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Editors' Introduction

Half a Century of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*

FOR OVER half a century, the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (*JJRS*) has shaped the study of Japanese religions. Since the first issue was published in March 1974, the *JJRS* has produced almost one thousand articles, reviews, research notes, and editorials on a variety of themes related to religion in Japan, the former Japanese Empire, or the Japanese diaspora, as well as the connections between Japanese religions and religions in other cultural and geographical regions. In honor of the editors, authors, and readers of the *JJRS* past and present, we are excited to publish this special “golden” issue celebrating the journal’s achievements and foretelling its continued success.

Although the *JJRS* dates to 1974, the journal is itself a continuation of a previous publication, *Contemporary Religions in Japan* (*CRJ*). Founded by Hideo Kishimoto and William Woodward at the International Institute for the Study of Religions (*IISR*) in 1960, the *CRJ* published statistics on religious affiliation in Japan, studies of “new religions,” and translations of articles by renowned Japanese scholars and philosophers such as Nishitani Keiji. The purpose of the *CRJ*, as KISHIMOTO and WOODWARD (1960, 4) note in the editors’ preface to the inaugural issue, was “to provide material and information that will assist foreign religionists, scholars and other interested persons in understanding religions in Japan.” There was, as the editors state, a “need” for such a journal in postwar Japan, presumably to advance research on religion that had previously been conducted

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under the supervision of the Religions Division of the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) during the US-led Occupation from 1945 to 1952.

Kishimoto and Woodward had both been members of the Religions Division: Kishimoto as a consultant in his capacity as a scholar of religion at the University of Tokyo and Woodward as a Christian missionary who returned to Japan after expulsion during the war. Kishimoto in particular was instrumental in the crafting of “The Shinto Directive” under the supervision of William K. Bunce, the head of the Religions Division (THOMAS 2019, 146–149; MULLINS 2021, 42–45, 55). The networks of scholars forged during the immediate postwar investigation of religion in Japan continued well after the Religions Division was dissolved and, over the decades, developed into an international cohort of scholars researching all aspects of Japanese religions. The *CJR* and *JJRS* have served as hubs for these networks. Thus, one could say that the *CRJ* and its offspring the *JJRS* were and are part of the legacy of the US-led Allied Occupation of Japan.

After Kishimoto passed away in 1964 and Woodward returned to the US to teach at Claremont Graduate School, the production of the *CRJ* began to decline. The journal published its final issue in 1970, although the issue seems to have been delayed considering that it includes an obituary for Woodward who died in 1973. One year after Woodward’s death, David Reid revived the journal and renamed it the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* to reflect the broader historical scope of its contents.

Some time between the summer of 1980 and the spring of 1981, management of the *JJRS* was transferred from the IISR to the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (NIRC) in Nagoya. In his editor’s preface, REID (1980, 82) writes that while he was in the US, “the editorial responsibilities will be in the capable hands of our new Associate Editor, Jan Swyngedouw.” Although Reid later returned to Japan, the *JJRS* remained at the NIRC. As SWYNGEDOUW (1981) notes in the editor’s preface to the 1981 issue, “As already announced in a letter accompanying the previous issue, the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* has changed publishers and, at least to a certain extent, has acquired a new editor.” The contents of this “letter” are uncertain as it has been lost to history (or in the boxes of files in the NIRC basement). However, the reason for the permanent relocation of the journal appears to be the fact that the IISR was suddenly closed soon after Reid left Japan.

During Swyngedouw’s tenure as editor, the *JJRS* primarily published social scientific studies of religion in accordance with his own research interests and in keeping with the original vision of Kishimoto and Woodward when they founded the *CRJ*. However, the journal was forever transformed when Paul L. Swanson, the longest-serving editor of the *JJRS*, joined the NIRC in 1986. First as associate editor and then as editor, Swanson broadened the scope of the journal considerably, standardized the style and format, and expanded distribution by

making the journal available online at an early stage and through databases such as JSTOR. It was under his leadership that the *JJRS* has become the leading international journal for research on Japanese religion.

Symposium

The content of this special issue stems from a symposium held in June 2023. In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the *JJRS*, the NIRC hosted a two-day international symposium entitled “The Study of Japanese Religions Past, Present, and Future: Fifty Years of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*” (UGORETZ 2024). Scholars and friends of the *JJRS* from around the world gathered to reflect on the history of the journal, recent developments in Japanese religious studies, and the future of the field. Many of the hands who have worked tirelessly to make the *JJRS* the cutting-edge publication in Japanese religious studies it is today participated, including former editor Paul L. Swanson, longtime advisors Hayashi Makoto and Jim Heisig, former associate editor Clark Chilson, and current editor Matthew D. McMullen. They were joined by an energetic group of discussants, presenters, and audience members, many of whom have contributed to the *JJRS* as previous guest editors, editorial consultants, and article authors.

The first day of the symposium was dedicated to reflection and discussion on the history of the journal and the field of Japanese religious studies as a whole. Swanson and Hayashi gave stirring keynote presentations in which they shared many milestones and moments of growth in past decades. One highlight was the ceremonial passing of a golden baton from Hayashi and Swanson to current editor McMullen. These talks gave valuable context for the panel discussion that followed on the subject of “The Study of Japanese Religions,” involving Clark Chilson (University of Pittsburgh), Hoshino Seiji (Kokugakuin University), Keller Kimbrough (University of Colorado), and Jacqueline Stone (Princeton University, Emerita). The discussion covered a wide range of topics, such as impact the *JJRS* has had in their careers and the field of Japanese religions, opportunities and challenges to research in the field's current state, and visions of the future of the study of Japanese religions. Key themes included changes within the academy; the impact of AI on research, publication, and teaching; how best to support Japanese scholars to publish their research in English; and the need for scholars to engage more with the public. The panelists' comments led to a lively discussion with all in attendance.

On the second day of the symposium, Emi Foulk Bushelle (Western Washington University), Orion Klautau (Tohoku University), Jolyon Baraka Thomas (University of Pennsylvania), and Aike P. Rots (University of Oslo) gave thought-provoking research presentations challenging contemporary conceptions of the study of Japanese religions. Anyone interested may watch the recordings of

the full symposium available on the NIRC's YouTube channel (@NIRC-nanzan), with thanks to the hard work of Van Bragt Fellows Ishihara Yamato and Suetamura Masayo and associate editor Kaitlyn Ugoretz.

Summary of Articles

This very special special issue is the culmination of research presented during the fiftieth anniversary symposium. The topics for presentations and subsequently the enclosed articles explore the origins of the study of Japanese religions, the factors leading to the current state of the field, and prospects on where the study of Japanese religions is heading (or should be heading) in the decades to come. We invited speakers and solicited manuscripts from scholars whose research we thought best represented these topics.

Chronologically, the first article in this special issue to address the origins of religious studies in Japan is Emi Foulk Bushelle's "Speech, Text, and Reality: *Kokugaku* and the Buddhist Roots of Japanese Philology." In this article, Bushelle considers how the debates within the *kokugaku* movement regarding a proper methodology for the study of texts led to the development of a modern philological tradition in Japan. This tradition, based on the writings of the Shingon monk Keichū, was rooted in a religious understanding and ritual usage of language. Therefore, despite the efforts of modern reformers to purge the religious elements from the history of *kokugaku*, the methodology of textual interpretation that defined this movement was inseparable from its religious origins.

The second article also addresses the modern formation of the study of religion in Japan, in particular the study of Buddhism as an academic discipline. In "The Politics of Essence: Towards a History of the Public Study of Buddhism in 1880s Japan," Orion Klautau discusses how Buddhist intellectuals in the late nineteenth century sought to develop a modern study of Buddhism that could engage with the global study of religion as an academic field, while maintaining what they believed to be the "essence" of their own Mahayana Buddhist traditions. The results of their efforts can be seen in the formation of Buddhist studies departments such as the Department of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies at the University of Tokyo and related academic societies in Japan.

In "Why Teach Religion?: Scholars of Religion and Education Policy in Post-war Japan," Jolyon Baraka Thomas examines the role that Kishimoto and Woodward and the journals that resulted from their collaboration (the *CRJ* and *JJRS*) have played in shaping the contemporary field of Japanese religious studies. Specifically, Thomas focuses on the agenda of religious studies scholars in the decades following the Allied Occupation to influence policymakers regarding religious education in Japan. More than mere reporters on religion in Japan, as the early issues of the *CRJ* were purported to be, scholars of religion have been

consequential players in defining religion in Japan. Thomas calls on scholars to acknowledge how their research affects policy and political rhetoric regarding religion.

In the final research article for the special issue, Aike P. Rots offers a critical assessment of the state of the field and suggests that scholars of Japanese religions should expand their methodological and geographical perspectives in their research. In his article "Crossing Boundaries: Rethinking 'Japanese Religion' in the Anthropocene," Rots highlights the nationalistic presumptions in many studies of Japanese religions that tend to marginalize minority communities and disregard the transnational aspects of religion in "Japan." With an eye toward the future and a concern for the sustainability of the field in dire times of dwindling research funds, political uncertainty, and accelerating environmental catastrophe, scholars of Japan must not insulate themselves from these global problems by relying on the deceptive comfort posed by the geographic distance and relative economic stability of the Japanese nation-state. Rather, scholars must cross such traditional borders if the study of Japanese religions is to remain relevant.

In addition to these four research articles, this special issue celebrating half a century of the *JJRS* includes four personal essays by long-time editorial board members. Swanson and Hayashi discuss the history of the *JJRS* and the role the journal has played in shaping the study of religion in Japan. Kawahashi Noriko discusses how the *JJRS* has been an outlet for feminist critiques in studies of religion over the years, noting her own experience working with the journal, as well as pointing out the remaining challenges for achieving gender equity in the study of Japanese religions. R. Keller Kimbrough provides a lively account of how the *JJRS* has served as a venue for scholars of Japanese literature to engage with religious topics. As a whole, these essays point to the diversity of scholarship that the *JJRS* has produced over the years.

We, the editors of the *JJRS* past, present, and future, are confident that readers will enjoy this selection of articles as a reflection of half a century of *JJRS* publications. In the editor's preface to the first issue of the journal, David REID (1974) explains his reasons for reviving the journal and changing the name, writing, "To say that we desire to carry forward the high ideals of our predecessors means first and foremost that we, like them, are concerned to raise the standards of this Institute's publications.... The name change is not intended to suggest that this Institute has now 'come of age,' that we have 'arrived.' On the contrary we are only too keenly aware of the long road ahead and the meagerness of our resources." Fifty years later, "the meagerness of our resources" notwithstanding, I think we can confidently say that the *JJRS* has indeed "arrived." It is our hope and mission to continue the tradition of publishing high-quality articles on the myriad aspects of Japanese religions for decades to come.

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