Koma-ga-take, and Mishima-ga-take all around the volcanic crater. Trekking through all these eight sacred peaks is called Ohachi-meguri (rim trekking). Ken-ga-mine is the highest of the eight, and its height is 3,776 meters (12,385 feet) above sea level.

