

TSURUOKA Yoshio

Foreword

VOLUME six of *Religious Studies in Japan* consists of three articles and two book reviews. From this issue onwards, we will also report on the academic works that have received the “Japanese Association for Religious Studies Award” (*Nihon shūkyō gakkai shō*), which traces its origins back to 1956, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of this association. Originally titled the “Anesaki Memorial Award” and established in order to honor outstanding achievements in the field, this annual award was renamed with its current appellation in 1966. Previous recipients and the titles of their works are published on the Association’s homepage.

Further changes are also afoot. Peer-reviewed articles will no longer have to follow the journal’s biannual publication schedule, but will be posted online regularly, as they are accepted and go through due editorial process. We are also planning to publish special issues dedicated to particular topics.

The two years since volume five have been marked by the chaos wrought by COVID-19. The pandemic greatly reduced domestic and international travel.

As for religious activity, whose essential meaning lies in people gathering and interacting—perhaps we do not even need to go as far as defining it in terms of “collective effervescence”—it too was heavily curtailed. Coming on top of ever-worsening climate change, the fate of religion in the world will likely become a central object of inquiry for contemporary scholars of the field.

TSURUOKA Yoshio is President of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies.

This chaotic situation also extends to academia. Fieldwork has become almost impossible to conduct and academic conferences can only be held by overcoming great difficulties. On the other hand, everyone has realized the convenience of online conferences and seminars. These can no longer be considered mere temporary substitutes, and might even become the standard in the future. If one possesses a certain level of English proficiency, it is possible to participate in conferences around the globe without investing much time or money. Venues for publicizing research results will also likely grow more diverse. However, the more this situation becomes the norm, the more we will realize the importance of direct interpersonal communication conducted in a shared physical space.

How to combine and harmonize online and in-person formats is an issue that has now been forced onto humanity by the enormous changes brought by the early twenty-first century. For us, who are in the middle of it all, it is impossible to completely see through the nature of such developments. At the same time, great changes have always been opportunities for creative innovation—could we perhaps say for “evolution”? With a history of thousands of years, religion will respond by taking on new guises. The study of religion will also achieve new breakthroughs in response to these transformations. I am looking forward to the challenges of this new era.

Tsuruoka Yoshio
Tokyo, January 2022