

SPECIAL ISSUE HONORING

Helen Hardacre



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## Editors' Introduction

### Helen Hardacre and the Study of Japanese Religion

**I**N 1984, HELEN HARDACRE published her second monograph, *The Religion of Japan's Korean Minority: The Preservation of Ethnic Identity*. The book was a slim volume on a topic studied by few Japanese scholars until then. It would be nearly another twenty years before Iida Takafumi would publish a more comprehensive and updated monograph on the subject in the wake of the emergence of a strong *zainichi* (resident) Korean identity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Hardacre's fieldwork-based study examined characteristics of *zainichi* Korean temples in the Ikoma Mountain Range near Ōsaka and the function of the *bosaru*, female shamans, in the *zainichi* Korean community. Hardacre showed that unlike their counterparts in Korea, many Japan-based *bosaru* established affiliations with Japanese Buddhist schools and played an important role in the identity formation of *zainichi* Korean women. The volume is probably Hardacre's least-known work because of its limited circulation, but together with Hardacre's first, more widely-known monograph on Reiyūkai, it marked the beginning in a prolific career as a leading scholar of contemporary Japanese religion.

Hardacre's scholarship has shown remarkable scope. Her work on modern and contemporary Japanese religions is best known in the fields of new religious movements (NRM) and the relationship between religion and the state, but she has also been a pioneer in other areas such as gender and ethnicity. Hardacre's engagement with Japanese religions began as an undergraduate and as an MA student under Winston L. King in the Department of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University. She continued her graduate studies at the University of Chicago under Joseph Kitagawa, one of the founders of the field of Japanese Religions

in the United States. Unlike Kitagawa, whose work was strongly indebted to the history of religion, Hardacre chose a more ethnographic and sociological approach. This has remained one of her trademarks.

Her work on NRM in Japan began with her dissertation, completed in 1980, and later published as a monograph entitled *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan: Reiyūkai Kyōdan* (1984). In her study of Reiyūkai, a Buddhist NRM that links beliefs in spirits with faith in the Lotus Sutra and promotes conservative familism, she argued forcefully against the received argument that NRM owe their existence to crisis. In her words, “while a crisis may explain . . . why groups form at a particular time, it does not account for their persistence once the time of crisis has passed” (1984a, 10). For the purposes of her study, Hardacre temporarily joined the Los Angeles branch of Reiyūkai. Even though such participant observation has become standard in anthropology, at the time it rankled some of the later reviewers of her work—perhaps a reflection of the underlying suspicion with which NRM are often treated in contrast to more established religious groups. Hardacre combined ethnography with her signature sensitivity to gender issues: she argued that women members were not simply empowered by the movement but actually found themselves having to subscribe to a chauvinist and sexist value system. Her monograph stands out as one of the first in-depth studies to take a Japanese new religious movement seriously and examine the implications of the movement’s practices on its members.

Her next book, *Kurozumikyō and the New Religions of Japan* (1986) was devoted to one of Japan’s earliest, Shinto-inspired NRM, founded in 1814 by Kurozumi Munetada (1780–1850). Hardacre’s book took a more historical approach than her earlier study of Reiyūkai by exploring the religious culture of Japan in the nineteenth century, a period of Japanese history that Hardacre would revisit in several subsequent works. Her first chapter, entitled “The World View of the New Religions,” became the most widely read section of the book, useful beyond the case study of Kurozumikyō. At a time when few comprehensive studies of Japanese NRM were available, making it difficult for a student of Japanese religions to make sense of the overwhelming variety of organizations, Hardacre argued that these religions shared a unified worldview despite their obvious doctrinal differences. By worldview, she was not referring to a static cosmology but to “how a group of people understands itself to be related to the physical body, the social order, and the universe,” all of which affects how “members think, feel, and act” (1986a, 8). NRM favor “balance, harmony, and congruence” of the “individual, society, nature, and the universe,” which they perceive as “an integrated system” (11–12). Self-cultivation to perfect this integration, she argued, is central to this type of religious practice. The particular terminologies, culled from Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian vocabularies, may be different across the NRM, but the underlying principles follow the same pattern (12–13). More recent studies on newer NRM may have challenged her argument, but it still represents a last-

ing contribution to the field. Several shorter publications on new and alternative religions have followed over the years on topics such as the tensions between the NRM and Shugendō, Asano Wasaburō and spiritualism, Ōmotokyō and gender, Shinmeiaishinkai and shamanism, Aum Shinrikyō in the media, and the impact of the Aum Shinrikyō incident on Japanese civil society.

Another major arena of research for Hardacre has been the relationship between religion and the state. As in her work on NRM, she has demonstrated a willingness to engage with controversial topics. *Shinto and the State, 1868–1988* (1989), a balanced and historically nuanced study of the development of State Shinto, is a case in point. While prior Western studies of State Shinto focused on vilifying its ideological role during World War II, Hardacre's survey of Shinto's complex relationship with state power from the early modern period through the politically conservative 1980s took into consideration the role Shinto played not just on the national stage, but on a popular level. Her discussion of the problematic relationship between Shinto institutions and the postwar state foreshadowed her current research on constitutional reform in contemporary Japan. Her present study elucidates, for example, the roles of religion in the government's efforts to revise the constitution in regards to the Self Defense Force (Article 9) and gender equality (Article 24). Her involvement in another conference volume, *Visions of Asian Authority*, edited with Charles KEYES and Lauren KENDALL (1994), speaks to her attentiveness to the relationship between religion and modern Asian nation-states more broadly.

Her interest in nineteenth-century Japan, already evident in her work on NRM and Shinto, led to her work on nineteenth-century regional religion in Sagami and Musashi Provinces, published as *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Japan: A Study of the Southern Kantō Region, Using Late Edo and Early Meiji Gazetteers* (2002). Based on a close reading of regional gazetteers from the nineteenth century, Hardacre examined what late Edo religion looked like on the ground. Her study urges us to pay attention to regional idiosyncrasies and to consider sources that can provide us with remarkable insight into local culture. Her concern with the nineteenth century also led her to publish *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan*, edited with Adam KERN (1998). The volume was based on an international conference she organized on the subject at Harvard University. The Meiji conference and the subsequent conference volume also demonstrated her commitment to chronicling the state of given fields of research, a commitment that also yielded another edited volume, *The Postwar Development of Japanese Studies in the United States* (1999).

A feminist reading of gender issues has been a recurrent thread in Hardacre's scholarship, from the role of women in the NRM and among the Korean minority in Japan to her work on *mizuko kuyō* 水子供養. *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan* (1998), which was awarded the Arisawa Hiromichi Prize, has probably been her most controversial work. It sparked a vigorous debate about how to

interpret *mizuko kuyō*. Was the rite a compassionate acknowledgement of women's suffering or did it, as Hardacre suggested, prey on women's fears? To prove her point that the rite's popularity was due to skillful, fetocentric marketing of the aborted fetus's menacing powers, Hardacre explored the discourse surrounding *mizuko kuyō* beyond the boundaries of Buddhist temples and beyond metropolitan areas, which had served as sites of study in other scholars' works. Her study included rural Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and popular print media to present a comprehensive view of *mizuko kuyō* in the context of Japan's reproductive and sexual culture.

As this brief survey of Hardacre's work illustrates, her contributions to modern and contemporary Japanese religions are extensive. Her research refuses to subscribe to sectarian boundaries and continuously probes the contested margins of Japanese religions: NRM, ethnic minorities, gender, controversial rites, State Shinto, and constitutional reform. This special issue demonstrates the scope of Helen Hardacre's influence on the field by bringing together a wide range of studies by scholars that have worked closely with her as colleagues from Japan and her graduate students during her years at Princeton University (1980–1989), Griffith University (1990–1992), and Harvard University (1992–present).

The essays included in this volume mirror a number of her research interests. The relationship between religion and the state, for example, is the major theme of the two contributions by Hardacre's colleagues in Japan who have influenced her work: Tamamuro Fumio and Shimazono Susumu. The other essays have been contributed by former students of Hardacre's who wrote their doctoral dissertations under her supervision on various aspects of religiosity in early modern and modern Japan: Nam-lin Hur, Duncan Williams, Regan Murphy, Hwansoo Kim, and Barbara Ambros.

Tamamuro Fumio, one of Japan's leading authorities on Edo and Meiji religious history, contributes an essay on the development of the Buddhist parish system (*danka seido* 檀家制度) within the context of anti-Christianity, funerary Buddhism, and the legal structures of the Tokugawa regime. Over the years, Tamamuro's wide-ranging research on how religious institutions (on both local and translocal levels) interacted with state institutions (also both locally and translocally) probably directly inspired Hardacre's monograph, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Japan*. Indeed, Hardacre's return to studying the nineteenth century—after a number of works on the modern and contemporary periods—was likely a result of her relationship with Tamamuro. This research shift opened up an area of inquiry that has subsequently been taken up by a new generation of scholars, including several contributors to this volume. The essay included here was written by Tamamuro specifically for this special issue, and was translated into English by Duncan Williams.

Duncan Williams's contribution, which supplements his recent monograph on early modern Zen Buddhism, also investigates an aspect of Edo-period

Buddhism, in this case the social and institutional history of Sōtō Zen Buddhism as revealed by the so-called 1627 “purple-robe incident.” In it he describes how the shifting landscapes of secular and religious power due to the new regulating initiatives of the *bakufu* affected the customary authority of the imperial house to award purple robes to distinguished monks. In so doing, Williams reveals a complex religious world where the creation and enforcement of new legal regimes come up against customary traditions, local practices, and the economics of religious authority. This examination of how religious life is shaped by both regional practice and centrally mandated laws reflects Hardacre’s insistence on the study of religion as it is practiced at the local level.

Nam-lin Hur, the author of two monographs on Edo-period Buddhism, extends his work on Asakusa Sensōji to the well-known temple Zenkōji through an examination of how its popular religious culture developed from the occasional display of its normally hidden Amida Buddha. Hur explores the interconnections between the practice of *kaichō* 開帳 (revealing the statue) with the economics of fundraising from pilgrims, who believed in the particularly powerful efficacy of coming into contact with the Zenkōji Amida Triad on auspicious days associated with the *kaichō*. He argues that since *kaichō* did not have a doctrinal basis in canonical Buddhist texts, Zenkōji’s practice of revealing “secrecy”—both in terms of the nature of deities and how a worshipper might come into contact with the deity—was derived from pre-Buddhist religious customs and framed in terms of a new *bakufu* program of public fundraising for Buddhist temples. Following Hardacre’s lead, Hur’s article emphasizes both the importance of specific sites of religious practice and the role of ordinary lay practitioners and monks in the creation of popular religious culture.

Regan Murphy, a current doctoral candidate under Hardacre’s and Ryuichi Abe’s supervision, studies the role of the esoteric Edo-period Buddhist monk Keichū in the development of the nativist movement of the period, Kokugaku 国学. This movement, which has often been characterized as anti-Buddhist, began as a study of the Japanese language and subsequently became associated with the search for the Japanese essence. Murphy draws attention to the fact that the “father” of this movement, Keichū, was in fact a Buddhist monk interested in Sanskrit as well as ancient Japanese texts. Murphy’s exploration of the blurred boundaries between Buddhism and nativism provides a model for the study of Japanese religions beyond strict sectarian or institutional frameworks, an approach long advocated by Hardacre.

Focusing on religion and the state in the latter Meiji period, Shimazono Susumu offers his analysis of the genealogy of State Shinto as well as a history of the scholarship on this critical topic. Although Shimazono is, like Hardacre, best known for his work on the emergence and maintenance of new religious movements and spirituality in pre- and postwar Japan, his contribution to this volume explores the genealogies of the category of “religion” vis-à-vis the question of

how to understand the “Shinto” tradition, a central issue in the study of Japanese religions. He points out how State Shinto was not simply imposed from above, but actively engaged with by ordinary people in the process of modern nation building in which the non-elite also carved out their space. In this approach that goes beyond treating State Shinto as intellectual history, his work resonates with Hardacre’s own seminal work, *Shinto and the State*, which he also explores in his article here.

Hwansoo Kim recently finished his doctoral degree under Hardacre on a groundbreaking piece of scholarship that explores Japanese and Korean Buddhism during the colonial period. In his essay, Kim takes up the unusual case of a Japanese priest, Sōma Shōei, who studied Korean Sōn from 1929 to 1936. Unlike the majority of Japanese Buddhists based in Korea, who viewed Korean Buddhism as backward and in dire need of “reform” and modernization, Sōma sincerely respected and sought out the great Sōn masters. Kim argues that Sōma represents an individual for whom religious identity as a Zen monk overrode his identity as a Japanese national. This examination of a transnational identity provides a counterpoint to the prevailing discourse on Korean Buddhism of Japanese colonialism and resistance to it. It is, in this way, a turn to the margins that sheds light anew on the mainstream of Japanese religions, much like Hardacre’s very first publication on *zainichi* Korean temples in Japan.

The final essay is by Barbara Ambros, whose recent monograph focused on the early modern history of the Ōyama, a sacred mountain and pilgrimage site. Here she contributes an essay on the making of a documentary film on a contemporary pilgrimage confraternity associated with the mountain that raises critical ethnographic questions. While filming the Ohana pilgrimage confraternity, Ambros documents how her presence in the making of the documentary and her participation in the pilgrimage impacted everything from how history and doctrine were discussed by the group to the addition of rituals that they thought an outsider (an academic and a non-Japanese) might expect. The essay also draws attention to the myriad ways in which a traditional pilgrimage confraternity has both adapted to contemporary social and economic realities while performing nostalgic reenactments of tradition. The ethnographic orientation of this article resonates with Hardacre’s early work on the contemporary, which likewise encountered questions of the appropriate place of a researcher during religious fieldwork, the impact the researcher might have on how a religious group represents itself, and how traditional gender roles can be challenged and subverted by contemporary religion as well as by a non-Japanese female researcher.

It is our hope that this volume will serve as a modest tribute to a remarkable scholar and teacher and draw attention to the breadth of Helen Hardacre’s work on the early modern, modern, and contemporary religious life of the Japanese.

## MAJOR PUBLICATIONS BY HELEN HARDACRE

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