

## Address by the Program Leader

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Kokugakuin University is an institution that – based on the school's founding Shinto spirit – has made solid achievements in research and education in the fields of Japanese history and Japanese literature in the 120 years since its founding in 1882.

The present COE program is being given the highest importance within Kokugakuin University's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Research and Education Plan; our aim is to establish an institute to further the study of the basics of Japanese culture and to disseminate our research results.

The present project seeks to further the already close co-operation between Kokugakuin University's Graduate School of Letters and the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics. Granting degrees in Shinto Studies, Japanese Literature, and Japanese History, the Graduate School possesses an impressive history of research achievements, foremost in the fields of Shinto studies and religious studies, but also in history, literature, ethnography, and archeology. In turn, the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics has produced numerous noteworthy achievements in the international cooperative study of Shinto and Japanese culture. At the same time, the project also actively promotes the training of a new generation of young researchers for the development and dissemination of future research.

“Shinto and Japanese Culture” is the research topic with which this institute is concerned. This research seeks to illuminate the Japanese worldview and Shinto as a symbol and core of Japanese culture, yet without being mere apologetics for Shinto and Japanese culture. This necessitates an approach that probes the nature of Japanese culture by putting equal emphasis on the universality of human civilization as well as local characteristics, rather than merely viewing the culture found in the Japanese archipelago as an isolated model and simply listing it alongside the various other cultures.

It goes without saying that Japanese culture and the Japanese worldview are not simply transitional historical phenomena with no connection between various historical periods. At the same time, history is conventionally divided into periods according to such principal categorical elements as economics, politics, society, and culture. Each historical period is complete in itself and each period has its own distinguishing traits. This means that Japanese culture consists of the

whole of the individual cultures that existed during these various historical periods. However, the formation of these historically specific cultures is not grounded only in domestic conditions, but also in direct and indirect relations with surrounding territories. With this in mind, we plan to first develop research within groups of researchers formed according to their academic specialties and then to synthesize the findings of the various groups.

Following this approach, concrete research will be advanced in five fields: 1.) Shinto studies, 2.) religious studies, 3.) Japanese history, 4.) ethnography, and 5.) archeology.

These five fields will independently establish research plans, continue conducting domestic research, and periodically organize small research seminars, while also engaging in overseas research and organizing international symposiums.

Each of these fields of research – working towards realizing the overall aim of this Institute – will be represented in the three overarching groups introduced in the following pages and engage in a mutual exchange of ideas and the deepening of our overall understanding of the various research issues based on accumulated research results.

The three overarching research groups are as follows:

Group I.            Research on Japanese Culture and Shinto as Its Cultural  
                                 Foundation

This group's objective is to elucidate Japan's cultural foundation, its elementary beliefs and the Japanese world view by applying the different approaches taken in Shinto studies, religious studies, history, literary studies, ethnology, and archeology to the issues of the origin, essence, characteristics, and universal nature of Shinto. Broadly taking the overall East Asian environment into account, fieldwork will be conducted on the diverse and complex aspects of the origin, historical development, and significance of Shinto and Japanese culture, paying particular attention to insights derived from history and ethnology.

The Jōmon period with its hunter-gatherer culture, and the following Yayoi period, with its rice farming culture, were of particular importance to the formation of Japan's cultural foundation. Jomon culture is gaining increasing international

attention as an original cultural pattern of the Japanese archipelago. However, it is believed that exchange with the areas represented by modern-day Siberia and Russia was also an extremely important source of influence for Jomon culture. Excavations are being carried out along the Russian coast in anticipation of clarifying this matter. Additionally, results derived from the latest dating methods have established that the Yayoi culture is some 500 years older than was previously believed. This has raised the level of importance of Japanese and Russian comparative research. Advancing concrete comparisons with China and Korea is also considered a valuable field of research.

Group II.            Research on the Formation and Development of Shinto and Japanese Culture; Comparison with other Asian Cultures

Based on the research dealing with the formation of Japan's fundamental culture conducted by Group I, the aim of Group II is to elucidate various aspects pertaining to the historical process of the emergence and concrete development of the originality of Japan's Shinto-based culture. First, we will make clear the process by which folk culture gradually strengthened the establishment of agricultural rites, based on the foundations already laid by Yayoi and Kofun period culture. Second, we should be aware that wide-ranging interaction with other East Asian cultures also played an important role from antiquity to the modern period.

Group III.            Dissemination of Information on Shinto and Japanese Culture and Research into the Current State of Shinto

The main aim of this research group is to synthesize the results of domestic and foreign research on Shinto and related aspects of Japanese culture. Another task is to disseminate the Institute's latest findings to domestic and foreign researchers of Shinto and Japanese culture. At the same time, this group will promote the utilization of these research results and encourage future research in this area of study.

In concrete terms, the group will create a scholarly database and further work on the online publication of English translations of Shinto-related texts. In regard to the translation of the *Encyclopedia of Shinto* and its online publication, we are continuing our cooperation with the Center for Shinto Studies at the University of California at Berkeley and hope to bring the translation project to

completion in the near future through the formation of the National Learning Institute for the Dissemination of Research on Shinto and Japanese Culture.

Our strategy to effectively accomplish the objectives of the COE program is the accumulation and synthesis of the findings made by the above-stated research groups. Additionally, we seek to advance research through establishing interdisciplinary research groups and by holding international conferences.

Kokugakuin University is giving its full support to the COE program. In particular, Kokugakuin University is providing continuing financial assistance for the organization of conferences and the English translation of the *Encyclopedia of Shinto*, striving to bring the COE projects to fruition.