The Seika Obake Group’s Activities and Survey Results

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The Seika Obake Group, consisting of students and faculty from all departments of Kyoto Seika University, was created in June 2009. Over a period of five years and eight months, it carried out activities with the aim of studying “Setsubun Obake” and working toward revival or recreation of this popular tradition formerly observed in Kyoto at Setsubun, the day before the calendrical beginning of spring. The group’s activities focused mainly on two districts of the city: the vicinity of the Kyoto Sanjō-kai shopping street in Nakagyō-ku, and the Kibune area in Sakyō-ku. In each location we conducted interviews about customs associated with Setsubun Obake, designed a framework for passing on the tradition, and organized events such as an Obake Café, Obake Gallery, and Obake Parade. These activities enabled us to interview older people about their memories and bygone aspects of the culture of daily life, and to play a part in reevaluating local culture and strengthening personal relationships in the community. By holding events, we were also able to contribute to local revitalization. Further, from the responses received we had the impression that, as Setsubun falls in February, during the off-season for Kyoto tourism, holding Setsubun Obake events for the general public is an effective way of promoting tourism.

The first half of this paper records the activities of the Seika Obake Group; the second reports in detail on our survey in the vicinity of the Kyoto Sanjō-kai shopping street in Nakagyō-ku, in which we conducted interviews about customs associated with Setsubun Obake.