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The *JJRS* and the Study of Japanese Religions

I WOULD LIKE to start by recalling some memories from when I first arrived in Nagoya many years ago, when I was assigned my new position at Aichi Gakuin University in April of 1985. At the time, Akaike Noriaki 赤池憲昭 was also a faculty member of the Religious Studies Department there, and Jan Swyngedouw was a Permanent Fellow of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. Both scholars shared the experience of studying as graduate students in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Tokyo under the supervision of Yanagawa Kei'ichi 柳川啓一. They also collaborated in translating Thomas Luckmann's work on *The Invisible Religion* into Japanese (LUCKMANN 1976). They were birds of a feather and took me under their wings. Swyngedouw is well known as a scholar of the sociology of religion who introduced the topic of secularization into Japan. He was quite familiar with the current discussions on secularization and also well acquainted with scholars in this field such as Bryan Wilson, Karel Dobbelaere, and Thomas Luckmann, who were mainstays of the Société Internationale de la Sociologie des Religions (SISR, International Society for the Sociology of Religions). The idea of secularization, which to a certain extent fit the situation in parts of western Europe, had not caught on in Japan. Swyngedouw was aware that Japanese scholars had their doubts about the applicability of "secularization," especially in Japanese culture.

Around this time it was popular among young researchers of religious studies in Japan to focus on so-called "new religious movements" (*shinshūkyō kenkyū*

新宗教研究), and they had a different perspective than that of secularization, which was based on the assumption that religion was in decline (YAMANAKA and HAYASHI 1995). The publishing industry was experiencing a boom in sales of books on “spirituality” (*seishin sekai* 精神世界), with special corners in large bookstores dedicated to this topic. Researchers on new religious movements sought to capture generational changes by examining topics such as “new new religions” (*shin shin shūkyō* 新々宗教), “new religious movements using spiritual techniques” (*reijutsukei shinshūkyō* 霊術系新宗教), and “new spiritual movements” (*shin reisei undō* 新霊性運動). It is not surprising that the idea of “secularization” was not popular among scholars of these new religious movements. Japanese scholars did not accept the theory that secularization was a universal trend; rather, they understood it to be applicable only to western Europe and even limited to some societies within those countries.

While Swyngedouw was the editor of the *JJRS*, many articles concerning secularization were published, including articles by Yanagawa, Morioka Kiyomi 森岡清美, and Shimazono Susumu 島蘭進. The journal served as a place for both Japanese and international sociologists of religion to mix and share their research. This tendency changed radically when Paul Swanson took over as editor of the *JJRS*. Swanson is a specialist in Chinese Tiantai Buddhism, but he is also familiar with the history of religion in Japan through his studies on Shugendo and has always been sensitive to current trends in religious studies in those fields. Swyngedouw laid the groundwork for international cooperation through his contacts with the SISR, and Swanson built on this foundation through active participation in various scholarly associations such as the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (JARS; Nihon Shūkyō Gakkai 日本宗教学会) and the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Thus, a new variety of articles began to be published in the *JJRS* reflecting the work of the newest scholars of Buddhism in the West and young Japanese researchers on religious studies.

Research on the Medieval and Modern Periods

In looking at the special issues published during the period when Swanson was editor of the *JJRS*, I was struck by two points. The first is the plethora of special issues and articles on the influence of exoteric-esoteric Buddhism (*kenmitsu taisei* 顕密仏教) in medieval Japan. The collection on “The Legacy of Kuroda Toshio” (1996), which contained several articles by Kuroda translated into English, played a key role in informing Western scholars about Kuroda’s influential research and ideas. In Japan, many scholars—Taira Masayuki 平雅之, Sasaki Kaoru 佐々木馨, Matsuo Kenji 松尾剛次, Satō Hiroo 佐藤弘夫, and so forth—took up the discussion of *kenmitsu taisei*, sometimes in a critical way, to rethink the history of medieval Japanese Buddhism. The following chart shows

the various special issues of the *JJRS* that were in some way connected with the theme of *kenmitsu taisai*.

1. Esoteric Buddhism	Vol. 14/2–3, 41/1, 47/1
2. Kamakura New Buddhism	Vol. 26/3–4, 33/2
3. Medieval Literature	Vol. 9/2–3, 36/2
4. Shugendo, Shinto, Onmyodo	Vol. 16/2–3, 29/3–4, 40/1
5. Ritual	Vol. 43/1, 49/2

The historiography of medieval Buddhism in Japan used to focus on the so-called schools of “new Kamakura Buddhism,” such as the Zen, Pure Land, and Nichiren schools. After the appearance of the *kenmitsu taisai* analysis, however, the themes of esoteric Buddhism, ritual, Shugendo, Shinto, and Onmyodo also became foci of attention. By sharing an interest in Kuroda’s research, scholars of many fields both in Japan and in the West were able to stand on the same ground to proceed with their research.

A second feature that developed in the pages of the *JJRS* under Swanson was a focus on modern and contemporary religion, with topics as shown in the following chart.

1. Gender and Religion	Vol. 10/2–3, 30/3–4, 44/1
2. Early Modern Buddhism	Vol. 25/1–2, 31/2, 37/1
3. New Religious Movements	Vol. 18/2–3, 22/3–4, 39/1, 50/2

“Gender and Religion” and “Modern Buddhism” are topics of increasing interest in the twenty-first century. The *JJRS* was ahead of the curve in publishing special issues on these topics. In contrast, interest in new religious movements reached a peak in the 1980s through various research projects from the perspective of the sociology of religion, but the tragedy of the Aum Affair in 1995 cast a pall on the subject and the number of studies in this area declined. From around 2010, articles that could calmly reflect on the Aum Affair began to appear, as well as research growing out of the study of folk or popular religion. The *JJRS* continues to respond to emerging trends.

A Turning Point for the Humanities in the 1970s

It is my belief that the rise of research on topics such as new religious movements and gender studies can be attributed to the academic turning point that occurred in the 1970s. This idea occurred to me when reading the work of

Yasumaru Yoshio 安丸良夫, and my impression was strengthened when I chaired a symposium that included panelists Komatsu Kazuhiko 小松和彦 and Shimazono Susumu at the annual meeting of the JARS in 2022. YASUMARU (2015) pointed out that as the Marxist historicism and the political theories of Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男 that influenced academia collapsed after the postwar era, the anthropological theories of Yamaguchi Masao 山口昌男 gained a broad influence in various fields. This point is right on target regarding the long-term influence of Yamaguchi on the history of academic studies.

However, the weakness of this explanation lies in the singling out of Yamaguchi. The turning point in the 1970s occurred not only in anthropological studies but also in folk studies, mythology, religious studies, and the sociology of religion, and all related academic areas were invigorated at this time. It was not a matter of Yamaguchi's influence alone. Yasumaru's insight does not see far enough to include the influence of the baby-boomer generation, who enthusiastically consumed the writings of scholars such as Yamaguchi and Yoshimoto Takaaki 吉本隆明. The appearance of Yamaguchi did not solely bring about the collapse of Marxist historicism and Maruyama's political thought; the rise of the student's movement in the late 1960s also played a critical role. Yasumaru's scholarship is based on a careful reading of the works of representative scholars of the age but leaves out a consideration of their readership. The irreplaceable actors in the turning point of academic knowledge in the 1970s were the students who participated in the radical student movement of the time (see HAYASHI 2023).

Why did the generation of students who participated in the student movement read works by Yamaguchi, or why were they attracted to the writings of Yoshimoto? Among these students were many who came to bear the burden of the next generation of academia. At the risk of over-simplification, it could be said that the goals of these people, both men and women, were to deny the view of history as a direct line of progress and to object to a simple rationalism. YAMAGUCHI's (1969) very first article, "Ushinawareta sekai no fukken" (recovering a lost realm), garnered significant attention from people in related academic fields. It cannot be denied that the ideas of "returning to the primordial" and "the resurgence of magic" appealed to members of the baby-boomer generation. Books like Carlos CASTANEDA's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1969) and MIYATA Noboru's *Genshiteki shikō* (the primitive way of thinking) (1974) were published one after the other and read widely.

Knowledge Gained at the Barricades

The student movement at the end of the 1960s was influenced by the "new left," but there were many who attempted to keep their distance. There was a shift from the Zengakuren 全学連 (All-Japan Federation of Students' Self-Governing

Associations) groups to that of the “joint struggle committees” (*zenkyōtō* 全共闘). A sect of the “new left” movement centered around the Zengakuren group that had taken control of Japanese university community associations was defeated in their struggle against the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty and began to decline in the latter part of the 1960s. Instead, “joint struggle committees” were organized in opposition to university authorities in an attempt to address problems within various individual universities. This movement influenced the so-called apolitical students of the age who showed no interest in political activism, and it also gained a measure of support from society in general. It was the activists of the “new left” who directed the student movement, but students who did not belong to any specific sect or avoided such sectarianism—and many free-spirited apolitical students—also participated in these activities.

Here we find both revolutionary members of the “new left” and representatives of the counterculture who sought changes in thinking and culture and a free lifestyle. The era of “joint struggle” at various universities saw the closure of some universities through the creation of physical barricades, creating a space for open discussions. This also created a clear space that promoted a festival-like atmosphere. For students of the baby-boomer generation who had attended lectures by old-fashioned professors in temporary and constricted classrooms in inadequate buildings, the free and open discussions on politics and ways of thinking with fellow students was like a breath of fresh air. This could also be described, to borrow a phrase from KOSAKA Shūhei (2006, 206), “a meaningful commotion” (意味のある空騒ぎ). The discussions and ideas battled back and forth by numerous students while working the large barricades were a phenomenon perhaps never before seen in the history of Japan. This was also probably true for those involved in student movements at the time around the world, such as the anti-Vietnam War and civil rights movements in the United States. There were also movements in Eastern Europe among those young people who sought freedom from the authorities who tried to suppress free discussion. The influence among baby-boomers from the experience of “manning the barricades” was incalculable, yet the influence was so strong that there is a tendency to overlook it.

The armed confrontation of the Asama Sansō Affair (Asama Sansō Jiken あさま山荘事件) by members of the Red Army in 1972 and the murder of fellow members by lynching were the disastrous culmination of the “new left.” The student movement lost the support of society in general and quickly came to an end. The student movement, however, was not limited to a political dimension; it also included an intellectual dimension and counterculture that intersected with a turning point in the realm of academia. This academic revolution in Japan consisted of at least three aspects. The first was the women’s liberation movement. Within the student barricades the men insisted that the women fix

them rice balls and serve them tea, which was severely criticized by the women. They called out and criticized the androcentric structure and gendered division of labor among the student movement, which gave rise to women's studies and feminism (see ONNATACHI NO GENZAI O TOU KAI 1996).

Second was the critical research on scientific technology by figures such as Takagi Jinzaburō 高木仁三郎 and Yamamoto Yoshitaka 山本義隆. Yamamoto, for example, interprets the strife at the University of Tokyo as follows:

In the twentieth century science was an essential element supporting society, and this support and its development were structurally guaranteed by the state. The historian of science Hiroshige Tetsu 広重 徹 called this the “systematization of science” 科学の体制化. The actual situation with regard to research involves a structural cooperative relationship among government bureaucrats, industry, and universities, or a complex of government, industry, university, and military. The lines of power are reflected in the distribution of research funds, and in a highly developed industrial state the decisions are made by high government officials in response to requests from industry and the military. *It was in the strife at the University of Tokyo in 1968 and 1969 that we began to problematize the education and research of universities as being taken in by the state.* (YAMAMOTO 2018, iv; emphasis added)

Third was the coming together of related fields in the humanities as represented by Yamaguchi Masao. Sociologists of religion became concerned with related fields in the humanities such as anthropology, folklore, and mythology, as well as new religious movements.

Society for the Study of the Sociology of Religion

Research on new religious movements that arose in the 1970s, including academic associations for the study of religion and society, can be understood as one example of the interdisciplinary study of humanities. Kōmoto Mitsugu 孝本 貢, one of the central scholars in this area, explains the situation as follows:

The strife that had raged at the universities was reaching an end by the early 1970s, and young researchers were in danger of falling into a catatonic state. At that time there was a movement to sponsor voluntary gatherings as a new type of research and educational organization, wherein one sought a commitment to society. The Society for the Study of the Sociology of Religion 宗教社会学研究会 was one of the progeny of this period.

(SHŪKYŌ SHAKAIGAKU KENKYŪKAI 1992, 1)

The sociologists of religion of the baby-boomer generation criticized Weber's theory of rationalization and disenchantment, as well as the theory of secularization that was popular at the time among sociologists of religion in Europe.

If Weber's theory of rationalization is deficient, then the theory of secularization that indicates the rationalization of the religious dimension also contains a weakness in its analysis of religion in modern society. This criticism of the theory of secularization is based on opposition to the assumptions of Weber's sociology that rationalism is the unique shift of the modern era. Nishiyama Shigeru 西山 茂, another prominent figure of this period, comments:

The "vitalistic view of salvation" is found not only among the new religious movements, but it is a view of salvation that appears as typical among the new religious movements. *Again, "salvation" (emphasized by religions) and "practical benefits" (emphasized by magic) that were considered separate matters in the one-sided theories of the West are not really separate but are concepts that can be shown to be connected....* The concept of "spiritual practice-type new religious movements" is a way to question the role of "non-rational" religion within a highly rationalized society.

(SHŪKYŌ SHAKAIGAKU KENKYŪKAI 1992, 89; emphasis added)

The critique of rationalism, the restoration of magic, and the theory of non-differentiation between religion and magic are motifs shared by scholars of the sociology of religion of the baby-boomer generation in Japan. At this time the phrase "folk religion" (*minzoku shūkyō* 民俗宗教) came into use, with a tendency to understand "religion" and "folk beliefs" as a continuum. It is clear now that this is also a variation of the "non-differentiation between religion and magic." Sociology of religion concerning new religious movements was sensitive to changes in society based on the critique of theories of rationalization but was not very interested in the themes of power and politics emphasized by Marxist historicism or Maruyama's political theories. On this point it was different from women's studies, feminism, and studies critical of scientific technology.

The Popularity of Research Groups in the 1990s

The Society for the Study of the Sociology of Religion was founded in 1975 and shut down in 1990. The comradely union of scholars from the baby-boomer generation took delight in criticizing the previous generation, but criticism from the younger generation was their Achilles' heel. There have been many arguments and speculations about the dissolution of the Society for the Study of the Sociology of Religion, but it was replaced in 1993 with the more open organization of the Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society (Shūkyō to Shakai Gakkai 宗教と社会学会). The creation of this association was quite significant. Researchers had started many study groups for the study of religions here and there, and this association created a place for scholars of different cliques and specializations to gather and polish their academic research while each focusing on their specific research themes. It had been difficult to have an intimate

discussion or share common research interests with colleagues at the larger academic associations such as the JARS, the Japan Sociological Society (Nihon Shakai Gakkai 日本社会学会), and the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (Nihon Bunka Jinrui Gakkai 日本文化人類学会). There was a need for small and middle-sized study groups, including: the Study Group for Japanese Women and Buddhism (Kenkyūkai, Nihon no Josei to Bukkyō 研究会・日本の女性と仏教) (1984–1989); the Association for the Study of Japanese Mountain Religion (Nihon Sangaku Shūgen Gakkai 日本山岳修験学会) (1980–present); Study Group on Japanese Buddhism (Nihon Bukkyō Kenkyūkai 日本仏教研究会) (1995–2001); Summer Seminar for Discussion on the History of Japanese Religions (Nihon Shūkyōshi Konwakai Samā Seminā 日本宗教史懇話会サマーセミナー) (1992–present); Society for the Study of Modern Japanese Buddhist History (Nihon Kindai Bukkyōshi Kenkyūkai 日本近代仏教史研究会) (1992–present); the Tōkai Network on Women and Religion (Josei to Bukkyō Tōkai Nettowāku 女性と仏教東海ネットワーク) (1996–present); the Kantō Network on Women and Religion (Josei to Bukkyō Kanren Nettowāku 女性と仏教関東ネットワーク) (1997–present); and the Study Group on Religion and Society in the Modern Period (Kinsei Shūkyō to Shakai Kenkyūkai 近世宗教と社会研究会) (1999–present).

The growing popularity of study groups beginning in the 1980s and taking off in the 1990s brought together people who were interested in the study of religions and provided opportunities for scholars of religious studies, sociology, folklore, anthropology, and so forth to meet. For example, the use of the conjunction “and”—as in “religion *and* society” or “gender *and* religion”—indicated the meeting of those studying religion with those of other fields of inquiry and revealed commonalities. It was no longer possible for religious studies to focus only on “religion” and objectify it as a privileged academic subject. This “and” indicates the parallel relationship between religion and other academic fields. It is said that a certain professor of religious studies at the University of Tokyo complained that this was merely “a second Association for Religious Studies.” However, the Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society is an attempt to bring together scholars from other fields related to religion, not to take up the subject of “religion” as an isolated subject. The fields of the sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, and so forth are not merely subfields of religious studies; these are areas intimately connected to religion. Originally religious studies intersected with many other fields. By focusing on these intersections, interchange and communication with other fields becomes possible. The name “Japanese Association for the Study of Religion *and* Society” was a challenge for our age and an attempt to bring new life to the image of religious studies.

To come back to the *JJRS*, I mentioned above that the special issues throughout the years have included many themes related to modern and contemporary

times and that this reflects the popularity of the many study groups outlined. Great progress has been made in the areas of “gender and religion,” “modern Buddhism,” and “new religious movements,” based on the quiet yet steady activities of these study groups.

Translated by Paul L. Swanson

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