

TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH ON JAPANESE RELIGIONS

2013 Nanzan Seminar for Graduate Students

KAWAHASHI Noriko 川橋 範子
Nagoya Institute of Technology

*The Nanzan Seminar was a brainchild of our Director Okuyama Michiaki, who wanted to provide an opportunity for advanced graduate students researching Japanese religions to discuss their topic in Japanese and interact with some of the best Japanese specialists in the field. The response to our invitation was encouraging, and the Seminar itself exciting and provocative. Our concern that the meetings could not continue for the whole time in Japanese was unfounded, and the active participation by all involved was truly a joy to behold. This report by Kawahashi Noriko, one of the four commentators at the Seminar, appeared originally in the 29 June 2013 edition of *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報 (page 5) as トランスナショナルな日本宗教研究へ——多様な関心取り込む海外研究.*

THE FIRST “Nanzan Seminar for the Study of Japanese Religions,” a gathering of advanced graduate students from around the world, was held at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture on the weekend of 1–2 June 2013. Eight young graduate students from Asia, Europe, and the United States—along with four local Japanese commentators (including the author), the staff of the Nanzan Institute, and other scholars for a total of thirty-three attendees—gathered to present and discuss their research on Japanese religions. The seminar was conducted completely in Japanese.

The author was a research associate at the Nanzan Institute from 1992 to 1996, and has collaborated with the Institute in many ways over the years as part of its international network of multicultural researchers and in its role in promoting the study of Japanese religions around the world. This Seminar was a significant opportunity to participate in a meaningful discussion, and I was joined as part of the panel of “local experts” by Hayashi Makoto (Aichi Gakuin University), Ōtani Eiichi (Bukyō University), and Yoshida Kazuhiko (Nagoya City University), three renowned experts in the history of Japanese religions and thought, and in the history of Buddhism in Japan.

The eight presenters at this Seminar were chosen amid strong competition from among sixteen applicants. Here, in order of their actual presentations, is a list of their names and their topics:

Kevin WILSON (University of Southern California), “The temple/shrine histories of Hachiman faith and the formation of cultural capital” (八幡信仰の社寺縁起と文化資本の生成)

Ethan BUSHELLE (Harvard University), “*Shōdō* and the development of Buddhism in medieval Japan as seen in Agui Chōken’s *Treatise on Turning the Wheel of the Dharma* (日本中世仏教の形成と唱導——安居院澄憲作『転法輪抄』を軸に)

Caleb CARTER (University of California, Los Angeles; Keio University), “Togakushi and the development of medieval Shugendo” (中世修験道の展開——戸隠山の事例)

Mick DENEKERE (University of Cambridge), “Buddhist contributions to the Japanese Enlightenment Movement in the Early 1870s” (啓蒙と教化のために——仏教学僧がいかに1870年代の文明開化運動に貢献したのか)

Bernat MARTI-OROVAL (University of Valencia), “Theories of the soul in Kiyozawa Manshi’s religious philosophy” (清沢満之の宗教哲学における靈魂論——西洋哲学と仏教教理の逢着)

MUN Heajin (Hanyang University), “Studies on the religious characteristics of the Namsan Shrine prior to Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1910” (日韓併合(1910年)以前の南山大神宮の宗教的性格に関する研究——居留民神社の庶民宗教性を中心に)

Alice FREEMAN (University of Oxford), “Ōmori Sōgen’s Imperial Zen and Western society” (大森曹玄の皇道禪と欧米社会)

Jolyon THOMAS (Princeton University), “Occupation or mission? The religious policies of GHQ” (占領か宣教か?——GHQの宗教政策)

A quick glance at the various topics presented here is enough to show the variety of issues and concerns among international researchers on Japanese religions. I myself, like the presenters at this Seminar, did graduate work on Japanese religions at a university outside Japan, and feel great empathy for their work, but here I can only give a short summary of each presentation.

Wilson’s presentation drew on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of cultural capital to examine shrine/temple histories (*engi*) and Hachiman faith, thus clarifying how shrines, temples, and religious rites gained recognition and economic support from the imperial court. Bushelle used a variety of primary sources to clarify the role of “preaching” or “liturgical performance” (*shōdō*) in late Heian society. He shows that such preaching performances played an important role in the



formation of the religious system known as the “exoteric-esoteric Buddhism” (*kenmitsu bukkyō* 顕密仏教). Carter took up the example of Mt. Togakushi (in the Shinano area) in the sixteenth century to analyze how Shugendo became a leading religious organization.

Denekere focused on the historical material found in the journal *Hōshi sōdan* 報四叢談 to examine how enlightenment ideas and “civilization” (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化) were interpreted by Buddhists in the Meiji era, and the role the Buddhists played in the “enlightenment movement” (*keimō katsudō* 啓蒙活動). Marti-Oroval provided a detailed analysis of Kiyozawa Manshi’s theories of the soul, an aspect that has heretofore been neglected in studies of Kiyozawa’s religious philosophy. Mun focused on the Japanese shrine at the foot of Mt. Namsan (no connection to Nanzan in Japan) in central Seoul to examine the meaning of local Japanese shrines in Korea, the background to their construction, and the religious role and character of their rituals in the lives of Japanese residents prior to the Japanese annexation of Korea.

Freeman took a fresh look at the right-wing political activist and Zen monk Ōmori Sōgen by comparing his “Imperial Zen” and his rhetoric during the war with his influence in the post-war “Zen boom” in the West, and commenting on the relationship between Japanese culture and Western culture. Thomas



mulled over the contradictions found in the policies toward religion during the Occupation period, showing that the interpretation of “freedom of religion” during this time relied mainly on Christian perspectives.

Flexible and Open Approaches to Japanese Religion

It is true not only for the study of Japan but also for studies on Asia in general that even today the research is dominated in many fields by white Western scholars. This has been pointed out by many Asian researchers working in the United States, such as Sakai Naoki of Cornell University, reflecting criticism of the continuing influence of the former colonial structure (for details see my book on “An ethnography of Buddhist clerical marriage: An approach to gender-religious studies” 妻帯仏教の民族誌—ジェンダー宗教学からのアプローチ, Jinbun Shoin, 2012). Western researchers continue to maintain a dominant position, with Japanese scholars often reduced to providers of necessary primary materials. In contrast, a good example of researchers of all backgrounds collaborating as equals in common cause—rather than Japanese scholars serving, in effect, as “research assistants”— is Barbara Ruch’s edited volume on *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Michigan Monograph Series in



Japanese Studies, 2002). The Nanzan Seminar also served as a good example of how a rigorous network of researchers that is open to all, both within Japan and overseas, can give birth to truly transnational research in Japanese religions. Again, I personally asked many of the young researchers about how they became interested in Japanese religions, and many of them admitted (with a bit of embarrassment) that they were drawn to the “exoticism” of Japan. However, I was delighted by the fact that their ability to communicate in Japanese had improved by leaps and bounds compared to the situation when I studied at graduate schools in the United States some twenty years ago.

At the final session on the second day of the Seminar, there was an intense discussion on methodological and theoretical issues that were common to the variety of topics offered brought up in the individual presentations. Spurred on by comments by Ethan Bushelle, the discussion covered issues such as secularization, performance theory, orientalism, and social capital. These Western theoretical concepts were held up for scrutiny from the perspective of topics from Japanese religions such as “performative preaching” (*shōdō*) and temple histories (*engi*), indicating the necessity to reconsider these issues from these perspectives.

On the other hand, Yoshida Kazuhiko (one of the commentators), made the stimulating assertion that young researchers should be flexible, with a healthy skepticism, and only “accept the authority of Japanese academic theories with a grain of salt,” and thus avoid getting entangled in the attachments of Japanese academia. By maintaining an open mind, he added, he hoped that these young

international researchers could fill in some of the gaps in the study of religion in Japan.

Finally, I would like to comment on the fact that my current research theme is “Buddhism and gender.” I was thrilled that three of the young male researchers came up to me during the Seminar and asked for advice, saying that as they advance to a university teaching position in the near future and teach classes on Japanese religions, they feel it is necessary to include the issue of “women and Buddhism” or “Buddhism and gender” as part of their lectures, and sought my help in gathering the most recent and important publications on this topic. It goes without saying that lecturing on Japanese religions in the West requires expertise in Buddhism, and it was heartening to see that the topic of “gender and Buddhism” was perceived as one of the crucial topics in this field.

[translated by Paul L. Swanson]