

2026
10.7 (wed.)12:10
12:50

12:10-12:15

◆ Introduction

12:15-12:40

◆ Seminar
(Presentation)

12:40-12:50

◆ Q&A

Online
(Zoom)Scan here for
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The Spiritualization of the Outdoors: The Birth of Mountaineering in Modern Japan



Keywords

Modern Japan

Mountain climbing

Spirituality

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Caleb Carter is Associate Professor of Japanese Religions and Buddhist Studies at Kyushu University with a research focus on religiosity in the mountains. At Kyūdai, he teaches for IMAP and IDOC (International Master's and Doctoral Programs in Japanese Humanities) within the Faculty of Humanities. Carter's first book, *A Path into the Mountains: Shugendō and Mount Togakushi* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2022), examines the historical development of a Buddhist mountain tradition in Japan known as Shugendō. He received his BA in Philosophy from Colorado College and his MA and PhD in Buddhist Studies from the Asian Languages and Cultures Department at UCLA. More about Caleb Carter can be found on his faculty profile (www.imapkyudai.net/caleb-carter).

We tend to think of mountain climbing as either a form of religious worship or recreation: one embodies tradition and piety, while the other belongs to modernity and secularism. Yet this grouping rests on a shaky foundation of binaries—traditional/modern, religion/sport, sacred/secular—that oversimplify our relationship to the mountains and broader natural world. In fact, modern mountaineering brought new ways of thinking about the self, the natural world, and spirituality. Taking the case of Japan, this talk explores the formation of these ideas at the turn of the twentieth century—an era when foreign residents, especially British, began climbing mountains around the world, including Japan. While commonly thought of as a purely secular endeavor, this talk sketches out that formative period of mountaineering through the lens of critical religious studies, while exploring a larger question: why do we continue to seek out mountains and other natural settings in our own lives?