

Editors' Introduction

Essays from the XIXth World Congress of the IAHR, Tokyo, March 2005

THE CURRENT issue is a collection of articles and reports based on presentations given at the XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) in Tokyo, Japan, at the end of March 2005. This is an unusual project for the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. As a rule, the *JJRS* does not publish conference proceedings, or even collected papers from a topical panel. There have been occasional special issues for which some of the presentations from a topical panel have provided a core around which further essays were added to produce a topical issue (for example, the special issue on "Revisiting Nichiren," volume 26/3–4, 1999), or the acceptance of numerous papers from the same conference panel (for example, four papers from a panel on "original enlightenment" published simultaneously in volume 22/1–2, 1995), but it is our policy not to accept collections of panel or conference papers and publish them as such.

The IAHR Congress in Tokyo provided a different kind of situation. Many Japanese scholars were challenged to prepare papers in English, and many international scholars were gathering to address issues and topics related to Japanese religions. We decided that this would be a good opportunity to gather and publish studies by Japanese (and international) scholars that otherwise may not find their way to the *JJRS* or another international forum. It also provided an opportunity to gain some snapshots of up-to-the minutes issues and recent reports in the field of Japanese religions.

With this in mind, we produced and contacted a long list of possible contributors, based on the announced title of their presentation, inviting them to rewrite

and update their IAHR presentations into essays for submission to the *JJRS*, with the understanding that the contributions would be subject to the usual evaluation and editing process. We eventually received 18 submissions. After the initial evaluations, and since space would permit the publication of only about half the number of submissions, slightly more than a third of the authors were contacted with our regrets that their papers were not accepted. A small number of essays were accepted in the first round, and the authors contacted with a request for the usual editorial modifications required for publication in the *JJRS*. About half of the authors were contacted with notice of provisional acceptance, conditional upon major rewriting, each with long lists of suggestions and requests for updating, correction, and other modifications. Publication was made contingent upon significant upgrading, and subject to another round of evaluation. We were very gratified and pleased that many authors made a great effort to rework their essays in a very short time, and many essays were accepted for publication after the second round.

The XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions was no doubt the largest international gathering of scholars of religion in the history of Japan. To give some indication of the scope of the conference, we will give an excerpt from a report published by Shimazono Susumu, Chair of the IAHR 2005 Congress Secretariat.¹

Reflections on IAHR 2005 TOKYO by Shimazono Susumu

The XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions was held at the Takanawa Prince Hotel complex in Tokyo between 24–30 March 2005. This international conference is held once every five years, and this time it was hosted by the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (Nihon Shūkyō Gakkai 日本宗教学会, JARS), with myself as President. This was the second time that this conference was hosted in Asia. The first time was in 1958, the VIIIth IAHR World Congress, and it was also held in Japan. The IAHR was founded in 1900, and it is a reflection of the depth and accomplishments of religious studies in Japan that the World Congress has been hosted twice in Japan during these one hundred years.

The next IAHR World Congress to be held in Asia will probably be hosted in China or Korea, or perhaps India, and it may be a long time before it is hosted again in Japan. Hosting and organizing such an event requires great efforts and heavy responsibility, and yet it offers valuable rewards. It is an good opportunity, especially for young scholars, to gain new insights on their research from a global perspective. Organizing such an international conference requires that many people interrupt their usual work or research to concentrate on preparing for and running the conference, but the rewards include providing an opportunity for

1. For details and the full report in Japanese, see SHIMAZONO 2005.

the next generation of scholars to experience an international level of religious studies.

The JARS decided to host the IAHR 2005 World Congress in order to mark the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the first Chair in religious studies in Japan (at the Imperial University of Tokyo) and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the JARS. The final decision granting the host status to Japan was made at the previous IAHR conference in Durban, South Africa, in 2000, and preparations for the 2005 conference were initiated immediately. Prince Mikasa, who has attended many of the IAHR conferences in the past, agreed to act as Honorary Chair, and many related academic associations agreed to cooperate with the planning of, and participate in, the conference. The Japanese government approved it as an official event, opening the door to financial support. Although there was concern over whether the JARS could handle such a major event, the cooperation of various organizations and the sacrifices offered by many people made it possible.

The previous conference in Durban in 2000 gathered together about 700 participants, so preliminary plans called for a goal of between 800 and 1,000 participants in Tokyo. As it turned out, there were more than 2,200 participants in total, with more than 1,800 academic participants. Over 700 people participated from abroad, from 62 different countries and locales, including Korea (50), India (22), China/Hong Kong (20), Mexico (16), Russia (11), Taiwan (10), Turkey (8), Kenya (8), Nigeria (8), and South Africa (7). It is quite unusual to have such a wide range of international participants in a humanities-and-social-studies related conference. The largest international representation (outside of Japan) was from the United States (130). The number of sessions (in addition to official large-scale events such as the Plenary sessions) totaled 331 sessions, including organized panels (292), symposiums (32), and roundtable discussions (7). The level of participation far surpassed any previous international conference of the IAHR, and cast a bright light on the future of the international study of religions.

The level of academic presentations and discussion was also highly evaluated. More than 20 sessions were held simultaneously, so it was impossible for anyone to attend all (or even a large percentage of) the sessions, but the general consensus was that the academic presentations and discussions were of a high level. Much of the credit for this should go to the preparation of a detailed program and summaries in both Japanese and English, the result of long and hard hours of work by many people.

Another reason for the success of the conference was the plenary sessions. The theme of the conference was "Religion: Conflict and Peace," and the plenary sessions were planned for the most part to reflect this theme. The main plenary sessions included special speakers and panels on the following themes:²

2. There are plans to publish the contents of these special plenary sessions through a major European publisher in the near future.

1. The Religious Dimensions of War and Peace
2. Technology, Life, and Death
3. Japanese Religions and the Study of Religion: Religion and Politics
4. Global Religions and Local Cultures
5. Boundries and Segregations
6. Method and Theory in the Study of Religion

Closing Comments

Although a special issue of the *JJRS* would normally focus on a central theme, include papers that address it, and contain an introduction by the guest editors that incorporates the main issues authors take up in relation to the theme, this is not the case with this issue. Nevertheless, it would be remiss of us not to make brief reference to the contributions themselves and how we have decided to structure them.

The articles are presented in a kind of historical order. Gaynor SEKI-MORI looks closely at the separation of kami and buddha worship in the mid-nineteenth century, building on other similar works in English, such as those of H. Byron Earhart. ISOMAE Jun'ichi presents a hotly debated topic, grounded on the historical development of and issues surrounding the term "Japanese religion." Thomas A. TWEED and MORIYA Tomoe, who presented papers on the same panel at the Congress, turn their attention to Japanese Buddhism and the transnational exchange of ideas and influences from around the turn of the twentieth century. Both feature the important Buddhist figure Suzuki Daisetsu, with Tweed focusing on scholarly collaboration and exchange between Japan and the West, and Moriya considering the influence of Western ideas on scholarship and social criticism in Japan. YAMAGUCHI Aki continues along this historical and transnational path, looking at the influence of Unitarians on Japanese intellectuals in the development of the modern nation-state. In bringing us to the contemporary period, MATSUOKA Hideaki considers an area that has yet to receive significant attention, at least by scholars of religion in the Japanese context: the role that landscape plays in explicating and justifying religious doctrine, as seen through the case of one Japanese new religious movement. Birgit STAEMMLER concludes the essay section by taking a concept from traditional Japanese folk belief and showing how it is being appropriated, presented, and interpreted through different media.

The reports, presented in a manner similar to Jonathan S. Watts's contribution published in the special issue on "Traditional Buddhism in Contemporary Japan" (volume 31/2, 2004), reflect the authors' ongoing research interests and future directions. FUJIWARA Satoko's survey-based work draws attention to the fact that for most Japanese students, undergraduate-level education is the first time they are exposed to the study of religion. The issue concludes with INOSE

Yūri's report on factors that influence intergeneration belief transmission, focusing on the Sōka Gakkai, a new religious movement.

We felt from the start that, given the nature of the Congress itself, this special issue could present an opportunity to open up some aspects of the study of religion in the context of Japan to members of the academy whose attention was focused on Japan perhaps for the first time. With this in mind, we asked authors to consider that the needs of our potential audience may be different from those of specialists. We are therefore grateful that they worked so willingly to accommodate our request. Finally, we want to express our appreciation and thanks to all the contributors for their efforts in preparing these articles and reports and working closely with us within tight deadlines.

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REFERENCE

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