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Rachel Schroder

University of Puget Sound, rschroder@pugetsound.edu

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Musings on Inari

By Rachel Schroder

The following is a test (or Celebration of Knowledge) answer written for the first test of Jonathan Stockdale's class Japanese Religious Traditions, spring 2016.

Inari is one of the most widely known *kami* in Japan and is perhaps most significant to the understanding of Japanese religion because of the variations in conceptualization of the *kami* between locations. A field anthropologist conducted a case study of *Inari* only to conclude that the gender, physical depiction, story, and purpose of *Inari* is different to each individual. For example, although Shinto priests strongly insist that *Inari* is not a fox, or *kitsune*, because of the cultural understanding of *kitsune* as tricksters, still some imagine *Inari* as a fox. Others have strong yet contradictory belief, like a hairdresser who does not think Buddhism should be associated with *Inari* yet recites a sutra to her *Inari* shrine every morning. The ambiguity and contradiction evident in the case study of *Inari* demonstrates how reliant Japanese religious traditions can be on personal and local custom.

Bibliography

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