

YAMANAKA Hiroshi

Foreword

TO MARK the publication of the fourth issue of *Religious Studies in Japan*, the English-language periodical of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, I would like to take a brief look back at the association's history and highlight the role of this journal.

As is well known, from the Meiji period the development of science in Japan relied on the energetic importation of various Western sciences, emphasizing deliberation and absorption. Encouraged by calls for civilization and enlightenment, the large amount of traditional knowledge focusing on Chinese classics that had been accumulated until the Edo period was now devalued. In its place various sciences of Western origin, such as the natural sciences and philosophy, were comprehensively imported and eagerly studied. I would argue that the establishment of a department for religious studies at the University of Tokyo (then Tokyo Imperial University) in 1905, although occurring after the Westernization policies of the Meiji government had come to an end, still strongly reflected the academic situation of the Meiji period.

Today, almost ninety years after its establishment, the research conducted by the Japanese Association for Religious Studies is changing considerably. Membership now exceeds two thousand, and every year more than six hundred scholars come together for the annual conference, with its many presentations and lively discussions. These presentations and discussions do not stop at merely introducing Western ideas and discourses. To the contrary, most of them have come to convey the originality of religious studies in Japan. But is it sufficient to

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assume that the Japanese Association for Religious Studies has proceeded from the level of “import” to the level of “transmission”? The answer to this question is not that simple. As there is still some ignorance towards overseas research development and a tendency toward introversion with regards to the awareness of problems, a look at the overall situation shows that there are still not enough opportunities and places for productive academic exchanges with overseas scholars. On the other hand, it seems that overseas scholars are expressing their wishes to learn from religious studies in Japan more explicitly. I feel that in the midst of the development of post-secularization there is a movement towards the reconstruction of religious studies from a new perspective—one that transcends Eurocentric paradigms that are based on Western modernization and Christianity.

In this context, this journal fulfills a very important role, because it constitutes an extremely helpful tool for the transmission of our members’ research and activities for an overseas audience. Furthermore, this journal provides more opportunities for bilateral exchange between scholars from Japan and overseas through the world language of English, the kind of exchange that will help to close the aforementioned gaps in their respective awareness of problems. On behalf of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, I would like to express our intention to eagerly transmit knowledge accumulated throughout the long history of religious studies in Japan by further improving this English-language journal so that it may contribute to the construction of a new field of religious studies befitting the age of globalization. I wish the journal continued success.

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