

# Pilgrimage to Mount Tai and Mount Tai's Cultural Space in Japanese Literature

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**Abstract:** Mount Tai, as a famous mountain in China, has not only geographical and material significance. With its own characteristics, it guides people's spirit, arouses people's imagination and resonance. Mountains are inanimate, but they have some kind of spiritual symbol in people's hearts. Such a spiritual symbol not only affects the whole nation, but also affects our neighbors and even other countries in the world. This paper is based on the classical literature of neighboring Japan, looking for the records of Chinese and Japanese visitors in Japanese literature, as well as Japanese scholars' understanding of Mount Tai as a cultural space.

**Keywords:** Mount Tai; Japan; Literature; Pilgrimage; Cultural space

## 1. Introduction

The author will first examine the basic impression of Mount Tai cultural space in Japanese literature through literary works. *Du Zichun*, a representative work of the famous modern Japanese writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa, sets the ending as Tieguanzi giving Du Zichun a "home located at the southern foot of Mount Tai". There are many opinions as to why this home is at the foot of Mount Tai. According to the book, the protagonist Du Zichun hopes to live a "real life like a human being", so the final result is set in Mount Tai, which is meaningful. When introducing the setting of the site of Mount Tai in Hironashi Hashimoto's *Treatise on Du Zichun*, he quoted the commentary in the *Guangciyuan* to explain that Mount Tai itself, as a sacred mountain, is worshipped by ordinary people and has been admired since ancient times. Citing Chinese works, he introduces the significance of Mount Tai to the Chinese people.

According to the book *Customs*, there is a manual on Mount Tai to predict the lifespan of people, and Mount Tai is the root of all things, clouds are born from the rocks of Mount Tai, and Mount Tai clouds can make rain fall in an instant. In *The Legend of Immortals*, there is the story of *the Old Father of Mount Tai*, which tells the story of a fairy who can make people grow old again. Others include *The Search for the Gods*, which also records some of the immortals of Mount Tai. Hashimoto concluded that for people in the past, Mount Tai was a sacred and imaginative place. Therefore, it is meaningful for Ryunosuke to set the ending at Mount Tai. As for Akutagawa's setting, the author believes that most critics have a positive opinion on the "home at the southern foot of Mount Tai", that is, it means that Du Zichun starts a new life. This opinion is inseparable from the sacred and positive impression of Mount Tai's cultural space in Japanese history and culture.

In addition, in the ending of *Du Zichun*, it is described that "Tieguanzi says that peach blossoms are blooming everywhere around the house", and peach blossoms can remind readers of the allusion of "peach blossom land". The author believes that the Chinese people have a deep belief in peaches, and they have always regarded peaches as "a symbol of immortality" and peach trees as the tree of life. At this time, the spot at the southern foot of Mount Tai, which is full of peach blossoms, undoubtedly outlines the symbolic significance of Mount Tai's fairyland, and in a sense, it is also the reason why Akutagawa himself accepts the image of Mount Tai's fairyland.[1]

To sum up, it can be seen that the Japanese literary works describe the cultural space of Mount Tai as a sacred fairyland.

## 2. The cultural space of Mount Tai in Japanese literature — Sacred Mountain

Then, how do other documents describe the cultural space of Mount Tai?

In his thesis *Thoughts on the Sacred Mountain Tai*, Kimura discussed in detail the significance of Mount Tai's existence as a sacred mountain, and also investigated the context of Mount Tai as a sacred cultural space. He first pointed out that Mount Tai contains multiple meanings, including the national sacrificial mountain, the Taoist mountain, the goddess of the mountain, etc. In addition, the stone carvings and buildings of Mount Tai are also of great historical significance. These multiple meanings are the factors that make up Mount Tai's "sacred mountain". At the same time, he combined the symbolic meaning of sun worship in Dawenkou culture with the deep meaning of the word "Tai", pointing out that Mount Tai refers to the intersection of opposite Spaces and places. Mount Tai represents the intersection of heaven and earth, the intersection of life and death, the intersection of Yin and Yang and other multiple meanings, and these meanings make Mount Tai a "sacred space" that includes all things.

The author also points out the problems of the secularization and commercialization of Mount Tai belief in modern times, and thinks that tourists watching the sunrise is actually the residual meaning of "sun belief". Here he puts forward a problem, that is, the people who come to Mount Tai can actually be divided into two categories, one is the "pilgrims" who really come to worship, and the other is the "tourists" who do not understand the cultural and religious significance of Mount Tai. Based on this, let's take a look at the descriptions of pilgrims and tourists in Japanese literature.

### 3. Chinese pilgrims in Japanese literature

Hiroshi Takahashi, professor of the Department of Law and Literature at Ehime University, called Mount Tai "the most famous of the five mountains" in his book *The Tour of Mount Tai in China*. He believed that Mount Tai, with the Emperor Dongyue as the chief deity and the Emperor Bixia Yuan Jun as the chief deity after the Ming Dynasty, attracted many visitors from North China as the center. The pilgrimage is also called Jin Xiang, and the pilgrimage visitors are also called Xiang visitors. "It is said that Bixia Yuan Jun has the merit of giving children and curing eye diseases, so the pilgrims are mostly women," he said. The Mount Tai Pilgrimage is a representative pilgrimage in North China, along with the Mount Putuo Pilgrimage in Zhejiang Province, the Mount Wudang Pilgrimage in Hubei Province, the Mazu pilgrimage in Fujian Province and the Guanyin pilgrimage in Hangzhou. Hiroshi Takahashi focuses on the Mount Tai's pilgrimage in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Since the Ming Dynasty, the main god of Mount Tai changed from Dongyue Emperor to Bixia Yuan Jun, so his investigation mainly focused on the belief of Bixia Yuan Jun. The article mentions that before the Ming Dynasty, the Mount Tai pilgrimage was mainly dominated by the Dongyue Emperor. During the Chongzhen to Hongzhi period of the Ming Dynasty, the Bixia Yuan Jun belief was particularly protected by the Ming government.

At the same time, the name Bixia Yuan Jun was fixed, and the number of pilgrims increased greatly during this period. And it is generally believed that the collection of incense tax started from this period. During the reign of Zhengde, the number of pilgrims continued to increase, and the emperor would send emissaries to worship Bixia Yuan Jun. During the years from Jiajing to Wanli, hundreds of thousands of people flocked to Mount Tai for worship every year. The emperor and his ministers would also personally or send emissaries to worship Bixia Yuan Jun. At the same time, the worship of Dongyue Emperor was abolished. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the temple of Dongyue Emperor on top of Mount Tai was no longer visited, and the buildings were almost destroyed.

"Mount Tai is a symbolic sacred place in China," Ishino Ichiharu notes at the beginning of his book *The 17th Century Mount Tai Pilgrimage and Incense Society: An Inscription on the Remains of the Grand Temple of Lingyan Temple*. He notes that most previous studies have focused on zen and the relationship between Mount Tai and Taoism, but the study of folk beliefs has only emerged in the last 20 years. Therefore, through the relevant inscriptions on the Mount Tai pilgrimage in the Lingyan Temple in the Mount Tai Mountains, the author will examine the situation of the Mount Tai pilgrimage of ordinary people in the 17th century. He explained in the article that the pilgrims not only gathered in Shandong, but actually came from a wider area, especially from the north of the Yangtze River. In his paper, he summarized the chapters about the pilgrimage written by Xie Zhaozhe and Chen Diwen at the end of the Ming Dynasty, and explained: "People at that time considered Mount Tai to be a holy place, and Mount Tai gathered the pilgrims from North China and even all over China."

As for the specific group of pilgrims, he quoted Chen Baoliang and Ye Tao's paper as saying that the pilgrims were mainly "peasants" who set up "random groups called such and such societies" and "almost no individual worshippers" or "family members". Records of "hui" began to proliferate from the middle of the Ming Dynasty. He mentioned that there were such records: "A group of travelers to Mount Tai would bring Xiang Paper to the temple of the Maiden Maiden first to report. There were also those who chose

not to go to Mount Tai and paid their respects at the Temple." Such accounts appeared frequently in local Chronicles after the end of the Qing Dynasty. Later, he gave a detailed account of how money was collected in these societies and how it was used for the pilgrimage. The main point of this thesis is to reflect the situation of the pilgrimage and the incense society of Mount Tai through the stone inscriptions near Mount Tai at that time.

After analyzing many inscriptions, the author comes to the conclusion that only through the individual inscriptions left in Lingyan Temple, the author can understand the grand occasion that a large number of various people from the vast surrounding area came to Mount Tai for pilgrimage at that time. According to the inscriptions of Lingyan Temple, it can be found that after the Ming Dynasty, with various situations such as social unrest, the number of people who visited the temple varied. Until 1650, it was constantly increasing and decreasing. After the 1660s, there were generally only 2-5 groups visiting the temple, and after the 1670s, it almost disappeared. The author believes that "the disappearance of inscriptions during this period is related to the decline of the Mount Tai Pilgrimage". Later, during the reign of Kangxi, the temples around the country recovered, and Mount Tai returned to its former liveliness. After the death of Emperor Yongzheng, the incense tax was completely abolished, which greatly increased the number of people visiting Mount Tai.[2]

He noted the fact that the number of inscriptions was particularly high in 1621 and 1660, reflecting the high number of pilgrims in these two periods. Considering the rebellion of Xu Hongru in 1621, Ishino Ichiharu points out that "for the common people of the folk religious association, Mount Tai was an irreplaceable holy place." Among other things, he asserts, "A large number of folk religious groups came to Mount Tai as a place of pilgrimage."

The Tours usually take place from January to April, and from September to December, especially from September to December. However, according to some relevant records in the local Chronicles, the number of pilgrims in October is also quite high, which is strange. On the contrary, there are few records about the pilgrimage in this period in the inscriptions. Therefore, the author believes that the pilgrims in this period may be related to some mysterious religion, or even a fanatical religious ritual.

The author goes on to analyze the geographical distribution of the pilgrims. Of course, Shandong Province accounted for more than half of the pilgrims. As a whole, there are more in the west of Shandong Province and the east of Henan Province, and there are also quite a few in the south of Hebei Province and the north of Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. It is distributed along the transportation routes, especially along the Grand Canal and along the Yellow River from Kaifeng to the east. In addition, people from villages accounted for a relatively high proportion. However, after the second half of the 16th century, with the development of the city, more and more rich people living in the city also came to visit Mount Tai.

What can be determined from the above documents is that Mount Tai is a sacred space in the true spiritual sense for the Chinese nation. From ancient times to today, a large number of Chinese people from all over the country have rushed to Mount Tai to make pilgrimages to find spiritual sustenance, and Japanese documents also record this fact from various sides. The author can infer that the Japanese literature's recognition of the sacred space of Mount Tai culture is also based on these records.

#### **4. Japanese visitors in Japanese documents**

In addition to some famous modern Japanese writers, the most representative visits to Mount Tai by ordinary Japanese people are the students of the East Asian Academy of Literature. The Institute was founded in Shanghai in 1901. After that, it began to conduct research and travel in China, writing and publishing the *Travel Records of the Institute*. This book contains a large number of investigations and studies related to Mount Tai, which are based on the actual experience and impression of the students of the Institute of East Asian Literature on Mount Tai. By studying the relevant records in the *Annals of Travel Records*, people can understand the impression and experience of ordinary Japanese students on Mount Tai at that time.[3]

First of all, the reasons why Mount Tai was chosen as the object of the survey trip are discussed. According to the *Annals of the Travel Records*, Mount Tai is widely regarded by ordinary Japanese as China's spiritual mountain and one of the five famous mountains in China. The survey team repeatedly encountered foreigners on the climb, which shows that Mount Tai was quite famous as a tourist destination at that time. The students of the academy also saw many scenes of the life of ordinary people in Mount Tai during the climbing. They specially recorded these life scenes, which shows that they agree

with ordinary people's reverence for nature. In their travelogues, the college students recorded the stone carvings of Mount Tai, which they considered to be the special features of Mount Tai. Some students were so impressed by the majestic landscape of Mount Tai that they not only praised the natural scenery, but also spoke highly of it. Most of the students spoke highly of the magnificence of Mount Tai.

The college students' visit to Mount Tai not only showed the appreciation of the natural scenery, but also included the first impression of the customs and customs of Mount Tai. In particular, they had a great interest in the goodwill of the local residents of Mount Tai, and also learned a lot about the daily life of ordinary people. Mount Tai was an important place for students of the Academy to investigate Shandong culture at that time. The students of the Academy keenly captured not only Mount Tai standing in the land of Qilu and its primitive and mysterious ecological cultural characteristics and its profound historical heritage, but also the wisdom and diligence of the people living on this fertile land. Of course, like most Japanese visitors, they could not fully identify with the history and culture beyond the physical geography and the lives of ordinary people. For example, some students thought that the stone carvings disturbed the harmony with nature.

This sense of cultural disharmony can also be seen in other scholars' writings on their visits to Mount Tai. For example, Ipei Tanaka, a Japanese scholar of Chinese culture in the early 20th century, although he affirmed the status of Mount Tai culture and believed that Mount Tai could provide insight into the changes of Confucianism and Taoism, the root of Chinese thought, and the embodiment of Chinese civilization, he still highly respected the original religion of Japanese Shinto and emphasized the integration with nature. This is similar to the preliminary views of some students in the Academy on Mount Tai.

## 5. Summary

It should be said that although Japanese scholars and some Japanese people have established a good impression of Mount Tai through Chinese stories and documents, the imagination of Mount Tai's cultural space is also sacred. However, when they really climbed Mount Tai to understand Mount Tai, they mostly stayed in the appreciation of the natural scenery, and could not fully identify with the understanding of history and culture. In other words, most of Chinese to Mount Tai are pilgrims, while most of the foreigners were just tourists to Mount Tai. This phenomenon is expected to change in the future. And this is also the direction that Chinese scholars will work hard in the future, that is, to make greater efforts to publicize the spiritual connotation of Mount Tai culture to the world.

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