

Faith in Mt. Fuji from Across Japan

Mt. Fuji was renowned throughout Japan from ancient times, celebrated in poetry, essays, and art. The beauty of its form captivated people across the country.

In the eleventh century, after volcanic activity subsided, Shugen ascetics adopted the highest peak in Japan as a site for religious practice. Spiritual traditions centered on Mt. Fuji continued to spread, and in the fifteenth century lay pilgrims also began to climb the mountain as an act of worship, a practice known as *tohai*.

These lay pilgrims made offerings to Mt. Fuji of Buddhist statues and ritual implements such as gongs. These were kept in shelters of wood and stone built on the ascending trail and at the summit at points of great significance for the faith. Unlike the wooden statues worshiped at the foot of the mountain, the offerings on Mt. Fuji were made of gilded bronze or iron. Each item was typically inscribed with the year it was made along with its donor's name and place of residence. The map to the right shows the places of residence identified so far. The distribution is centered on Mt. Fuji, covering the entire Kanto region and stretching as far west as Kyoto. This shows how widespread faith in Mt. Fuji was among residents of Honshu, Japan's largest island.