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Symposium and Kagura Performance at UCSB Celebrate 15th Anniversary of Shinto Studies Endowed Chair

Japan's religion and culture will be the focus of a three-day conference at UC Santa Barbara to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the campus's International Shinto Foundation (ISF) Chair in Shinto Studies. Among the events are a ceremony and reception, an international symposium, and a rare performance by the Kagura Ensemble of Chichibu Shrine. All events are free and open to the public.

The first event is a Shinto ceremony to recognize the anniversary of the establishment of the endowed chair. It will begin at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 1, in 4080 Humanities and Social Sciences Building. Speakers will address the role of the endowed chair in Shinto studies, as well as the state of Shinto studies today.

On Saturday, November 3, the symposium "The Sacred and Natural Disasters" will examine how different religious traditions in the world envision natural disasters -- such as the earthquake and Tsunami that struck Japan last year -- as connected with ideas about the end of the world. Bringing together scholars from UCSB and Japan, the symposium will begin at 9 a.m. in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building. Speakers from UCSB include Fabio Rambelli, professor of religious studies and of East Asian Languages & Cultural Studies, current holder of the ISF Chair in Shinto Studies, and organizer of the

conference; Dominic Steavu, assistant professor of religious studies and of East Asian Languages & Cultural Studies; and Stefani Tutino, professor of history and of religious studies.

Also participating in the symposium are Japanese scholars Sonoda Minoru, professor emeritus at Kyoto University, president of Shinto Kokusai Gakkai, and head priest at Chichibu Shrine; Mogi Sakae, professor at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo; and Myake Yoshinobu, Superior General of the Konko Church in Izu.

At 8 p.m. on Saturday evening, the Kagura Ensemble of Chichibu Shrine will present an evening of sacred music and dance in UCSB's MultiCultural Center Theater. The concert marks the troupe's first and only United States performance, and is the first Kagura performance of any kind at UCSB.

"Kagura is performed at Shinto shrines all over Japan," said Rambelli. "This is a unique opportunity to experience the sacred music and dances from Chichibu Shrine, an important Shinto sacred site in the mountains near Tokyo." The performance at the MultiCultural Center is based on an ancient Japanese myth that dates back to the eighth century, he noted, and represents the revival of the world after a natural disaster.

Other events related to the celebration include a lecture and workshop on Kagura Shinto music and dance for students in UCSB's Department of Music, and a performance at Vieja Valley Elementary School. Kagura performers from Chichibu Shrine will present classical Japanese dances and music from the Shinto tradition, as well as a discussion of the sounds and patterns of the various musical instruments, and the significance of the masks, kimono robes, and ritual implements.

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