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Editorial Intent

Special Number: “Japanese Culture: Formation, Transformation, and Passing On”

Since its founding, Kokugakuin University has promoted the study of Japanese culture in various fields. These include history, religion, archaeology, and folklore. However, this “Japanese culture” is by no means static or fixed. As could be seen in the first KJS issue on “Interrogating the Boundaries of Japanese Culture,” the things included under this category are dynamic, in a constant state of flux—including the “Japanese culture” that has been presented as “traditional.”

This issue contains three articles on the formation, transformation, and passing down of Japanese culture. While focusing on different types of cases (historical documents, oral literature, and folk customs), they all look at culture as a dynamic process.

By comparatively examining historical documents like diaries and procedural manuals for deity rites, Suzuki’s paper traces how from the late eleventh century onward, shrines’ annual events took shape as imperial court events started to be regularly held at them. Itō’s paper, dealing mainly with stories of being bewitched by foxes and other animals from Fukushima Prefecture, examines the formation and disappearance of tales based on speakers’ interpretations. Finally, Hattori’s paper takes a comprehensive look at the customs of the Bon Festival held in the Nakiri 波切 hamlet in the Daiōchō 大王町 area of Shima 志摩 in Mie, noting the multilayered nature of *yorishiro* 依代 (temporary dwellings of spirits/deities) in various elements—not only umbrella floats (*kasahoko/kasabuku* 傘鉾) but also lanterns, shelves, and memorial tablets—and how they reflect the local view of life and death.

These papers trace how Japanese culture exists at ostensibly separate sites, such as shrines, temples, individuals, and communities. However, from a bird’s-eye view, one can see that today its formation, transformation, and passing on at multiple sites come together in multilayered, intertwined ways. The KJS Editorial Committee hopes that further similar examinations of such individual sites of culture will in the future develop into a more comprehensive elucidation of Japanese culture.

KJS Editorial Committee