

JJRS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

THE STUDY OF JAPANESE
RELIGIONS PAST, PRESENT, AND
FUTURE



Kaitlyn Ugoretz

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

The following essay summarizes the symposium held at the Nanzan Institute to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of The Japanese Journal of Religious Studies. On 9 and 10 June 2023, scholars and friends of the journal from around the world reflected on the past, present, and future of the study of Japanese religions. The editors are currently preparing a special Golden Issue of the JJRS to crystallize the insights gained from this momentous event.

THE NANZAN Institute for Religion and Culture (NIRC) was proud to celebrate fifty years of publishing *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (JJRS) in 2023 by hosting a grand symposium entitled “The Study of Japanese Religions Past, Present, and Future: Fifty Years of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*.” On 9 and 10 June, scholars and friends of NIRC and JJRS from around the world gathered to reflect on the history of the publication, recent developments in Japanese religious studies, and the future of the field.

The first issue of the JJRS was published in March 1974 as a revival of the journal *Contemporary Religions in Japan*. David Reid of the International Institute for the Study of Religions saw the potential of the journal to play a leading role in advancing of postwar study of religion in Japan and changed the name to reflect the diversity of research published by the journal. The management of the journal was transferred to NIRC in 1981, where it remains today.

Countless hands have worked together into the long hours of the night to chart the course of the journal, and many of these contributors participated in the fiftieth anniversary celebration, including former editor Paul Swanson, longtime advisers Hayashi Makoto and Jim Heisig, former associate editor Clark Chilson, and current editor Matthew D. McMullen. Former editor and current President of Nanzan

University Robert J. Kisala sent his regards and joined everyone in spirit despite a scheduling conflict. In addition, the room was full of previous guest editors, editorial consultants, and *JJRS* article authors.

Today, the *JJRS* is proud to continue its legacy of leading cutting-edge scholarly production. In terms of content and scope, the journal has advocated for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of religion in Japan. And in terms of production, the *JJRS* was a leader in open access publishing and is currently available for digital download on NIRC's recently redesigned website and as a print journal printed on-demand and distributed all over the world.

The first day of the symposium kicked off with presentations from past editors Paul Swanson and Hayashi Makoto, highlighting many milestones in the journal's history. This retrospective gave a fascinating and, for many, nostalgic glimpse into the scholarly debates and developments that helped to move the field of Japanese religious studies forward. At the end of his talk, Hayashi revealed a golden baton which he and Swanson ceremonially passed on to McMullen to great applause. That afternoon, Clark Chilson (University of Pittsburgh), Hoshino Seiji 星野靖二 (Kokugakuin University), Keller Kimbrough (University of Colorado), and Jacqueline Stone (Princeton University, Emerita) gathered for a panel discussion "On the Study of Japanese Religions." The discussion covered a wide range of topics, including what impact the *JJRS* has had in their careers and the field of Japanese religions, what opportunities and challenges there are to research in the field's current state, and what sort of future we might envision for the study of Japanese religions. The panelists' comments led to a lively discussion with all in attendance.

The second day of the symposium focused on several presentations designed to challenge research on the study of Japanese religions. In the morning, Emi Foulk Bushelle (Western Washington University) presented on the topic of "National Learning and the Buddhist Roots of Japanese Philology." Bushelle traced the philology represented by Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 back to the Shingon monks Jōgon 浄嚴 and Keichū 契沖 and their attempts to rediscover "lost" Buddhist truth in language in the seventeenth century. Orion Klautau (Tohoku University) shared his researched on "Towards a History of the Public Study of Buddhism in Modern Japan." Klautau examined how early Japanese academic study of Buddhism at the University of Tokyo and transnational discourses on Mahāyāna sought to answer the question of how Buddhism could contribute to building a "civilized" Japanese nation.

The afternoon session included presentations by Jolyon Baraka Thomas (University of Pennsylvania) and Aike Rots (University of Oslo). In "Scholars of Religion as Educational Policy Actors and Religious Aspects of Education Policy in Postwar Japan," Thomas critiqued the role religion scholars play in creating educational policy in postwar Japan and how our arguments for religious education

often reflect field, state, and economic interests rather than public needs. Speaking on “Crossing Boundaries: Rethinking the Study of ‘Japanese Religion’ in the Asian Anthropocene,” Rots argued for a present and future of religious studies that critiques “methodological nationalism” and projects of Japan-making in favor of transnational comparisons of place-based ritual in the Asian Anthropocene, with case studies shedding light on environmental humanities and more-than-human relations.

While the fiftieth anniversary of the *JJRS* is now in the past, the contents of the event continue to be available to scholars who were unable to attend the event. The full symposium was recorded with the technical assistance of Van Bragt Fellow Ishihara Yamato and logistical aid of Van Bragt Fellow Suemura Masayo. New associate editor Kaitlyn Ugoretz made the event accessible online by posting about the program as it unfolded on social media and later editing and uploading the presentation recordings to NIRC’s new YouTube channel (@NIRC-nanzan)—please like and subscribe! Finally, the editors and participants are currently preparing a special Golden Fiftieth Issue of the *JJRS*, which promises to crystallize the insights gained from this momentous event. Here’s to fifty years of the *JJRS* and many more to come!

**THE STUDY OF JAPANESE RELIGIONS
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE SYMPOSIUM**

Friday, 9 June (13:30~17:30)

“Fifty Years of the *JJRS*”

Paul Swanson, *Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*, Emeritus

“The *JJRS* and the Study of Japanese Religions”

Hayashi Makoto 林淳, *Aichi Gakuin University*

Panel Discussion On the Study of Japanese Religions

Clark Chilson, *University of Pittsburgh*

Hoshino Seiji 星野靖二, *Kokugakuin University*

Keller Kimbrough, *University of Colorado*

Jacqueline Stone, *Princeton University*, Emerita

Research on the Study of Japanese Religions

Saturday, June 10 (9:00~17:00)

“National Learning and the Buddhist Roots of Japanese Philology”

Emi Foulk Bushelle, *Western Washington University*

“Towards a History of the Public Study of Buddhism in Modern Japan”

Orion Klautau, *Tohoku University*

“Scholars of Religion as Educational Policy Actors and Religious Aspects
of Education Policy in Postwar Japan”

Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *University of Pennsylvania*

“Crossing Boundaries: Rethinking the Study of ‘Japanese Religion’
in the Asian Anthropocene”

Aike Rots, *University of Oslo*