

## **Cultural dimensions of outdoor education in Mt Koya, Japan: Co-existing patterns of universalist and local outdoor education approaches**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is based on research completed into social and cultural dimensions of outdoor education in Mt Koya, Japan. Following Andrew Brookes' research on cultural dimensions of Australian outdoor education, I examined 12 outdoor activities in four main categories – elementary school, high school, local group, and public event – through the use of unobtrusive research methods. From the research findings, data revealed that a distinctly Japanese style of outdoor education, which connects philosophy and practice with existing cultural landscapes, is emerging, particularly at the local and regional level. Therefore, in this descriptive study, I will focus on cultural dimensions of Koya outdoor education in two parts: (I) Koya cultural landscapes and ontological experience; and (II) Koya cultural preferences and outdoor education responses.

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### **Introduction**

Japan is a 'developing' country in outdoor education. The current Japanese outdoor education climate can be a 'blind spot' in outdoor educational research (Wagner, 1993), because of (a) Japanese academic lag, and (b) a lack of articles written in English. According to Iida (2002), while Japanese outdoor education is about twenty years behind compared to American outdoor education, it has dramatically improved. (Iida, President of Biwako Seikei Sports College, is a pioneer in Japanese outdoor education and an authority in 'camp' education.) In addition, most Japanese outdoor educators do not publish their research in worldwide English academic journals. In three of these top journals, *Journal of Experiential Education*, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, and *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* (AJOE), I can find only one article (Maeda's (2005) action research on community-based outdoor education in AJOE) that mentions Japanese outdoor education in the last 5 years (2004-2008).

In my master's thesis, I selected 12 current Japanese outdoor education practices (out of 30 programs collected between June and November 2007) in Mt Koya, Japan (three each from elementary school, high school, local group and public event) through which to examine social and cultural dimensions of Koya outdoor education. The main research related to the nature and role of Koya outdoor education, through (a) an analysis of the role of social and cultural influences on Koya outdoor education through a range of outdoor education practical models, and (b) a critique of imported outdoor activities in the Koya context. Data was collected via observation, incidental conversation and information-gathering in various forms and analysed using an ethnographic-inductive approach.

As a research limitation, this study did not examine typical universalist approaches, (although Outward Bound Japan was established in 1989 and Project Adventure Japan was set up in 1995), but focused on Koya co-existing patterns where they presented. Because possible useful universalist approaches with local and national meaning and significance are naturally selected from within the existing culture, pure, solely universalist approaches such as Outward Bound School are not found in Mt Koya (except for Taikyu High School 'Long Hiking' program).

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Importantly, this study was conducted during a transitional period of the education reform (the application of the revised Fundamental Law of Education in 2006 and announced new national curriculum guideline in 2008), as well as during a period of change revolving around the economic and educational challenges presented to Koya, and a community development plan in transition (three years after the World Heritage nomination in 2004).

Thus, I hope that this study is some kind of contribution to cultural diversity in outdoor education, which is one of the current outdoor education academic interests, as Gough (2007) indicates in National Outdoor Education Conference (Australia). For this reason, I highlight cultural dimensions of Koya outdoor education, including its historical development and future possibilities. This paper thus reinforces the view of Brookes (2004), that no aspects of outdoor education should be considered universal without first taking into account geographical, historical, social and cultural aspects of outdoor education.

## **Part I: Koya cultural landscapes and ontological experience**

### *Concept of cultural landscapes as human-nature relationships*

My research area is part of World Cultural Heritage *Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range*<sup>1</sup> in Wakayama Prefecture. The Kii mountain range is highly regarded for its unique ‘cultural landscapes’ which include three sacred sites – (1) Koyasan; (2) Kumano Sanzan; and (3) Yoshino and Omine – and embody a diverse mix of religious traditions such as Shinto, Buddhism and *Shugendo*<sup>2</sup>. An even more remarkable component of the buffer zone area surrounding the sites (designated by UNESCO to protect the area’s natural heritage value) is the world heritage cultural landscapes (see Ishida, 2005; Oda, 2007; Town of Koya, 2008).

According to Ishida (2005), cultural landscapes are classified into three categories: (a) cultural landscapes specifically man-made, such as gardens and parks; (b) cultural landscapes formed organically by human activities, such as rice terraces and vine yards; and (c) cultural landscapes associated with religion and arts, such as sacred trees, holy mountains, pictures and poems.

In relation to the second and third categories, Motonaka (2001) notes that the integration of organic cultural landscape and religious cultural landscape has helped preserve Koya area (see Photo 1 & 2). Rice terraces, villages and forests along the pilgrimage path, Koyasan Stone Marker Path, and most of the surrounding mountains (all acting as buffer zone), can be identified as exceptional Koya cultural landscapes.

Furthermore, this cultural landscape reflects the intertwining of nature and human spirituality. The spirituality of the Japanese and beauty of Japan’s natural landscape have interwoven over time to form the sacred sites and pilgrimage routes of Koya. Oda (2007) notes that the spiritual framework of contemporary Japanese culture was first developed through the fusion of Shinto and Buddhism. Koyama (2001) also notes that Shinto/Buddhist fusion led to “the foundation of Shintoist or Buddhist sacred sites in various locations which have become sites of pilgrimage” (p. 97). Since Mt Koya had been an important hub for cultural and religious interactions in Japan

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<sup>1</sup> The sacred sites and the pilgrimage routes make up the largest cultural heritage site in Japan, covering Wakayama, Nara and Mie Prefectures: this is the most remarkable feature of this heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Shugendo is a distinctive form of ascetic spiritual training produced by the fusion of Shinto mountain belief and Buddhist philosophy.

from the earliest times, the cultural and spiritual climate of Japan was shaped in Koya region. All these factors have played a significant role in the creation and maintenance of a Koya outdoor education philosophy which is based in Koya *huudo*.



*Photo 1. Koyasan Okuno-in (tombs in forests)*



*Photo 2. Amano-no-sato (rice terraces in Amano village)*

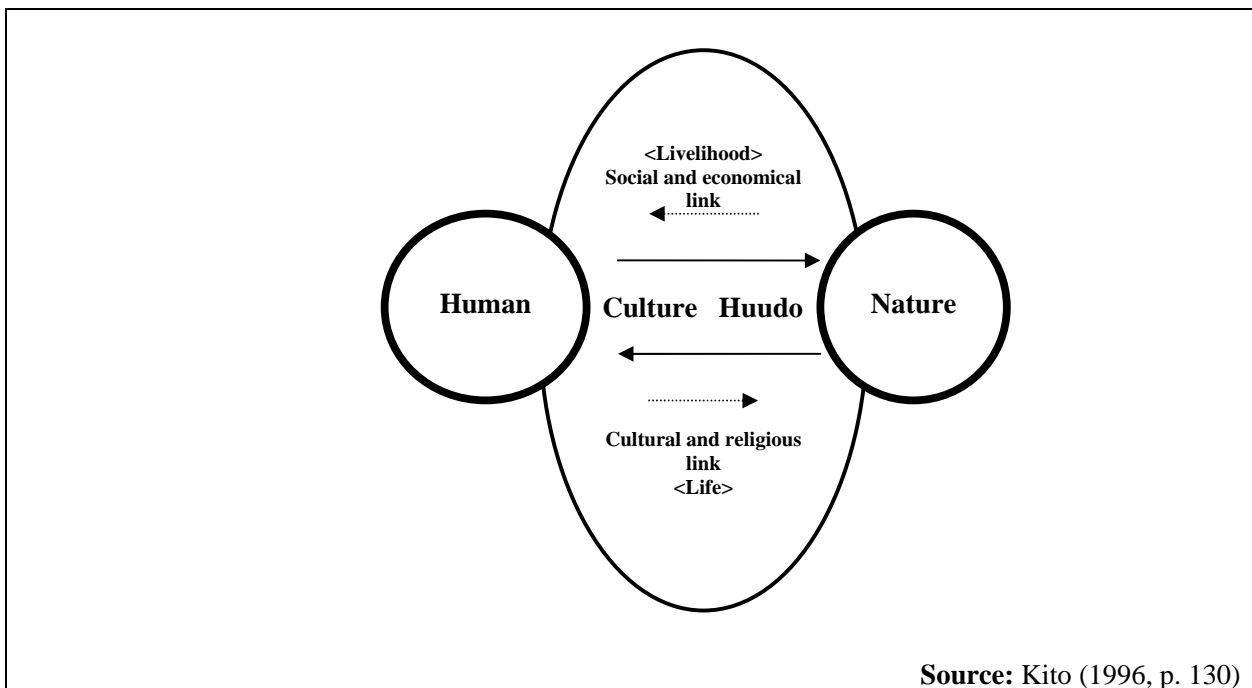
**Examples of cultural landscapes (images by the author)**

*Huudo* provides a vital link with cultural landscapes. *Huudo* in Japanese means the entire relationship between a community and a living environment in a particular region (Kito, 1996; Kameyama, 2005; Maeda, 2005). Berque (1994 cited in Maeda, 2003) treats '*huudo*' as similar to the French '*milieu*', while Kameyama (2005) considers '*huudo*' to be closer to the German '*landschaft*', which refers to the culturally and socially distinctive features of any local or regional area. Meanwhile, Maeda (2005) notes that the continuous co-existing balance between community and nature generates a particular *huudo*; and more importantly, local *huudo* factors such as geography, climate and history can lead to different types of socio-environmental relationships.

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Further, Kito (1996) identifies Japanese socio-environmental relationships as largely the product of 'livelihood', as a 'social and economic link' from nature to human (examples of this can be found in forestry, hunting, and use of medicinal plants); and 'life', as a 'cultural and religious link' from human to nature, for example, through custom, belief and religion (see Figure 1).

More specifically, Kameyama (2005) emphasises three physical relationships between human and nature: (a) skill; (b) symbol; and (c) society. The first is the particular structural wisdom pertaining to local lifestyle and industry; the second refers to a specific culture of socio-environmental relationship, including local custom, rite, religion and folklore; and the third focuses on the ethical and regulatory parameters of the socio-environmental relationship. He also notes that these three physical relationships are identified through three realities indigenous to a place: lifestyle with tradition, space with landscape, and time with history (see Table 1).



**Figure 1. Overview of Japanese human-nature relationships**

Realities of place	Lifestyle (Tradition)	Space (Landscape)	Time (History)
Relationship with skill	Rice farming Industrial art	Rice field Architecture	Traditional skill etc.
Relationship with symbol	Festival Folk entertainment etc.	Temple and shrine Sacred place	Myth Folklore etc.
Relationship with society	Meeting of the neighbourhood association etc.	Community place Common land Bridge etc.	Manners Greeting Language etc.

Source: Kameyama (2005, p. 146)

**Table 1. Focus of *huudo***

In the case of Koya, Koyasan Stone Marker Path<sup>3</sup> is a strong symbol of local *huudo* (see Kameyama's (2005) space-symbol relationship in Table 1) and local outdoor education approach. There are many examples of invisible culture along the path. From three stones which have a particular association with Kukai<sup>4</sup>, three folktales (see Kameyama's (2005) time-symbol relationship) have grown: Daishi's Gown-laid Stone (*Kesakake-ishi*), Shelter Stone (*Oshiage-ishi*) and Mirror Stone (*Kagami-ishi*). In addition, Kongobu-ji temple and Niutsumi-jinja shrine perform their own festivals and rites periodically. Moreover, as a local custom of Koya region, enshrining part of the bones of the deceased at Koyasan (*Okotsu-osame*) has been happening since the beginning of the 11th century (Koya Town Office, 2000). Furthermore, as a folk entertainment (see Kameyama's (2005) lifestyle-symbol relationship), dance with traditional music for the god of rice fields (*Onta-no-mai*) is an important national invisible cultural heritage which has continued since the middle of the Heian Period (794-1185) in Katsuragi-town.

Koya cultural landscapes, therefore, have been produced by age-old interactions between nature and humans. In other words, human activities such as agriculture, forestry, religion and lifestyle that have an 'invisible' culture component and links with traditional belief systems have formed the landscapes. Importantly, current outdoor education, world heritage studies, nature-based tourism and community-based outdoor education can all contribute to the future management of the cultural landscapes. These activities also make it possible for local residents and visitors alike to experience and recognise human-nature relationships through outdoor activities which give meaning and significance to the cultural landscapes of Koya area.

<sup>3</sup> The path connects a previous administrative office for climbing Mt Koya, Jison-in, at the foot of the Koya area in Kudoyama-town, to the mausoleum of Kukai in Okuno-in in Mt Koya. There are 180 stone markers from Jison-in to Danjo Garan and 36 stone markers from Danjo Garan to Okuno-in. The distance between stone markers (which replaced wooden signs in 1285) is around 109 metres. The stones themselves are significant markers of 'Koyasan belief'. This is one of the significant pilgrimage routes of the World Cultural Heritage 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range'.

<sup>4</sup> Kukai (774-835) is one of the most famous high priests of Buddhism in the history of Japan. He is remembered not only as a saint but as a scholar, saviour, spiritual healer, calligrapher, Buddhisattva, pilgrim, inventor of the Japanese *Kana* syllabary alphabet, and founder of Japanese Buddhism and public schools (Koya Town Office, 2000).

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It is therefore important for Koya local people to have their own cultural, historical and environmental understanding of and response to their own place in order to promote sustainability of their own landscapes (landscape shapes mindscape (Orr, 1992, p. 130)), as these landscapes indicate “what may be at stake in the relationship between the community and forest (*agriculture*) (word in italics added by author)” (Brookes, 2005, p. 7).

Some Japanese outdoor education researchers (see Nunome, 2002; Maeda, 2005; Takano, 2005) even argue that the relationship between Japanese ‘*huudo*’ and Japanese outdoor education should be much more inclusive and given greater consideration in any design of outdoor education programs. In so doing, ‘ontological dimensions of outdoor experience’ need to be more strongly emphasised in any learning and understanding of the reality of place. Some Australian outdoor education researchers (see Brookes, 2002; Slattery, 2001; Stewart, 2006) take into careful consideration the role of ‘environmental history of place’ including both natural history and cultural history.

Brookes (2002) notes that “natural history knowledge is not just the accumulation of facts, but also the layering of stories in which personal experience, social interactions, and locality together give both order and meaning to nature” (p. 77), thus claiming that narratives based on ontological assumptions and epistemological interests are part of the naturalist experience. However, even while he acknowledges that natural history knowledge is much more than just mere facts, he is also aware that “all knowledge is selective and partial, including experiential knowledge of local natural history” (p. 81).

Similarly, one hundred years ago, Kumagusu Minakata<sup>5</sup>, one of the great Japanese naturalists, already identified the importance of ontological experience and human-nonhuman connectedness in the Japanese context. Minakata’s perspectives on place and nature can open the way of development of ‘cultural landscapes and experience’ in Koya outdoor education. His ecological philosophy, reinforced with ‘environmental folklore’ as well as cultural anthropology and ethnology, I found to have ideas overlapping with Brookes’ (2002) thoughts on ‘place and experience’ in outdoor education.

According to Kato (1999), Minakata insisted on the importance of natural history and folklore in his environmental movement, because he believed in the importance of sacred places (nature around shrine) for biodiversity, local community, and human spirit. Kato (1999), using terminology originally coined by Gregory Bateson and Felix Guattari, interprets a letter written by Minakata outlining eight reasons against amalgamation of shrines, and also acknowledges Minakata’s identification of complex ecological interrelationships combining three ecological spheres: (a) ecology of biology; (b) ecology of society; and (c) ecology of mind. In particular, Minakata’s ecology of society and ecology of mind, in which sense of place attaches great significance to folklore that is vernacular and historical and embedded in the place, have many similarities with Australian perspectives. Minakata highlighted the significance and contribution of natural history, folklore and oral tradition to local culture and customs in a particular place or community, for example, in the realm of public morals and manners, people’s love for their home place, psychic-physical relationship with the place, and ancient memories of land. In addition, he

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<sup>5</sup> Kumagusu Minakata (1867-1941) was born in Wakayama-city, Japan. After his six-year stay in America, he lived in London between 1892 and 1900, worked for the British Museum for several years and contributed fifty articles in English to *Nature* between 1893 and 1914. He questioned the ecological impact of government destruction of small shrines (as part of the merging of shrines) and started his own environmental movement (known as Anti-Amalgamation of Shrines Movement) in 1909.

paid careful attention to not only conservation of the biological ecosystem in a place but also to the social ecosystem and the idea of connectedness of all existence in the universe (known as *mandala* in esoteric Buddhist jargon).

I believe Minakata's philosophy still has valid meaning today in creating and enriching a Koya outdoor education style with 'ontological dimensions' of experience. By looking to Minakata's three ecological spheres, outdoor educators can connect Koya cultural landscapes with outdoor education experience. Natural history, folklore and religion can all be part of the teaching and learning process as a means to a deeper and better understanding of Koya cultural landscapes.

### ***Example of one outdoor activity (walking) and cultural influences***

From my research findings, Koya outdoor education has several distinct cultural influences. These are in large part due to (a) shifting Japanese perceptions of outdoor activity, viz. internal; and (b) the introduction of ideas from other cultures, viz. external. In this section, highlighting 'walking' as a significant Koya outdoor education style, cultural factors (relating mainly to imported outdoor education practices) that have shaped and developed the walking outdoor activity are highlighted in Figure 2. The development of Koya outdoor education is different from that of the UK, for example, where outdoor education has had close associations with 'militarism', giving rise to such movements as scouting and orienteering.

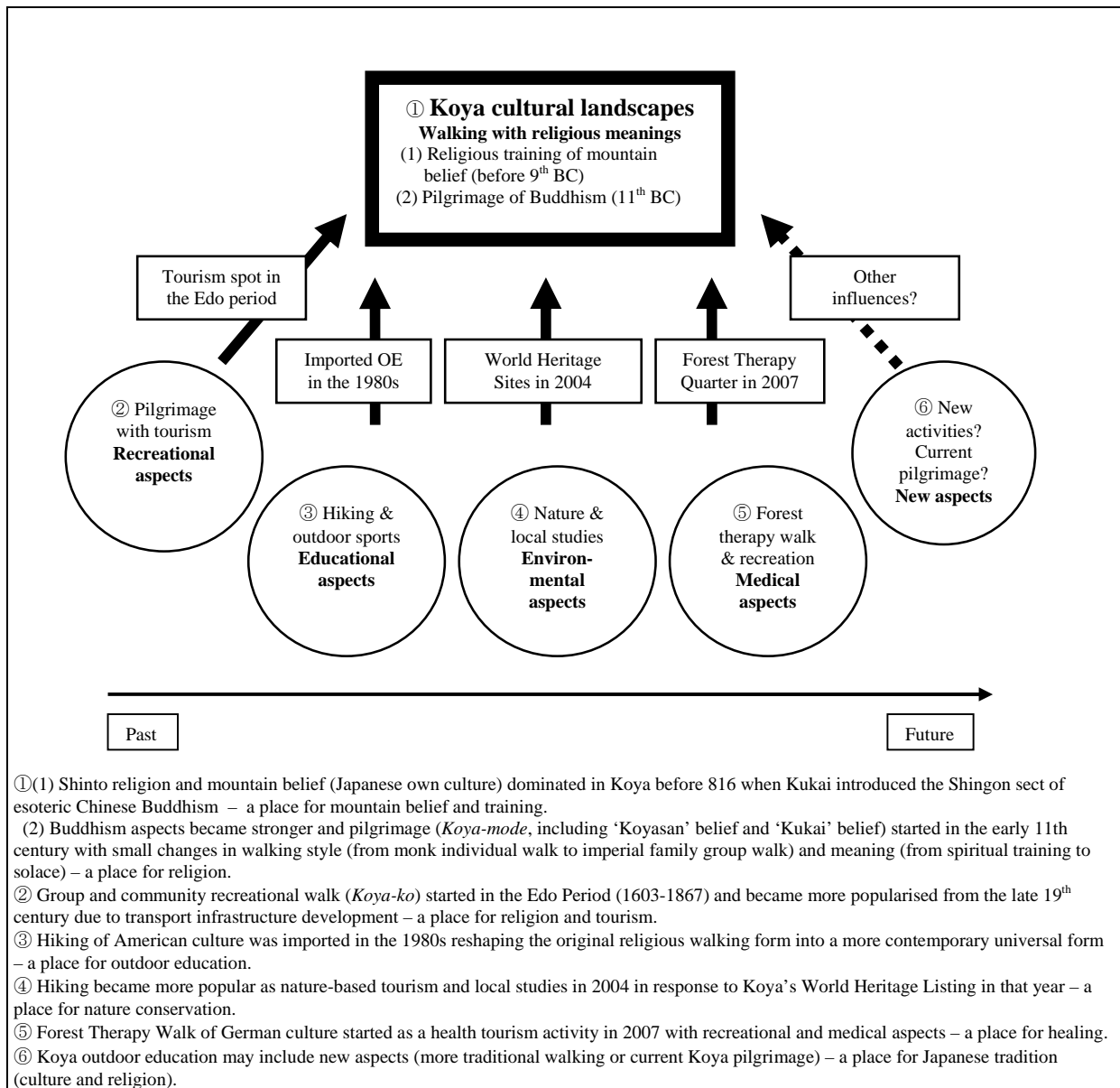
Figure 2 illustrates how no one Koya outdoor culture has maintained itself in its pure form, but has sought to add and absorb new social values and foreign cultural influences (in this case, Chinese, American and German). However, there is something that makes the Koya experience very different: because the strength of Koya's cultural base (Koya *huudo*), spiritually and historically speaking, is still quite formidable, walking has seen the transformation of these imported elements into something very Koya-like. Because Koya culture is deeply rooted in Japanese values and attitudes towards nature in general, this powerful base has been an indispensable element of Japanese culture in every generation.

Looking forward, reclaiming that Japanese traditional outdoor philosophy and religious activity associated with Mt Koya is an important new phase in the 'walking' story. Wakayama Prefectural government is currently addressing these new aspects by encouraging forest education through local government and cultural education through Wakayama Prefectural World Heritage Centre. Koya local government is also trying to create a contemporary pilgrimage model, whereby walking along a pilgrimage route becomes part of both local/regional education and international education tourism (specifically culture, religion and environment).

Thus, by employing a range of culturally-sensitive outdoor education practical 'walking' models, outdoor practitioners can develop outdoor activities more appropriate to Mt Koya. Despite (or can we say, because of) successive imported outdoor culture influence which started in the early 9th century with the fusion of Japanese and Chinese religious training, then working its way into pilgrimage, Mt Koya has for the most part managed to maintain and protect its unique 'walking' outdoor education tradition. Since the 1980s, this tradition has moved together in parallel with progressive western-style outdoor activity (hiking and outdoor therapy) with universalist principles, which (nonetheless) manages to satisfy the nature of Japanese experience and Japanese social and educational imperatives. However, since Koya local outdoor culture reality might still be overlooked in education models, it is in this current period of transition that Mt Koya must now look to its past and pay homage to those purely Japanese cultural elements, in order to reinvent its Japanese outdoor spirit and forge a truly relevant style and purpose of

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outdoor education. This internal change may be as far-reaching throughout Japan as the previous internal change of ‘walking’ with recreational aspect, and may be useful to reconstruct Japanese outdoor philosophy and traditional view of nature.



**Figure 2. Successive stages of outdoor cultural influence on walking over 1200 years**



## **Part II: Koya cultural preferences and outdoor education responses**

### *Japanese cultural preferences*

Japanese culture has historically been influenced by the culture of other countries (Nakane, 1997). In the past, Japan mostly drew on Chinese culture for its alphabet and characters, religions, and socio-political systems (Komatsu, 1997). Since the Meiji Period of Japan (1868-1912), western culture has had a great impact on Japanese culture. A western-style political system, a western-style education system, and a western lifestyle which included fashion, food and housing, have been positively accepted, although not without some modification to suit Japanese cultural preferences (Inoue, 1997; Hirakawa, 1997; Komatsu, 1997; Nakane, 1997). The uniqueness of Japanese culture, therefore, arises both from its cultural selectiveness and the way in which it assimilates other cultures (Komatsu, 1997; Nakane, 1997).

Komatsu (1997) states that:

. . . we find that while this nation of Japan introduced quite a number of cultural elements from other countries into its own culture, this was done on the basis of a certain principle of selectivity: “We want this, but we don’t need that.” Most of a system would be introduced, but sometimes important parts would be left out entirely. This habit of dropping aspects of imported foreign culture is a rather negative element in Japanese culture, but I feel that it is important (p. 171).

Nakane (1997) also refers to the ‘situational adjustment’ of Japanese culture when in the process of assimilating other cultures. She notes that “it seems that Japanese culture is elastic in its ability to meet and respond to different situations while maintaining its own solid foundation” (p. 187).

Just as Japanese culture has been formed through acceptance of foreign culture elements while still retaining its ‘Japanese-ness’, in the same way, outdoor education, as an imported culture, might be modified and arranged in the process of Japanese cultural adoption. The complexity of cultural influences on Japanese culture, therefore, needs to be critically examined in order to, as stated by Payne (2002), provide a critical paradigm for outdoor education theory and practice.

However, there is little concern that Japanese society would ever become thoroughly westernized, even though Japan is absolutely modernized. Wakata (1995) points out that Japanese society conserves particular Japanese patterns which are different from western societies. In his view, Japanese society is bound by Japanese cultural tradition in stark contrast with western protestant ethics. His ‘ethos of Japanese culture’ contains six fundamental elements to explain Japanese society: sense of shame, social relativism, interdependence, clientelism, family system, and the idea of ‘defined construct’ (unconditional and limitless contribution to family and sense of belonging). Similar to Wakata’s ‘social relativism’, other social commentators, for example, Nakane (1997), reinforce the notion of Japan’s culture of collective belonging and respect for group ethos and how this ethos translates into daily life. Because of this strongly defined cultural sense, Japanese culture may not be completely inclusive of western individualism and egalitarianism since it is not very accepting of notions of individual liberty and self-expression.

***Co-existing patterns of universal and local outdoor education***

Even though Koya outdoor education has developed under the strong influence of western culture, it also takes advantage of Japanese traditional culture and Koya local culture. Some outdoor activities can be seen to have cultural influences and traditions at local and national levels. In other words, while they tend to follow a universal model, they also integrate national and/or local components in their program aims. We can see from the aims of each outdoor activity that some outdoor education practices highlight personal development or health care (see Table 2), as universalist outdoor education principles mostly focus on the individual (Brookes, 2004).

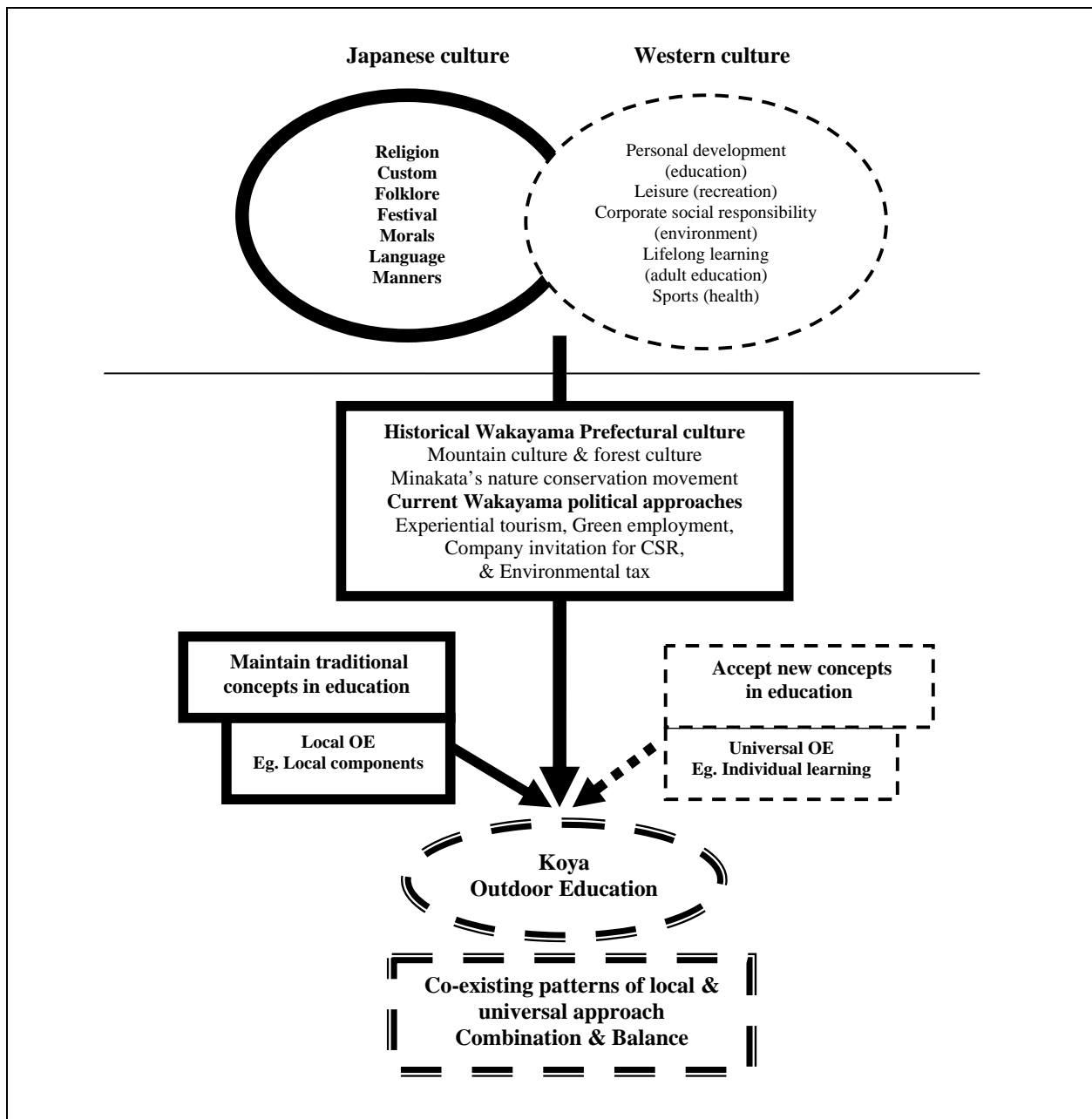
However, in reality, these outdoor activities include dual western and Japanese cultural aspects. While the way of conducting outdoor activity is influenced by the western universal model, the meaning of activity in the Japanese sense is of much greater cultural importance. In an opportune reinvention of universalist principles, imported adventure outdoor activities are now being utilized to develop important Japanese social and educational imperatives in keeping with the prevailing Japanese mood. In other words, personal development in the Japanese sense may lead to moral awareness, mental discipline, traditional-cultural value or religious understanding, compared to in the Australian sense, where personal development focuses on leadership skills, problem-solving skills, personal responsibility, and personal achievement.

More specifically, the Taikyū and Seifu High School hiking activity includes aspects of mental and physical training (*shugyo* or *tanren*) recalling spiritual training and mountain ascetic practice. This is evident in the way that traditional outdoor activities (mountain training or religious walk) are integrated with imported hiking outdoor activities (adventure hiking or therapy walk). However, since some important factors in universalist outdoor education are not featured in Koya outdoor education, some national elements (*viz.* moral and religious) are given a stronger focus. Therefore, these hikes, which would seem to be typical of the universal outdoor education model, when looked at in more detail, can be seen to include unique Japanese-style components, developing the Japanese sense in the uniquely Japanese way.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Taikyu School</b>	<b>Seifu School</b>	<b>Matsue School</b>	<b>Wakayama Medical Uni.</b>
<b>Program aims</b>	Personal development & Cultural studies	Personal development & Religious belief	Group living & Moral education	Medical treatment & Cultural tourism
<b>Approaches</b>	School-based 30km hike & fieldwork	School-based 100km hike	Koya government established forestry	Outdoor therapy walk
<b>Co-existing patterns</b>	<b>Balance</b> Hike & Cultural studies	<b>Combination</b> Hike with religious education	<b>Combination</b> Forestry experience with moral education	<b>Combination</b> Health care with cultural tourism

**Table 2. Universal, national and local influences on Koya outdoor activities**

Figure 3 illustrates co-existing patterns of western and Japanese cultural elements together with co-existing patterns of universal and local/national outdoor education approaches:



**Figure 3. Co-existing patterns of local and universal outdoor education influences<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>6</sup> It was my Japanese friend's wedding that led to my developing the Koya co-existing outdoor education model (see Figure 3) with its blend of universal and Japanese national components. Especially, it was the bride's changes of dress from traditional to western that captured my attention. The wedding was in two parts: one for only close family members in a shrine and the other for invited guests in a hotel. The first part of the wedding was in a very traditional Japanese marriage style. It was in the morning and the bride wore a Japanese white kimono (*shiomuku*). This particular kimono is only worn at a traditional wedding ceremony. The second part of the wedding, the three-hour wedding reception, was held in a hotel in the afternoon with around 170 guests. The bride wore two different sets of clothing. She arrived wearing a Japanese traditional coloured kimono and sometime during the reception she

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By demonstrating the interplay of universal and local influences on outdoor education in Mt Koya, this outdoor education model indicates two processes at work: (1) acceptance and/or rejection of universal approaches at national level; and (2) cultural adoption undergoing different stages of rejection, acceptance, re-examination, modification and absorption, while mixing with local components and symbols of national significance at local level. Therefore, even while universal outdoor education approaches may be accepted at national level, they may not always be absorbed at the local level, because of locally strong culture, as in the case of Koya. Significantly, coming between these two processes, Wakayama culture and government policy-making may have a greater influence on Koya outdoor education. Historical Wakayama mountain and forest culture, including Minakata's nature conservation movement, and current Wakayama government approaches, for example, experiential tourism, green employment, company invitation for corporate social responsibility, and environmental tax, may interfere with choice and acceptance of some kinds of universal outdoor education. The complexity of all these influences on Japanese and Wakayama culture also has the potential to make Koya outdoor education very special.

The Koya outdoor education model is an example of a uniquely blended cultural product, in which western concepts and values overlay a robust Japanese cultural base. It is this blend of Japan's own past, its current cultural mood, and its future social concerns, which currently dominates in Japanese society. Therefore the blending of both universal and local approach, as demonstrated in Koya outdoor education, is useful to respond to the prevailing social climate.

In a careful look at outdoor education programs (see Table 2), the combination and balance of universal and local/national approach, which is the end process of adoption (in whatever form) from universal components, can be identified. Seifu High School uses its 'hiking program' (universal) for the fostering of 'religious belief' (local/national). Matsue Elementary School also combines forestry experience (universal) and moral education (local/national) in its outdoor education program. Wakayama Medical University uses its outdoor program for both 'outdoor therapy' (universal) and 'cultural tourism' (local) concurrently. In contrast, Taikyū High School adopts two separate outdoor program strands, one for 'hiking' (universal), and the other for 'cultural studies' (local). It is this coexistence of both universal and local approach which is found in the Koya outdoor education model in Japanese outdoor education.

Outdoor experience activities with a strong cultural, religious and social connection are deeply embedded in Koya region. Because the features of Koya (cultural landscapes, invisible culture) are so distinctive, they can demand particular educational responses. While universal approaches or principles have played a useful educational role in reclaiming Japanese traditional cultural components, through a western experiential style of learning, their use has not been at the

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changed into a western-style wedding dress. Here, there is a uniquely embedded Japanese cultural meaning in the dress change (*oironaoshi*). The kimono change from white to coloured has traditionally indicated that the bride is now ready to take on her new family colour (or mood), a metaphor for following her new family. However, Japanese wedding culture nowadays may include stronger western aspects. Western-style wedding dress and even a further change to western-style evening dress may be worn. Although, superficially, this current stereotype would seem to be much less meaningful than the old (really serving to give the bride time to have a rest or refresh, and also to make her feel like she is having a 'real' marriage), couples and guests will often still remain mindful of the traditional cultural meaning (*oironaoshi*) even within western parameters. The parallels between the wedding and Koya outdoor education are clearly evident. Both present a balance and combination of Japanese and western culture – in other words, there are in both examples co-existing patterns of universal model and local/national components.

expense of Japanese cultural emphasis. Even though Japanese outdoor education is still influenced by imported culture and ‘universalist’ principles in some cases, Japanese outdoor education is quite robust, even while continuing to absorb these principles. All of this indicates the innate strength of the Japanese spirit.

### ***Critical thinking***

Outdoor education with co-existing patterns of universal and local/national outdoor education has several strengths and weaknesses. Co-existing patterns can provide a wide range of activities and multiple purposes due to four possible combination patterns (see Figure 4, (1) activity a & b, (2) a & c, (3) b & c, and (4) a, b & c). Furthermore, the patterns can offer dual educational effects (viz. religion **and** personal development, moral **and** group living, and local culture **and** health care). All of this might be useful in response to the current lack of outdoor education opportunity in regard to special programs and activities as found in school education curriculum. When more schools actually set about to establish longer-term and more on-going outdoor education programs (and hopefully regional outdoor education curriculum), they can combine both universal approach and local studies, and increase the number of educational activities in the outdoor education programs. However, from the findings, it is evident that there may be conflicting issues when a school has to decide on a particular balance of universal or local/national approach in its short-term lodging program or special activity<sup>7</sup>. Because the programs are usually only a once-a-year event, there may be pressure to conform to social demands of what is seen to be appropriate and necessary at any one particular time.

However, while universal outdoor education aspects have become stronger (activity-oriented rather than living-environment outdoor education), the original meanings of traditional and cultural outdoor activities tend to be weaker or forgotten in most cases in my research finding. Significantly, as most of the program aims do not formally include deeper spiritual philosophy and religious components or practices (cf. hike for learning ‘history’ and ‘spiritual culture’ and having ‘faith’ along the Koyasan Stone Marker Path), important and distinctive local and national components of Koya outdoor education have become a ‘hidden’ curriculum<sup>8</sup>.

Another crucial point is that, in a few schools, the contents of outdoor programs have not changed at all for the last (almost) 30 years. In the current social climate, if school outdoor activities are clearly identified as part of environmental education or are more closely combined with other activities and subjects in the school curriculum or community-based program, their ‘focus on the individual’ universal aspect will morph into a broader social-educational imperative.

Therefore, outdoor experiences must be a continuing process through long-term education and school curriculum for their success to be realized. One-off experience will most likely fail to make a strong impact on entrenched attitudes and capacity for change, for example, where the

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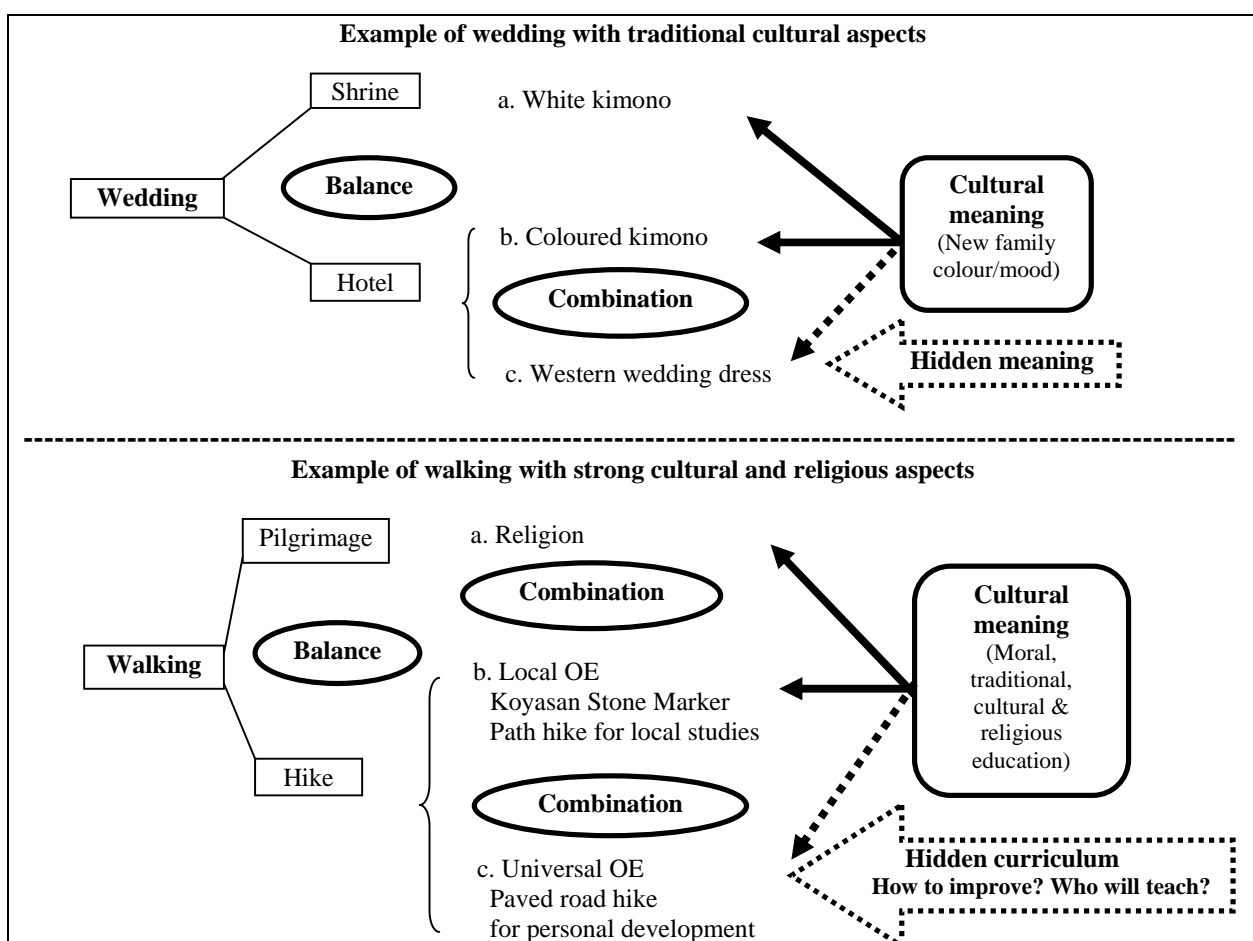
<sup>7</sup> In Japan, outdoor activities are conducted in a special-activity lodging program. Special activities comprise homeroom activities, student council activities, club activities and school events. They also emphasize development of independent and practical thinking to encourage students to work together more effectively as part of a group.

<sup>8</sup> Koyasan Stone Marker Path hike (currently a popular outdoor activity in school education, social education, nature-based tourism and public event) can be recognised as the progressive development of Koya culture’s relationship to nature and religion. When I saw children praying at religious and historical sites along the traditional path, I understood the importance for children to experience this part of the Japanese cultural spirit, sense of awe, and worship of nature. Although the hike did not specifically set out to intensify religious belief, it would have nurtured the latent Japanese spiritual sense as it paid attention to Koya *huudo* and culturally significant aspects of the mountain.

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environment is concerned. To foster a strong sense of place, different ways of connecting and maintaining those connections with Mt Koya need to be developed.

As further implications, we have to consider (1) ‘how’ to highlight hidden curriculum which is relevant to outdoor philosophy, and (2) ‘who’ will teach cultural values through outdoor education. In consideration of Brookes’ (2006) critique of aims and purposes of outdoor education – “*who goes where and does what*” (p. 8), how to improve teaching content to ensure the spiritual and cultural value of Koya cultural landscapes is not lost, and who will teach these values, are both crucial elements in any outdoor education revision. Because at the moment Japanese higher education does not provide specialist environment and culture teachers in outdoor education, it is doubtful that questions of ‘how’ and ‘who’ can be successfully addressed in the near future.



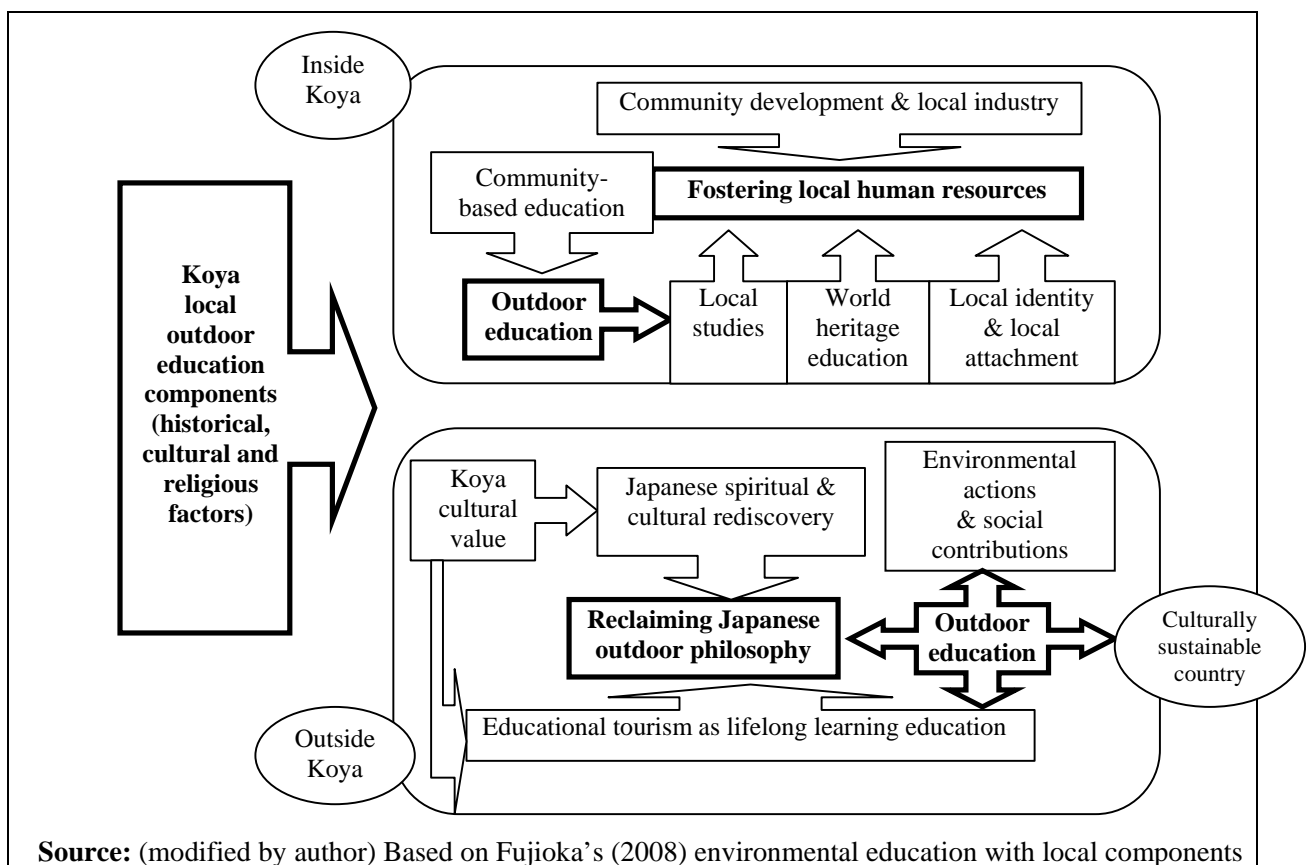
**Figure 4. Wedding-walking analogy: Interplay of universal and local/national approach**

Koya Municipal Government and Wakayama Prefectural Board of Education are starting to emphasise these aspects; however, schools (from Osaka and Wakayama-city) are generally not focusing sufficiently on the appreciation of cultural landscapes. In the end, the choice of activity is exclusively the domain of each school under the direction of the Prefectural Board of

Education. The kind of choices made by schools is usually influenced by what is seen as important at the time, time constraints and parental demands.

Figure 5 illustrates the use of Koya local components for outdoor education. Outdoor education practices with consideration of particular local components need to be more carefully considered.

Developing outdoor education aims and purposes which take into account historical and cultural resources is advantageous to provide deeper understanding of local environments and enhancement of relationships between students and the natural environment.



**Figure 5. Use of Koya local components for outdoor education**

From the findings, most of the (elementary) schools I observed used Koya government's packaged outdoor education programs (only one, Shibuta, conducted its own school-based outdoor education program). Here a gap might exist between the main aims of outdoor activities as outlined by school staff and the actual outdoor education practices conducted by Koya government. When schools request government input into the preparation of outdoor programs, it is very important for staff to consider the aims of each program and the needs of a specific outdoor program in advance (and not as I observed merely perform a camp school coordinator role). If so, the government may be able to offer more effective educational programs in line with

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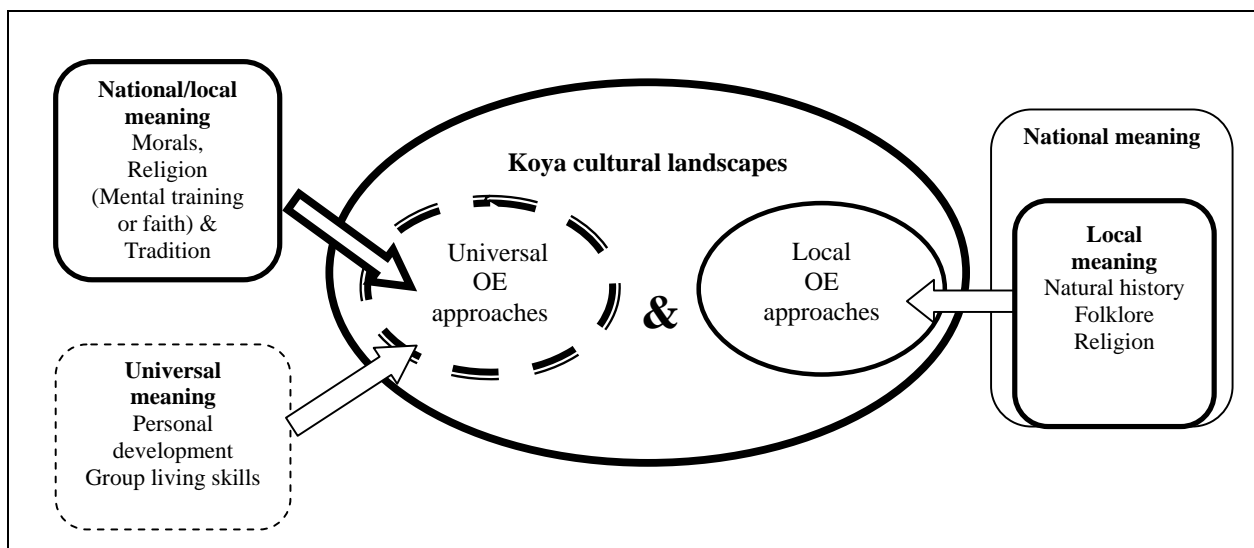
activity aims.

Nevertheless, my belief is that more schools could engage in organising their own outdoor activities without merely relying on the government's pre-packaged program. From my observation, I was sceptical about the teachers' level of understanding of the educational value of Mt Koya, since they chose to not actively engage in some of the program activities. Teachers themselves may need to have a better understanding of Mt Koya and the kind of teaching opportunities it provides; consideration of the geographical, historical, social and cultural aspects of Koya area can achieve this. This however may take more time and resources than the school is prepared to devote in the name of outdoor education.

**Concluding remarks**

In this paper, I highlighted Japanese outdoor education in one place, Mt Koya, focussing on Koya cultural components. Of most significance is that, throughout the 1200 years of Koya culture, Koya outdoor education has uniquely developed. This descriptive study somehow contributes to deconstructing universalist theories and approaches in outdoor education and reconsidering outdoor education programs to enhance local and regional education.

To this end, some western universalist approaches seem to be helpful in the Japanese outdoor education context and process of cultural adoption. However, looking at adjustments that Japanese outdoor education is beginning to make for geographical, historical, social and cultural particulars, whereby universalist outdoor education approaches are adopted in the context of Koya cultural landscapes, the emergence of a 'truly universal approach' across all levels and particularly at local level, which goes beyond the western universal construct, is already underway (see Figure 6); as Brookes (2004) argues, that no aspects of outdoor education should be considered universal without first taking into account geographical, historical, social and cultural aspects of outdoor education.



**Figure 6. Koya outdoor education model with local/national/universal components**



As a further implication, in place-based education, Koya outdoor education may ultimately become religion-based education, because of Koya's status as both a sacred place for religion and a place of national cultural importance, although schools and central government (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) have also to examine significant religious components of Japanese culture and spirit. It is whether or not the educational and social imperatives as seen through the eyes of the government and its educational institutions require religious outdoor education which can offer religion-centred history and Japanese traditional core culture, embracing at the same time a unique form of Koya religious outdoor philosophy, which is where the future lies. Alternatively, temples or shrines can play an important role in providing religious and cultural education with other stakeholders (companies, local groups, and/or non-profit organizations), although my aim was not to present every unique Koya local approach in this paper. There is no doubt that social internal changes can translate 'Koya-like' and 'Japaneseness' into more powerful concepts in Koya outdoor education if that education has a clear and well-structured meaning. Now is the time to develop awareness of, and act on, not only the meaning of "landscape shaping mindscape" (Orr, 1992), but also, more significantly, on mindscapes (religion and tradition) shaping cultural landscapes.

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### Summary of study organisations and programs

To provide more in-depth information on the study organisations and programs, Table 3.1 summarises the key characteristics of the organisations, and Table 3.2 indicates key features of the observed/collected programs. Because of limitation of data collection, five out of twelve outdoor programs were analysed without observation: these were Shibuta Elementary School, Seifu High School, World Heritage Ranger Project, Genji-no-mori Group and Wakayama Medical University. In particular, as World Heritage Ranger Project was not conducted in 2007, I used the data from 2006; and because of lack of information relating to outdoor programs of Shibuta Elementary School and Wakayama Medical University, I used their 2006 program data. All data collection was carried out post-observation.

**Table 3.1 Study organisations and programs**

Organisation	Key characteristics	Observed/collected programs
<b>Tennoji Elementary School</b> Osaka-city	A national school attached to Osaka Kyoiku University. The school is able to provide camp schools for children from Grades 3 to 6 every year as there are sufficient financial resources for the school to conduct both short- and long-term lodging experience that includes outdoor activities for different ages in different places.	3-day Lodging Program ( <i>Rinkan-gakusya</i> )
<b>Matsue Elementary School</b> Wakayama-city	A public school leader in 'moral education' (a compulsory unit in elementary schools in Japan) as formulated by Wakayama Prefectural Board of Education. The school successfully combines 'moral education' and outdoor activities.	2-day Lodging Program ( <i>Shizen-kyoshitsu</i> )
<b>Shibuta Elementary School</b> Katsuragi-town	A relatively small public school with 110 students at the foot of Koya region. To implement its school-based program, the school has the successful cooperation of families, other educational institutions, a local government, local residents and a variety of local industries.	5-day Lodging Experience Program ( <i>Choki-syukuhaku-taiken</i> )
<b>Taikyu High School</b> Yuasa-town	A public school with a 150-year tradition offering 'Long Hiking' since 1980. The school also provides disaster prevention in its Periods of Integrated Study for Grade 11 students. Hiking is treated as part of disaster-prevention efforts in the event of earthquake or tsunami.	Long Hiking Program
<b>Seifu High School</b> Osaka-city	An all-boys private Buddhist school established in 1932 by an abbot of the Shingon Buddhism sect. School education is modelled on the concept of Buddhist discipline. As Mt Koya is the birthplace of Shingon Buddhism, at the beginning of their first year, Seifu students go on a retreat at Mt Koya.	100km Hike Program (100km-hoko)
<b>Wakayama Prefectural Board of Education</b> Wakayama-city	The board, a division of Wakayama Prefectural Government, controls around forty prefectural high schools and organises education administration in Wakayama Prefecture. It promoted its own special project, known as 'World Heritage Ranger', between 2004 and 2006, to take advantage of the exceptional opportunities and circumstances provided by the World Cultural Heritage Site.	World Heritage Ranger Project
<b>Amano-no-sato Group</b> Katsuragi-town	A local group established in 2006 to revitalize the village by taking advantage of local natural, cultural and historical assets. It aims to construct a new network link between local people and visitors as part of its own local approach to promoting agrarian lifestyle and shrine culture.	Walking Event
<b>Genji-no-mori Group</b> Koya-town	A local forestry volunteer group established in 1992. It aims to preserve natural environments for the next generation and reproduce broad-leaf forest in a section of Koya Forest Park with the support of Koya Municipal Government. The group conducts its own local outdoor education program as social education every third Saturday and contributes to its own local forest management program every second Sunday (and once a year with a private company).	1. Aozora Forestation Project 2. Nature Experience Program ( <i>Mori-no-kakurega</i> )
<b>Kongobu-ji Group</b> Koya-town	Kongobu-ji, the head temple of Koyasan Shingon Buddhism, has its own forest management division. In the past, the whole of the Koya mountain area was considered the precinct of Kongobu-ji. As, currently, some of the Koya forests belong to the Kongobu-ji, the temple has played a leading role in the overall forestry management of Mt Koya since 1920.	1. Local Forest Festival 2. Tree-planting Ceremony
<b>Wakayama University</b> Wakayama-city	A national institution with approximately 4,500 students divided into four faculties, Education, Economics, System Engineering and Tourism. The Faculty of Tourism was set up in 2008 in response to strong local demand from Wakayama communities trying to promote tourism.	Koyasan Guided Tour
<b>Wakayama Medical University</b> Wakayama-city	A public university corporation playing an important role in Wakayama Prefecture's leading medical care centre, also contributing to the overall development of medical science. The School of Health Science and Nursing established a new 'Tourism and Medicine' course in 2006 to qualify instructors for 'tourism and medicine' and 'tourism and health'.	Tourist Diabetes Prevention Program
<b>Koyasan University</b> Koya-town	A private Buddhist university with a 120-year tradition specialising in Esoteric Buddhism and Spiritual Care. It has approximately 500 students. Cultural and historical study, (Koyasan Studies), as lifelong learning education, has been offered to the public since 2004.	Koyasan Studies Experiential Program ( <i>Isshinin-dani</i> Walk)

Table 3.2 Key features of the 12 examined programs

Examined program	Timescale and location	Participants	Style and structure	Program features
<b>Nature-based Experience</b>	19 July, 2007 Koya Forest Park Ichinohashi area	120 children in Grade 3	Koya government OE programs (3-hour plant dyeing & 2-hour animal watching)	As the school requested Koya government to organise both outdoor activities, local people were used as instructors. The meaning of these activities is mostly linked to the making of 'enjoyable' memories.
<b>Forestry Experience</b>	26 July, 2007 Koya Forest Park	90 children in Grade 6	Koya government OE program (2-hour forestry experience)	The meaning of forestry experience is the fostering of social skills to some extent through team work. Children also learnt the importance of the forest and the difficulty of forest maintenance. However, activity-oriented practices are in danger of becoming a kind of universal outdoor education.
<b>Koyasan Stone Marker Path hike</b>	24 August, 2006 Koyasan Stone Marker Path	16 children in Grade 5	School-based OE programs (3-hour hike & local studies)	Children spent three hours climbing up to Mt Koya with a local interpreter. They stopped at some historical sites along the traditional pilgrimage route whose significance was explained by the interpreter.
<b>Long Hiking Program</b>	19-20 October, 2007 Reihokan Arida-ryujin-do	240 students in Grade 11	School-based OE programs (2-hour cultural studies & 30km hike)	The program consisted of two significant parts: (1) student-initiated fieldwork (local OE form), becoming familiar with Koya culture and history during the first day; and (2) 30km individual hike (universal OE form), walking along paved roads in Koya area on the second day.
<b>100km Hike Program</b>	16-17 March, 2007 Koya area	378 students in Grades 8-11	School-based overnight hike	As an extra-curricular activity, the hike focused on Japanese religious components with a universal aspect of personal development.
<b>Koyasan Stone Marker Path hike</b>	6 August, 2006 Amano village Koyasan Stone Marker Path	24 students in Grade 10-12	Community-based 6 km hike (one-hour local studies & 2-hour hike)	World Heritage Ranger Project aimed to enhance students' social and environmental contribution as an extension of school education. It included (1) walking with a local interpreter around Amano where historically important sites still exist; and (2) walking along the path with a local high school teacher.
<b>Walking Event</b>	4 November, 2007 Amano village	About 20 local residents and 50 visitors	Nature-based tourism (3-hour exploratory walk)	As four walking routes, ranging from 4 to 10km, had already been set up for that day, visitors enjoyed walking in natural surroundings and calling at historical sites, using a new map with key historical sites, local plant types and locations of local industries, at Amano.

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<b>Aozora Forestation Project</b>	8 July, 2007 Koya Forest Park	About 20 local and 50 visitors	Companies social contribution & environmental action	With the help of about fifty people from All Nippon Airways Group and Kyoto University, the group cleared away the undergrowth for their forest planting.
<b>Nature Experience Program</b>	21 July, 2007 Amano village	6 local children	Small group education as social education	Environmental education advisors in the group engaged in constructing a wood shelter and collecting and identifying different botanical specimens.
<b>Local Forest Festival</b>	7 November, 2007 Kongobu-ji Temple	About 100 local residents	Cultural event (one-hour celebration)	Koya Forestry Association took part in an annual outdoor festival held at a small shrine in Kongobu-ji to celebrate mountain harvests in the Koya area.
<b>Tree-planting Ceremony</b>	Daimon	About 100 people (monks & forestry workers)	Temple-based landscape management (one-hour planting)	Fifty maple trees and dogwoods were planted over one hour to improve the appearance of Mt Koya as the first step in a three-year temple environmental conservation plan.
<b>Koyasan Guided Tour</b>	16 July, 2007 Kongobu-ji Daimon Okuno-in	Around 30 students and 20 overseas students	Cultural tourism (walking with English instruction)	Students made their presentations (prepared in advance) at the main historical sites. Geographical features of Koya (basin and mountainous zone), historical features of Koya (Kukai and temple history), and Koya cultural features (style of architecture and food culture), were some of the subjects chosen.
<b>Tourist Diabetes Prevention Program</b>	9 November, 2006 Okuno-in area	About 25 people with diabetes	Health tourism	Participants received instruction about cultural landscapes as an integrated feature of temples and forests as they walked and then they had a 10 minute rest in the forest, lying down on the ground and engaging in deep breathing. It may become the case that the outdoor therapy walk is used merely for health promotion purposes and could be in danger of becoming a kind of universal outdoor education.
<b>Koyasan Studies Experiential Program</b>	24 July, 2007 Isshinin-dani	20 participants	Experiential cultural studies (2-hour walk with academic instruction)	The walk was based around the latest study of a professor of medieval history specialising in Koya society and culture. The participants explored historical places with academic instruction and the use of an old 17th century map to compare past and present locations.