

FUJIWARA Satoko

## Foreword

VOLUME 7 of *Religious Studies in Japan* (RSJ) features papers originating from a special panel hosted by our International Connections Committee on 11 September 2022 during the Eighty-First Annual Meeting of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (JARS). Originally planned for Aichi Gakuin University in Nagoya, the meeting shifted to an online format due to ongoing pandemic concerns. This change, while unfortunate, notably expanded global access to our annual meeting.

Building on the success of the first online international panel at the Eightieth Annual Meeting, the Eighty-First Annual Meeting's international panel featured four up-and-coming scholars from Denmark, France, South Korea (affiliated with Tohoku University in Japan at the time), and Japan. Additionally, Erica Baffelli of Manchester University contributed as a commentator. The panel, entitled "Esotericism, Occultism, and Spiritual Therapies during the Long Twentieth Century: Theoretical Implication," was organized by Ioannis Gaitanidis of Chiba University, a JARS Councilor, under the auspices of the International Connections Committee.

The panel provided an exploration of esotericism in Japan, particularly its intersection with history, sociology, and religion in Japan. Its success led Hoshino Seiji, chief editor of RSJ, to invite Ioannis Gaitanidis to guest edit a special issue of the journal, thereby extending the panel's reach to those unable to attend. Gaitanidis, in turn, invited Erica Baffelli to coedit the issue, an invitation she graciously accepted. On behalf of the RSJ Editorial Board and the

International Connections Committee, we extend our deepest gratitude to these distinguished guest editors.

While hosting an entirely online and international panel was a new endeavor for JARS, the International Connections Committee has consistently organized in-person panels featuring international scholars since the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting in 2014. Let me take this opportunity to summarize the content of these panels:

“Understanding of Other Religions in Changing Societies,” given in Arabic and in English, convened and chaired by Shiojiri Kazuko on 13 September 2014 (seventy-third meeting), at Doshisha University, Kyoto.

This panel examined the dynamic nature of Islamic understanding of others and other religions in changing societies. It focused on religious pluralism in Turkey, the Hui Muslim community in China, the acceptance of Islam in prewar Japan, and the role of religious minorities and interfaith dialogues in Islamic societies. The panelists discussed these topics from the perspectives of secularism, civil society, and religious movements, aiming to deepen the understanding of Islam’s role and adaptation in diverse social contexts.

“Secularism and Nation in Modern Asia: Toward a Post-Secularization Theory,” given in English, convened and chaired by Yamanaka Hiroshi; and “Public Religion and Public Roles of Religions in Modern Japan,” given in English, convened and chaired by Hoshino Seiji on 5 September 2015 (seventy-fourth meeting), at Soka University, Tokyo. (These two panels were organized by the Soka University host.)

These two panels discussed the public roles of religion in modern Japan and secularism in modern Asia. The first panel, joined by James Beckford as commentator, examined the historical and social contributions of religion, focusing on public religion and religious organizations’ societal roles. The second panel, joined by José Casanova as commentator, addressed the secularization debate in Japan, comparing religious freedom in modern Japan to secular trends in Thailand and India, and exploring the relationship between religion and the state in these countries.

“Religious Studies and Global Environmental Issues,” given in English and Japanese, convened and chaired by Kimura Takeshi on 10 September 2016 (seventy-fifth meeting), at Waseda University, Tokyo.

This panel explored the role of religious studies in addressing global environmental issues. It included discussions on religious responses to environmental problems, the connection between Buddhism and environmental movements, and the relationship between humanity and nature in Daoism, focusing on the concept of grotto-heaven (cave sanctuaries). The panel, featuring diverse experts including Sarah Frederick, aimed to deepen the understanding of how religious studies can contribute to global environmental understanding.

“Reconsidering Religious Studies in Modern Japan in Light of the Institutionalization of Universities,” given in English, convened and chaired by Fujiwara Satoko on 16 September 2017 (seventy-sixth meeting), at the University of Tokyo. (This panel was organized by the University of Tokyo host.)

The panel, featuring Tomoko Masuzawa as commentator, discussed the history of religious studies in Japan from institutional perspectives, focusing on the early modern history of Japanese religious studies and the impact of the university system on these studies. It covered various perspectives, including higher education systems, Christian studies courses, modern Buddhist studies and monastic training, as well as the establishment of philosophy departments, exploring their layered structures and historical significance.

“Rethinking ‘the Religious’ in Secularized Societies,” given in English, convened and chaired by Date Kiyonobu on 8 September 2018 (seventy-seventh meeting), at Otani University, Kyoto.

This panel explored the evolving nature of religious belief and practice in modern secular societies. It featured presentations by experts like Grace Davie, who discussed concepts such as “believing without belonging” and “vicarious religion,” applying these to contexts ranging from contemporary Britain to post-Soviet Russia, and examining the paradoxes and diverse aspects of secularization.

“Reconsidering the Role of Biography in the Study of Modern Japanese Buddhism,” given in English, convened and chaired by Orion Klautau on 14 September 2019 (seventy-seventh meeting), at Teikyo University of Science, Tokyo.

This panel critically revisited the use of biographies in Japanese studies. It explored how a biographical approach can enrich the understanding of Buddhism in modern Japan through the lives of three influential

figures: Nakanishi Ushirō, D. T. Suzuki, and Sugimoto Tetsurō. The session included discussions on the impact of these individuals on Buddhist reform, the interpretation of Zen in the West, and the development of modern Buddhist art.

The seventy-eighth meeting in 2020, held online, was considerably downsized due to the pandemic and did not feature an international panel.

“JARS-KARS Joint Forum: Toward Post-COVID-19 Networking,” given in English, convened and chaired by Fujiwara Satoko on 7 September 2021 (seventy-ninth meeting), online.

This panel focused on building scholarly networks in the post-COVID-19 era. It featured four young and mid-career scholars from JARS and KARS (Korean Association for Religious Studies), discussing their research experiences and expectations for international networking, particularly in East Asia. The panel also addressed the challenges and potential benefits of such networks, including the impact of technological advancements on international collaboration.

“Esotericism, Occultism, and Spiritual Therapies during the Long Twentieth Century: Theoretical Implication,” given in English, convened and chaired by Ioannis Gaitanidis on 11 September 2022 (eightieth meeting), online. (See the “Introduction” for its content.)

“Translation Matters: Translating Japanese Religious Concepts into Other Languages,” given in English, convened and chaired by Okuyama Michiaki on 10 September 2023 (eighty-first meeting), at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

This panel explored the complexities and philosophical dimensions of translating Japanese religious texts and concepts into other languages. Panelists with diverse expertise discussed various challenges and strategies in translation, touching on subjects ranging from classical *waka* and Shugendō to contemporary issues in religious tourism and spiritual care, while also considering the broader implications of these translations on Japanese religious identity.

While these international panels reflect the broad interests of JARS, it is notable that, with few exceptions, their full papers had not been previously published in English. Volume 7 represents a significant milestone in the inter-

nationalization of JARS, for the first time featuring papers from one of its annual meetings in English.

This volume also highlights the achievements of Iijima Takayoshi and Kameyama Mitsuhiro, the 2022 and the 2023 JARS Award recipients respectively. We invite our readers to explore these authors' summaries of their awarded works and the accompanying statements from the Award Committee. The presentation of an award to a doctoral student, Kameyama Mitsuhiro, marks a first in its history, underscoring the evolving and dynamic nature of our field.

Finally, we acknowledge a significant transition within our journal. Hoshino Seiji, who has served as the chief editor of RSJ for eight years, is stepping down with this volume's publication. On behalf of all JARS members, we express our profound gratitude for his unwavering commitment and contributions to the journal. Simultaneously, we are pleased to welcome Maruyama Takao from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies as the new chief editor.

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