

The Advancement of Japanese Premodern Research and the
Necessity of Large- and Extra- Large-Scale KAKENHI Grants:
Making Royal and Noble Archives Accessible and Establishing the
Field of Japanese Archives Studies



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Research Theme Implemented in FY2017:

Increasing the Accessibility of Royal and Noble Archives Manuscript Holdings and
Developing the Field of Japanese Archival Studies: The Structure and Transmission of
Knowledge Systems (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S))

While JSPS funding for hard sciences continues to grow larger and larger, one often encounters the sentiment that for humanities scholarship, especially in the fields of premodern Japanese history and literature, there is no need for large-scale research grants. In an overall milieu in which the humanities are taken lightly, in some quarters there is a sense that the fields of Japanese history and literature overall are stagnating, and that the number of students pursuing doctoral work in these fields is in sharp decline. One even hears concerns about the collapse or demise of humanities research. As an undergraduate and then graduate student at Kyoto University, I studied premodern Japanese history under Professor Toshio Kishi and others. Afterward I worked for eleven years at the great treasure house of premodern manuscripts, the Royal Archives of the Imperial Household. Between 1998, the year after I departed for the University of Tokyo, and now (with the exception of 2001 and 2006), while participating in the ongoing project of compiling the *Dai Nihon Shiryō*, I have been selected as the principal researcher for two Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A), one Grant-in-Aid for Creative Scientific Research, three Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S), amounting to a grand total (including indirect funding and future scheduled allotments) of roughly 1 billion yen.

Few humanities projects were chosen for large-scale and extra-large-scale KAKENHI grants during the time of crisis of the humanities; yet compared to how things

were twenty years ago, the research environment for Premodern Japan Studies has improved drastically. In particular, there is a deepened understanding of Japanese Archives Studies as a foundational field of research that contributes to Premodern Studies. Manuscripts that are housed in royal or noble archives—collections sustained by a sovereign-centered aristocratic society—have been hitherto either completely sealed off or extremely difficult to access for viewing in amounts sufficient for research. Our project has rendered available for viewing, via digital images tagged with metadata, roughly 1 million documents. I shared a portion of this work in the “Topics relating to the latest research achievements” section of *KAKENHI News* 2016 (Vol. 4), in an article entitled, “Breakthroughs in the Surveying, Access, and Research of Royal Archives, and a Reconsideration of Lineages of Aristocratic Studies.” Succinctly put, the article concerned the dramatic improvements we initiated in rendering accessible the archival collections of royal and noble libraries, themselves systematic accumulations of premodern knowledge. We amassed digital images of archival materials from the royal lineage (Imperial Household) archives, princely lineage archives such as Fushimi miya and others, and house archives such as the Konoe lineage, Kujō lineage, and others, and, organizing them according to lineage provenance, stored them on a large-scale visual materials database at the University of Tokyo Historiographical Institute. We added bibliographic metadata and have made them freely available for viewing at the Institute Library. For three categories of items, namely, 260,000 items hitherto sealed by royal decree in the royal archives of Kyoto Goshō Higashiyama Gobunko; roughly 50,000 items of the Yōmei Bunko Archives (transmitted from the Konoe Lineage, foremost of the five regent houses) such as the *Midō kanpaku ki*, the diary manuscript of Fujiwara no Michinaga in his own hand, designated a UNESCO “Memory of the World”; and roughly 2000 items from the *Tōnan-in monjo* collection of the Imperial Household Agency Shōsōin Archives, this was the first time ever for them to be made publically accessible.

The bold decision on the part of the respective custodians of the above three groups of historical materials to make digitally accessible what had been impossible even for research institutes to secure permission to view was facilitated by a Grant-in-Aid for Creative Scientific Research award from 2007-2011, entitled *Archives Research and the*

Rejuvenation of Premodern Studies – Reconstructing Royal and Noble Archives and Clarifying Traditional Knowledge Systems and subsequent two Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S) awards. It was thanks to the public nature and transparency of tax-supported large-scale and extra-large scale KAKENHI grants that I was able to explain the significance of this work as a “state research project” for the sake of advancing of Premodern Studies and subsequently to gain permissions to make publicly available digitized images. The project entailed expenses for the digitization of over 1 million images, and what amounted to tens of millions of yen in yearly labor costs for over 10 regular employees, including specially appointed professors with expertise in documents, various research support staff and research assistants possessing specialized knowledge in document content, as well as office staff. These personnel were essential in order to develop and refine support tools for Premodern Studies as well as to supply metadata for all of the images, a process that required the verification of each image and an understanding of its content. Other significant expenses included event-related costs for a yearly average of 20 general public-oriented lectures and the purchase and maintenance of large-capacity servers. Being selected multiple times for Grant-in-Aid for Creative Scientific Research and Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S) from 2007 on enabled the basic fulfillment of the research plan.

Recently, in order to make establish a research base for Premodern Studies that meets the needs of our global common internet-based society, we are planning to make publicly accessible on the web 700,000 digitized images (accompanied by metadata) of Imperial Household Archives-held documents from the Fushimi miya, Kujō, and Yanagihara lineage archives. Once completed, researchers from abroad will be given equal footing to conduct research, thus stimulating the internationalization of Premodern Japan Studies based on high-quality reproductions of manuscripts.

Moreover, with regard to manuscript collections whose original form in modern times was lost, we have used library catalogs from earlier periods to recreate synchronically past forms of the collections. Each collection also possesses a diachronic history that we have sought to elucidate by attending to its forms and transmission as well as its subsequent losses, destruction, and efforts at restoration. The advance of Japanese Archives Studies, the

aim of which is to clarify the structure of traditional knowledge systems acquired by aristocratic houses from ancient, medieval, and subsequent periods, will enable researchers to make use of early modern royal and major aristocratic collections in a way that closely corresponds to how they were configured in that era.

The fact that a Grant-in-Aid for Creative Scientific Research (which requires concrete research plan proposals from presumptive principle researchers whose research theme has been selected) was awarded to foundational research of Japanese Premodern Studies will have lasting historical significance for the discipline.

It is hoped that his kind of access to digital imagery will encourage the development of proximate fields of humanities research (aesthetics, art history, archaeology, etc.) and fields of research that blend science and humanities (architectural history, design, garden landscaping, landscape geography, etc.). And, in addition to enriching the potential for new research themes and data among researchers from many disciplines, we hope that ordinary people too will take interest in outcomes of scholarly activity that serve to refresh and rejuvenate our society. The rediscoveries of arts, crafts, and designs going back to early modern or medieval times that this work makes possible carries with it economic potential as well, if used in Japan's ever-increasing domestic and international tourism industry—contributions that could be felt in various regions of the country. At this point Japan has broken through the threshold of 20 million international tourists visiting annually, and these international visitors are increasingly interested in Japan's traditional culture. National policy, as well as policies intended to stimulate local economies, have assigned significance to the proactive introduction of Japanese traditional culture abroad, and the use of cultural resources is being promoted more strongly than before. One distinguishing feature of Japanese society is that its culture was constructed using classics as its very basis, as a way of responding to the vicissitudes of history—the “classics” being something that transcend historical period, are viewed as exemplary, read continuously, and conveyed generation to generation. The culture of the classics heavily influences the shape of the history and culture of subsequent ages. To cite a familiar example: the source of contemporary “traditions” is knowledge that was nurtured by an aristocratic and religious society spanning the Nara and Heian periods and, even after great

changes took place, was received by the subsequent martial society. This knowledge was transmitted chiefly by documents. Although Japanese culture is all too often represented by martial culture—such as *bushidō*—once the wars ended and things stabilized the warriors appropriated what they deemed to be the best of aristocratic culture and did such things as rebuild shrines and temples founded during the Nara-Heian periods and fashion paintings and designs based on favorite scenes from Heian classics such as the *Tales of Ise* and the *Tale of Genji*. Thus the “classics” became the basis for the creation of a new culture. The process of reevaluating the classics, works that transcend period and are read by people time and again, all the while keeping them close at hand, serves people nowadays as a comfort. How to make a society rich with the classics is a topic for humanities researchers that has immediate relevance.

The journey is mid-course. In order to continue to build this new foundation for premodern studies, large- and extra-large-scale KAKENHI grants will be crucial.