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THE JAPANESE PEOPLE AND THE JAPANESE MONKEY: HOW HAVE THE JAPANESE PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH MONKEYS?

Y. Mito

Japan Monkey Centre, Inuyama, Japan

Presenter's Email: hzw01315@nifty.com

The ancestors of the Japanese monkey (*Macaca fuscata*) and human populations arrived in the Japanese archipelago during the Pleistocene Epoch, beginning a long relationship between the two species, as attested by archaeology. The Neolithic *Jomon* Period (BC10,000~BC300) produced shell middens containing monkey bones, and clay monkey figurines that may have been amulets for fertility and easy birth. A *haniwa* figurine was excavated from a tumulus of the 5th century. As history progressed, however, the Japanese view of monkeys changed, along with the psychological and spiritual culture of the Japanese people. Once treated as godlike, people began to think of monkeys as equals, or less, and even as objects of ridicule. In daily life, monkeys were hunted as a natural resource or despised as pests harming farm crops. Nevertheless, monkeys retained some special powers. The custom of having a stable monkey *Umayazaru* remained until recently in many parts of Japan, in which a monkey or monkey body parts were affixed in stables to protect horses from illness or injury. Today, government policies to manage and control monkey populations are constrained, not only by heightened awareness for nature protection, but also the fear of some hunters of a curse from killing monkeys because of the similarity between humans and monkeys. Some zoos and research institutes carry out annual compassion ceremonies to express gratitude and gain the indulgence of monkey spirits. Japanese culture retains a concept of co-existence with monkeys based on a sense of equivalence among livings in this transient world.

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