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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
