

Afterword

MIZOGUCHI Koji

This symposium was held on the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region, and other related World Heritage sites, with the aim of deepening understanding, through a wide range of specialist and in-depth discussion, about the history, function, and historical context of the Okinoshima rituals, or in other words, their role in the broader archipelagic and East Asian historical context. This symposium also referred to the global significance and importance of continuing to engage in research on Okinoshima and associated sites as a World Heritage property and deepen understanding about it. Here I would like to attempt to summarize the main findings in the following three points, also incorporating my personal views as an additional “auxiliary line” towards further deepening research, as well as to touch on prospects for future research (For more information about the specific details and basis for my personal views, see: MIZOGUCHI, Koji, “Okinoshima saishi no kino to henyō: Kodai higashi Ajia no kokai-koryū ni okeru saishi-shinko he no approachi no kanten kara” [“Functions of and Changes in the Rituals of Okinoshima: From the Perspective of Approaches to Rituals and Beliefs in Ancient East Asian Voyages and Exchanges”], in *Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region Special Research Project Report*, (ed., Preservation and Utilization Council of “Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region”), 2023, pp. 165-178).

Firstly, the special research project has helped to coalesce a certain perspective pertaining to the question of why large-scale ritual activities were initiated on Okinoshima from the late 4th to the end of the 9th centuries. The reports and discussions at the symposium made it clear that the formation and development of a

network horizon known as “Wa” (Wakoku or Japan), in the China-centric world order of the time was closely related to the initiation of Okinoshima rituals in the “early state formation stage” of society on the Japanese archipelago, as part of a historical process of increasing social complexity and broadening. This network horizon constituted a mutually interdependent and mutually-reproducing system between the central government in the Kinki region and regional chiefdoms. It was characterized by the Kinki central polity establishing a position of leadership in negotiations with polities on the Korean Peninsula and Imperial China, and then maintaining this preeminent position through the distribution to the regional chiefdoms of various authoritative, symbolic, and distributive goods that had been acquired through these continental interactions. It is important to note that such interactions and negotiations would have been supported by a variety of maritime voyages and related technologies, as introduced in the Akimichi article, and that there would have been a category of people professionally involved in voyages and trading, who engaged directly in these interactions with overseas counterparts, as noted in the Woo article. In order to control the sharing of technology and the behavior of traders while allowing them a certain degree of freedom, as well as to sustain stable networks for the widespread distribution and circulation of goods, it was necessary to have an overall network order and a “transcendental normative reference point” to support it, capable of transcending the relationships among connected individual polities that functioned as the components within the network. The “transcendental existence” of the “body of the chief,” constituted and realized through the burial of the deceased chief in a burial mound based on certain stipulated rules constitutes

the formation of just such a “reference point,” and I believe that a similar background and mechanisms are involved in the creation of “personal gods” that became the object of rituals at the boundaries and key locations within the network horizon (Okinoshima being one such key location). From this perspective, fleshing out further details about the historical background and mechanisms by which “personal gods” were generated, as described in the Saso article, adds a direction for historical interpretation of the cognitive archaeological explanations pertaining to the mechanisms that gave rise to “personal gods,” as also described in the article.

Secondly, in terms of the “specific details of the meaning and function of the Okinoshima rituals,” what became particularly clear through the Special Research Project was the response and handling by “Wa” (and subsequently Japan) of the various risks involved in maintaining the network horizon were necessary for the continuation of the “Wa” polity, namely, the risk of crossing the Tsushima Strait itself, the risk posed by the political situation on the Korean Peninsula and its various upheavals, and behind all those risks, the risk posed by socio-political and -economic changes that took place in Imperial China, were the underlying factors that specifically defined the meaning and function of the rituals. The destabilization of relations with polities on the Korean Peninsula due to Goguryeo’s southern expansionist policy, and the frequency of conflict were the major risks that threatened the survival of the network horizon as “Wa.” Also, for the federation of chiefdoms that comprised “Wa” (or the Yamato Kingship/Paramount-Chieftainship), and also for the local chiefdoms that were involved in various ways in mutual negotiations with the peninsula polities, the question of how to deal with the situation became a major issue that constituted a matter of survival. As considered in great detail in the articles by Woo, Takata and Tanaka, that process involved a diverse range of political and strategic choices and actions. It is my belief that the rituals of Okinoshima may have been performed as a conceptual and symbolic expression and mediation

of such actions, and that the actual practice was not necessarily performed on a regular basis, but may rather have been performed as an “event intended to ensure the survival of the entire polity of ‘Wa’ which was in the incipient stages of state formation,” when a conceptual and symbolic response to the increased risks described above came to be of particular and imminent necessity. In that sense, in contrast to the regular observation and practice of (ancient state) rituals (the rituals of “Ritsuryo system Japan”) from the eighth century onwards and their prescribed and formulated contents, the contents of the ritual sites dating to before the seventh century and the assemblage of ritual tools, implements and votive objects excavated from such sites may reflect the specific details of the risks inherent to each ritual occasion, and the specific historical circumstances, including what was planned and prayed for on each ritual occasion. As presented in the Takata article, reconstruction of individual ritual episodes at the Jungmak-dong ritual site in Korea, based on the detailed investigation of the contents of the excavated artifact assemblages, will undoubtedly provide a great source of reference when advancing further studies on this particular topic.

Thirdly, from the above considerations it has become apparent that Okinoshima rituals were positioned on the boundary of the internal and homogeneous (or homogenization being aspired to as the ideal) domain of governance of ‘Wa / Japan,’ and functioned as a place for the expeditious and intensive handling of risks threatening the very existence and security of the network horizon of ‘Wa,’ and later Japan. As a part of the “boundary ritual” function of such a polity, the main risks that the Okinoshima rituals addressed and handled were political risks (including the risk of war as the most expeditious means of resolving political conflicts) arising from negotiations with the polities on the Korean Peninsula (and Imperial China) as mentioned. However, I would surmise that right from their inception, rituals and functions to pray for the “peace and security of the entire territory” of the network horizon of “Wa” and

later “Japan” were also incorporated. In that sense, the unification of the Korean Peninsula by Silla brought to an end one of the historical functions of the Okinoshima rituals, namely “responding to and handling the risk of negotiations with foreign powers,” and with the development of institutional and transportation structures within the national territory of “Japan,” their function transitioned to become “integrated risk response and handling for the entire national territory.” It could therefore be said to be a logical progression that the actual implementation of the rituals themselves would ultimately come to an end. In other words, the risks that the rituals sought to respond to and handle transitioned from risks arising from the political situation and developments in Imperial China and on the Korean Peninsula, to maintenance of the security of national territory as “Japan.” In this case, I would hypothesize that Buddhism, as a world religion that is based on a unified worldview and the functional requirement of overcoming risks that are universally and generally present in everyday life, became more functionally compatible with prayers for the peace and tranquility of a national polity, the ideological premise of which was internal homogeneity, in contrast to the “Ritsuryo rituals” as a system comprised of prayers to diverse personal gods. By the 10th century the “Ritsuryo”-style rituals of Okinoshima would ultimately peter out, and as the Saso article notes, one of the factors behind this demise was the shift from rituals for dealing with specific politico-economic risks to rituals for the maintenance of the well-being of national territory, the latter better served by Buddhism as a world religion. There is a growing need to engage in specific and multifaceted examination of

what occurred from the 11th century onwards, when the internal homogeneity of the ancient state collapsed and the focus shifted from the late antiquity to a medieval state, and to what degree the ritualistic activities that shifted in focus to Munakata Shrine inherited aspects from the Okinoshima rituals and what was changed in the course of transition.

As described above, the findings presented in this Special Research Project have significantly deepened our understanding not only of the Okinoshima rituals, but also about a wide range of research topics, including the origins of Shinto, its interrelationship with Buddhism, and its specific relationship with historical processes in East Asia. Furthermore, in the process of analysis and consideration, other previously unconsidered or unapparent topics for study have also emerged. The fact that many of these topics for study transcend the frameworks of Japanese and East Asian history and are directly interrelated with comparative research on the co-transformation and co-evolution of global state formation and religion could well be said to be one of the most significant outcomes of this symposium. It is my sincere hope that the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region Special Research Project, the results of which were summarized and reported in this symposium, will continue to develop and deepen our understanding and appreciation of history not only in the Japanese context, but in the broader East Asian context and even on a global scale, encompassing the ancient world to the present, and that the new questions raised by this project will in due course of time be answered and further outcomes produced that will contribute to creating a better modern society and world.