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Foreword

ON BEHALF of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, I am pleased to present the third issue of *Religious Studies in Japan*.

Religious studies seems to be entering a new stage on several fronts. Perhaps the main issue facing scholars is that fundamental terms of the discipline are losing their potency. Concepts used to explain religious phenomena are no longer sufficient to explain the realities or tendencies of contemporary religions. It is not just that scholars are greatly divided in their opinion of what the term *religion* means; reaching consensus on anything from a variety of social settings has become difficult in the extreme.

A principal cause of the problem with applying the received framework of ideas is, of course, the dynamic transformations taking place in the way religions function in contemporary society. Advances in globalization and information technology have greatly affected our relationships with religion, and the rapid pace at which society today is moving has enormously complicated the continuity of traditional religions. We might also point to the fact that theories and methodologies that were developed within the European academic traditions to explain these changes do not necessarily fit the situation of religion in non-European societies. All of this reminds us again of how the achievements of religious studies are affected by historical, regional, and cultural conditions. That is not all. If indeed we admit that the formation of religious studies was a result of the attempt to categorize a wide variety of phenomena around the world by

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using the concept “religion,” and that these phenomena were objectified based on this concept through a modern rationality, then the very foundation of our religious studies research is being challenged.

That said, these challenges can also be understood to mean that the research of phenomena called “religion” reflects the contours of knowledge and the current status of our modern world. From here on in, the study of religions must be done from the perspective of various methodologies, and reflect the plurality of phenomena in various localities. The Japanese Association for Religious Studies includes many specialists doing research in numerous fields: comparative study of religions, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, anthropology of religion, philosophy of religion, theology, and so forth. Our hope is that *Religious Studies in Japan* will serve to make the results of religious research in Japan better known around the world.

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