

Group I

Research Group on Japanese Culture and Shinto as its Cultural Foundation



Yoshida Eiji

The Research Group on Japanese Culture and Shinto as its Cultural Foundation is conducting research on the formation and development of Shinto and Japanese culture, as well as undertaking comparative study involving other Asian cultures. In this way, it hopes not only to elucidate the domestic developmental process of the various cultures linked to Shinto and National Learning between the prehistoric Jomon period and antiquity, but also to take the larger East Asian context into account. To achieve these goals, our research is focused on the fields of archeology, ancient Japanese history, ancient literature, oral traditions, and Shinto studies.

1.) Archeaology

Regarding “Japan’s cultural foundation,” the field of archeology aims at illuminating the cultural characteristics of Jomon and Yayoi culture, and the ways in which then-emerging rites of worship and ritual culture played roles in the cultures of later periods.

In contrast to the Old Stone Age during which all of East Asia shared largely similar cultural forms, the Jōmon period, which saw the emergence and development of a unique culture on the Japanese archipelago, greatly contributed to the emergence of Japan’s fundamental culture. In order to show what characteristics and universal traits the Jōmon culture possessed among East Asia’s New Stone Age cultures and how it influenced the succeeding Japanese cultures and the emergence of Shinto, we will conduct comparative research on the New Stone Age cultures of the Siberian coast, North-East China, and the Korean peninsula. These cultures were on the same civilizational level as the hunting, fishing, and gathering society of the Jōmon culture. One important method to achieve the above objective is the excavation of sites dating from the end of the Old Stone Age to the beginning of the New Stone Age in the Siberian coastal region. We intend to take this approach as our cardinal point for the inspection of the emergence of earthenware in Asia, the comparison of agricultural and production techniques, and the study of sites and objects related to the spiritual culture of

these areas. In regard to the excavations in the Russian coastal region, we have gained the cooperation of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a joint research program has been arranged with Far Eastern National University in Vladivostok. This summer, a three-year excavation project will commence.

At the same time, what came to form the basis for Japan's fundamental culture was the rice cultivation that emerged during the Yayoi period. The rice farming culture of the Korean peninsula and other parts of East Asia greatly influenced the establishment and development of Japan's Yayoi culture. Therefore, we will comprehensively elucidate the form of relationship that existed between the rice-growing culture and society of the Yayoi period and the following Kofun period on the one hand, and on the other, East Asia's rice-growing cultures and societies that are its source of origin. We will also research the rites of worship that were conducted in relationship to the rice-farming culture of the Yayoi period by comparing the special characteristics and universal traits of Yayoi culture with the rice growing cultures of China, Korea and Northern Vietnam. However, after the Yayoi period and up to the present, millet cultivation has existed in Japan alongside rice cultivation. Thus, research will be advanced considering the culture of millet cultivation as well. For this project, research programs have been arranged with the Department of Archeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University, Shandong University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Cultural Relics and Archaeological Research Institutes in many Chinese provinces and municipalities, Shanghai Museum, Pusan National University in Korea, and the Vietnam Archeology Institute. Since last year full-fledged surveys in the various localities have commenced. We also plan to hold an international conference in the field of archeology concerning the cultures of the Jōmon and Yayoi periods in December of this year.

2.) Ancient Japanese History

The project *Cultural Exchange between Japan and East Asia* in the field of ancient Japanese history aims at elucidating the way in which the formation of Japanese culture has been influenced by continental and Korean culture. Emphasis is put on Tang China, Paekche, Silla, and Bohai. We are mainly looking at the period from antiquity to the Middle Ages. The role this influence has played in the birth and development of rites of worship in Shinto and other ritual cultures is given special consideration. Particular attention will also be paid to findings derived from the

fields of archeology and historical geography.

In concrete terms, we have already conducted research focusing on the cultures of remote regions, trade culture, religious culture, foreign cultural imports, and the burial culture represented foremost by the *kofun* burial mounds of ancient and medieval Japan. Last year we surveyed the keyhole-shaped tombs in Korea's Jeollanam-do region, the historical sites related to the Heian period monk Ennin in China's Shandong peninsula, and the activities of inhabitants of Silla in that region. Surveys were also conducted on the spread of medieval Kamui pottery from Tokunoshima. Likewise, research was conducted on orthographic cultures. We have gained the cooperation of a large number of research facilities, such as the Institute of History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute of North-East Asian Studies at Beijing University, the Department of Sino-Foreign Relations at Shandong University's School of History and Culture, the Department of Korean Studies at Shandong University, the Shandong Provincial Culture Bureau and the Chang Po-Go Memorial Project Group at the National Museum of Korea. Last year, we organized two international conferences under the titles "Cultural Exchange among the Countries of Ancient East Asia," and "Religious-Cultural Exchange in East Asia Involving Deities and Buddhism." This year, too, from December 13 to 14, an international conference will be held dealing with cultural exchange.

3.) Ancient Literature and Oral Traditions

In the fields of ancient literature and ethnology, we aim to create a new National Learning focusing on the formation of the notion of *kami* in Japan and its comparative cultural analysis. The basis for this research will be provided by the findings of Takeda Yukichi's inquiries into the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, *Man'yōshū*, and *Fudoki*. We will also use Orikuchi Shinobu's ethnological methodology. To achieve our aim, we will implement the following three projects:

- 1.) We will elucidate the process of the formation of the notion of *kami* in Japan by taking a comparative approach. As part of this approach, comparative analyses will be conducted on annual rites performed by minority nationalities in southwestern China displaying a resemblance to Japan's ritual and oral culture, with especial emphasis placed on the rites for summoning deities and the songs performed on these occasions. The expressions of vocal offerings to the deities

and utterances emanating from the deities found in the oral transmissions among the Tong, Miao, and Bai nationalities will be given particular attention. This project will be jointly conducted with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

- 2.) Dividing the Japanese archipelago for research purposes into the two geographical areas of Ryukyu and Yamato, we will clarify the process of formation of the notion of *kami* in Japan. Surveys will be carried out on the ritual and oral cultures found in Okinawa and Amami for the Ryukyu geographical region and on the ones found in Iwasuzuri, Izumo, and Tsugaru for the Yamato geographical region.
- 3.) We plan to re-examine, categorize, and publish various materials relating to the formation of the notion of *kami* by using the collections at the Professor Orikuchi Memorial Research Institute of Antiquity, the Kawano Collection, and the Takeda Collection.

As part of project 1.), we organized a joint research group with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing last year and are making progress in the collection of material on Chinese folk art and the organization of this data in a database. In regard to project 2.), we have conducted surveys on the oral cultures relating to sacred sites on Okinawa island and the Yaeyama islands, the oral cultures connected to rituals and religious festivals, and the oral cultures found in village society. Taking the results of these surveys into account, we are currently working towards the publication of source materials related to the formation of the notion of *kami*.

4.) Shinto Studies

In the field of Shinto studies, we will conduct research about the bronze mirrors that have been objects of worship in Japan from the Yayoi period onward. Bronze mirrors have been worshipped since antiquity as one of the three divine regalia and have played an important role in ancient religious rites and the emergence of Shinto, as symbolized by the fact that the object of worship at the Ise Shrine is a bronze mirror. Differing from the view purported in previous research, that bronze mirrors are simply ancient artifacts, our research will elucidate the meanings and roles that the bronze mirrors have had in the various beliefs, rituals, and festival activities that have been part of Japanese tradition ever since the Yayoi period. The findings accumulated by the Kokugakuin University-based Ritual Archeology Society will

form the basis of this research project. Since last year, we have been advancing surveys on Korean bronze mirrors and the remains of sites of worship as well. This year we will commence our main research inquiries.

The above is an overview of the research projects of Group I. The main characteristic of our research is that we will re-examine and academically reconstruct Shinto and Japanese culture by drawing on a synthesis of research results from a variety of fields. The creation of an environment that allows young researchers such as COE research assistants and graduate students to advance their research interdisciplinary and internationally has been all but completed and we hope to be able to disseminate the results of our projects starting this year.