

# CSJR Newsletter

The SOAS Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions \_\_\_\_\_  
January, 2001 no. 3

## SOAS

# 日本宗教研究

# センター

# 公報

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/Centres/JapaneseReligions/>

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Carmen Blacker brought to a close last term's seminar series when she addressed a packed audience on types of *kami*. It was the best attended seminar the CSJR has so far hosted, but audience figures have been consistently good. The term's seminars were kicked off by Gaynor Sekimori on *shinbutsu bunri* policy within Haguro *shugendo*; illness prevented Massimo Riveri talking on mummies, but we have secured his return for the early summer (see below); Brian Bocking spoke on *sanja takusen* to a joint gathering of the CSJR and the JRC; and we also had Rein Raud on space-time and enlightenment in traditional and contemporary thought. The coming term's programme is full once again: we not only host six of the regular seminars, but we also run the Japanese religions forum as well.

In March of this year, we will be welcoming Prof. Ikemi Choryu from Bukkyo Daigaku (Kyoto) on a year's research leave. Prof. Ikemi is an expert on medieval Japanese Buddhism and we look forward very much to involving him in the Centre's activities. We will get him to introduce himself more fully in the next issue of the Newsletter. Still further ahead, the CSJR is planning to host a two day workshop on *shinbutsu shugo*. Gaynor Sekimori is the brain behind this, and details will be published in the next issue.

For the next issue, the plan is to shift publication to the Centre website, but for readers who do not have internet access, we are happy to continue mailing. Please e-mail me on [jb8@soas.ac.uk](mailto:jb8@soas.ac.uk) if you would like to receive hard copy. Note also that there are a couple of new links on the CSJR web page; one is a link to Relnet, a Japanese site run by Rev Miyake Yoshinobu of Konkokyo; the other links to the Society for the study of religions. This in turn provides multiple links.

Finally, I shall be stepping down from the Chairmanship from July this year. I am off to the Jinbun kagaku kenkyujo in Kyoto till the end of the year, and shall be handing over to Professor Brian Bocking.

JB

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# Seminars

Thursdays, 5:00 -6:30 pm

Room 336

- |          |    |   |
|----------|----|---|
| January  | 11 | <b>Charles Rowe</b><br>(Independent scholar)<br>Omoto and the new religions in Japan  |
| January  | 25 | <b>Wim Boot</b><br>(Leiden University)<br>Rites, law, or ethics. Or 'How to categorize<br>Confucian thought?'   |
| February | 8  | <b>Koji Mizoguchi</b><br>(University College, London)<br>The mortuary practices of the Yayoi and Kofun<br>periods: time, genealogy and the centralisation<br>of power |
| February | 22 | <b>Yukiko Shirahara</b><br>(SOAS, University of London)<br>The portrayal of the Sixteen Arhats in Chinese<br>and Japanese religious art                               |
| March    | 8  | <b>Mary Picone</b><br>(Ecole des Hautes etudes en Science Sociale,<br>CNRS, Paris)<br>Rethinking the 'menacing foetus': religion and<br>psychology in Japan           |
| March    | 22 | <b>John Breen</b><br>(SOAS, University of London)<br>Yasukuni: land of peace  |
| May      | 10 | <b>Massimo Raveri</b><br>(University of Venice)<br>The search for the perfect body: living<br>mummies and ways to utopia  |

For further information on the seminars, contact Lucia Dolce on [ld16@soas.uk](mailto:ld16@soas.uk)  
or see the Centre website:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/Centres/JapaneseReligions/>

## *Japanese Religions Forum*

The Forum, convened on the 1st Thursday of the month in term time, brings together post-graduate students, MA and PhD, working on Japanese religions from all academic departments at SOAS. The Forum aims to encourage a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of Japanese religions.

Forum activities include PhD student presentations; videos/films related to Japanese religions; presentations by representatives of Japanese religions in the UK; visits to the British Museum's collection of art and artefacts related to Japanese religions

**Time:** 5:00 -6:30 pm

**Place:** Room 336 (3rd floor, SOAS *main* building)

February	1	Inside out: experiences of Soka Gakkai <i>Jamie Cresswell</i> (Director, Soka Gakkai Institute of Oriental Philosophy, European Centre)
March	1	Social crisis and religious change in early Japan <i>Hirokuni Usami</i> (Ph.D. candidate, East Asia Dept., SOAS)
May	3	Taught to fear : ghost stories in Japanese schools <i>Anna Schegoleva</i> (Ph.D. candidate, Study of Religions, SOAS)

For updates on the monthly programme, please check the CSJR notice board on the East Asia floor of the SOAS main building or contact Lucia Dolce directly on [ld16@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ld16@soas.ac.uk)

*From Anna Schegelova, the holder of the first CSJR PhD studentship.*

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the CSJR for giving me this opportunity to continue my studies here at SOAS with CSJR Research Studentship. In my prospective thesis I am planning to look at Japanese ghost stories, mainly new urban myths, with respect to folk beliefs and pre-modern concepts of the supernatural. Besides, I am interested in tracing the motifs in all kinds of *kowai hanashi* and visual interpretations of supernatural beings.

My first degree was devoted to *musha-e* prints and the new level of appreciation that developed for them following the Tempo reforms. At an earlier stage, I was considering becoming an art historian but finally graduated from the Japanese Studies Dept. of St. Petersburg Oriental Institute with a thesis on *tengu* and I presented a paper on this topic titled the 'Multifunctional *tengu*' at the EAJS conference in Budapest. In the last year of my studies, I became a staff member of Asian and African Literatures Dept. of the Russian Academy of Sciences Library and since 1998 I have been a junior research member.

During my *tengu* investigations I come across other ghostly beings and that is my interest in the supernatural has continued to grow. In the study year following my graduation in 1996, I began lecturing on Japanese mythology and folklore and Introduction into Japanese society (Oriental Institute, St. Petersburg). Another area of my interest concerns samurai ideology, and I devised and taught a course on that subject.

During my first long stay in Japan when I came to participate in a course for librarians at the Japan Foundation Kansai Centre, I acquired a fascination for the research possibilities of what is known as the *yokai* boom. There were, gratifyingly, abundant and varied sources on this living folklore, available on Internet sites, on TV and elsewhere in the media.

On receiving Toshiba International Foundation scholarship earlier this year, I spent some months in Japan on fieldwork, which involved mostly interviewing schoolchildren. I was also lucky to be at Nichibunken where I could participate in team project meetings on the formation of horror culture in Japan. These were convened by Prof. Komatsu. Recently, I have become interested in *kanashibari* (sometimes called "sleep paralysis"), and at the moment I am writing up a paper on the subject for an international workshop on The dark side of life in Asia and the West: Night-time and the time to sleep. The workshop is to be held in January at the University of Vienna. Other interests of mine include: *musha-e* prints and the Kuniyoshi school, mythology and folklore, folk beliefs, the psychology of religion, fieldwork theory and method, and censorship in art.

## Members' research-related activities

### October

Brian Bocking delivered the keynote lecture, 'Study of Religions: the new queen of the sciences?', at the annual conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions, held at SOAS, 14 October;

John Breen attended the autumn festival (*Aki no rei taisai*) at Yasukuni shrine, and conducted interviews with members of the *Eirei ni kotaeru kai* and the *Nihon izokukai* as part of an on-going project on the Yasukuni shrine;

### November

Brian Bocking and John Breen attended a two-day conference on Shinto hosted by the International Shinto Foundation in Tokyo, November, 11-12; Brian Bocking gave a keynote address entitled 'Why is Shinto research important now?'

John Breen conducted interviews with priests at Yasukuni and members of two war veterans' associations.

## Members' publications

Brian Bocking

*The oracles of the three shrines: window on Japanese religion*, Curzon Press, 2000.

Lucia Dolce

Bernard Frank, *Kata-imi et kata-tagae: etude sur les interdits de direction a l'Époque Heian*  
Review in *SOAS Bulletin*, 64, 2 (June 2000).

George Tanabe ed., *Religions of Japan in Practice*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.  
Review in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 10, 1 (July 2000).

## Conference report

### 6th International symposium of the international Shinto Foundation

Tokyo International Forum, Tokyo, 11-12 November, 2000

Day 1 of the two-day conference comprised a round table discussion, moderated by Professor Abe Ryuichi of Columbia University and Rev. Miyake Yoshinobu of Konkokyo. The theme set for discussion was the globalisation of Shinto studies. Discussion was lively, but it quickly became apparent that, for many of those present, there were unresolved issues more pressing than Shinto's 'globalisation' - whatever that might be - to be addressed. The morning session began with a lively debate on the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of Shinto; the afternoon session closed in on how we might define, to the satisfaction of all present, the notion of Shinto and Shinto studies; the final session of the day was concerned with the controversial question of the centrality of Shinto, however defined, to Japanese culture.

What was achieved? A frank, meaningful and long overdue exchange of opinions by participants from very diverse backgrounds. The view among some present was that something other than the globalisation of 'Shinto studies' was called for. Namely, the engagement of many more scholars from a range of different academic disciplines in the study of shrines and their *kami*-focused cults. For these participants, shrines and their *kami*-focused cults do not of themselves equal 'Shinto'. There were historically, it was pointed out, multiple 'Shintos', a fact which renders the concept of a unitary 'Shinto' highly problematic. However, this view was by no means favoured by a good number - perhaps a majority - of others present, both Japanese and non-Japanese. For these latter participants, the received notion of Shinto remained viable and valuable; essential, in fact, to an understanding of the continuities in Japanese religious, cultural and social history.

The views of this latter group re-surfaced with considerable vigour in the final session of the day, as discussion moved to a consideration of a joint agreement. The idea was that a joint agreement, drawn up by the Conference organisers, would be debated and then signed by all present, and act as a spring-board for further action. Key to further action was the establishment of a Shinto Global Network Research Fund. The snag proved to be the phrase 'Shinto as the essence of Japanese culture' in the agreement's opening sentence. The sentence read in full:

We propose the establishment of a Shinto Global Network Research Fund in order to firm up and invigorate a global network of researchers working on the study of Shinto as the essence of Japanese culture.

While there was no disagreement over the creation of the Research Fund, divisions that had begun to emerge earlier in the day over the meaning of Shinto now reasserted themselves. Some regarded - or voiced no objections to regarding - Shinto as the essence of Japanese culture; for others it was highly problematic. The discussion that ensued was at times as emotional as it was rational. The upshot was that an *ad hoc* committee was formed - comprising a majority of adherents of the latter 'problematic' camp - to reconsider the opening paragraph. After consideration, the controversial phrase was replaced as follows: '...researchers working on the study of Shinto in Japanese culture'.

Participants in the round table discussion (in alphabetical order):

Dr. Irit Averbuch, Tel Aviv University

Prof. Brian Bocking, SOAS, University of London

Prof. William Bodiford, University of California, Los Angeles

Dr. John Breen, SOAS, University of London

Emeritus Prof. Delmer Brown, University of California, Berkeley

Prof. Liudmila Ermakova, Kobe University

Prof. Alfonso Falero, Salamanca University, Spain

Rev. Toshu Fukami, Vice-Chairman ISF

Prof. Allan Grapard, University of California, Santa Barbara

Dr. Sergiy Kapranov, University of Kiev

Prof. George Komarovskii, Osaka Gakuin University

Prof. Alexander Mersheyakov, Russian Academy of Sciences

Dr. Vassilil Molodiakov, Tokyo University

Emeritus Prof. Akira Nakanishi, Chairman ISF

Prof. Nakanishi Masayuki, Kokugakuin University

Prof. Andrei Nakortchevski, Keio University

Dr. Park Kyu-Tae, Seoul University

Prof. Herbert Plutschow, University of California, Los Angeles

Prof. Michael Pye, Marburg University

Dr. Fabio Rambelli, Sapporo University

Dr. Bernard Scheid, Austrian Academy of Sciences

Dr. Daniele Sestili, Free-lance journalist and researcher

Emeritus Prof. Sonoda Minoru, Kyoto University; Chief priest Chichibu shrine

Prof. Mark Teeuwen, University of Oslo

Prof. Umeda Yoshimi, Director General ISF

Emeritus Prof. Jesus Gonzalez Valles, St. Thomas University Graduate School, Spain

Prof. Wang Yong, Zhejiang University

Prof. Vladimir Yeryomin, Moscow State University

Day 2 was open to the general public and comprised lectures given by a number of invitees on the need for promoting academic research into Shinto. Prof. Nakanishi Masayuki of Kokugakuin University moderated. The three most provocative talks - not least because they were somewhat tangential to the topic at hand - were perhaps those by Profs. Bocking, Mayumi and Wang. A few brief comments on each follow.

Professor Bocking drew on his work on the *sanja takusen*, the oracles of the three shrines, to identify a couple of areas where Shinto study was now needed: Shinto in its relation 1) to the perpetuation and transformation of identities, ethnicity and gender, and 2) to power relations within Japan. To what extent, Bocking asked, could Shinto absorb trans-cultural values such as gender equality and respect for ethnic diversity, when so often it has functioned as the locus of exclusion and differentiation? Bocking also highlighted the anomaly of Japan alone among nations in the 21st century having no religious education in schools.

Professor Mayumi argued that Shinto can only be understood through its festivals and rites, and explored the broad Asiatic influences on the Gion festival at Yasaka (Gion) shrine. The *yamaboko* 'mountain floats' paraded at the Gion festival provided Professor Mayumi with evidence for what he took to be a unique merging of multiple religious traditions. He spoke of the floats that exhibited yin yang influence, Buddhist influence, and even Christian influence, one a tapestry depicting a scene from the Old Testament. These depictions were not gratuitous; rather, they were designed to show multiple foreign religions united in veneration of those kami that resided at the tip of the *yamaboko*. Professor Mayumi reminded us that the kami of Gion was related to the Gion shoja, the birth place of the Buddha in India; he asked us to ponder linkages between Gion and Korean, Indian and African cults. It was precisely this web of international connections, he argued, that gives the Gion festival its meaning.

Professor Wang, an expert on early Japan-China cultural exchange, began his talk with an impassioned plea for recognition of the evils of state Shinto. The sacred, he proposed, lies in the heart of people of all cultures of the world - Japanese, Chinese as well as Western. It is the experience of the sacred that gives people of all cultures a pride in the past and hope for the future. However, the past hundred years or so of Japanese history were witness to the abuse of Japanese kami by men of power, to such an extent that their original form was all but hidden from view. The kami were soiled, rendered unclean, by the actions of the state. The remainder of his talk Professor Wang devoted to a vivid exposition of the role of kami, of sacred sites and their priests, in the earliest cultural exchanges between Japan and China.

The other speakers, in alphabetical order, were: Dr. Irit Averbuch; Professor Delmer Brown; Professor Alexander Mesheryakov; Professor Michael Pye; Professor Minoru Sonoda.

## CSJR Post-doctoral fellowship in Japanese religions, 2001-2

Applications are now invited for the one-year CSJR Postdoctoral fellowship in Japanese religions (any area) to be held at SOAS from September 2001.

The main purpose of the fellowship is to enable the holder to bring his/her recently completed PhD thesis to publication during the year at SOAS. Whilst at SOAS, the CSJR Fellow will be expected to contribute a maximum of 3 hours of teaching per week. In addition, s/he will be expected to organise a workshop/symposium in his/her speciality. Financial and administrative support will be available to this end. The Fellow will have access to appropriate study facilities and will be a member of the Senior Common room and a full member of SOAS library.

The fellow's annual stipend will be £19,482 plus London weighting.

It is expected that the successful candidate's doctorate will have been awarded no earlier than September 30, 1998.

Applications consist of a *curriculum vitae* (to include a list of publications) an abstract/summary of the applicant's doctoral thesis, a clear statement of the candidate's academic plans for the postdoctoral year and the names of three referees. Five copies of these documents together with a covering note should be sent to Personnel Department, SOAS, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG. Dr. John Breen, Chair, Centre for the study of Japanese religions, SOAS, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG.

**The closing date for applications is Monday April 2nd, 2001.**

Interviews will be held during May/June 2001.

For informal enquiries about the CSJR fellowship, please contact Dr. John Breen, Chair, Centre for the study of Japanese religions, SOAS, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG.  
e-mail: [jb8@soas.ac.uk](mailto:jb8@soas.ac.uk)

## **CSJR Research studentships, 2001**

Applications are now invited for the CSJR research studentship in Japanese religions. The studentship, which is for training leading to a PhD in Japanese religions at SOAS, is to be held from September, 2001.

The studentship will consist of a remittance of fees and a bursary of £7,060 per year in the first year of postgraduate study, and is renewable for up to a further two years, subject to satisfactory progress. The Studentship is open to outstanding students of Japanese religions regardless of nationality.

**Closing date for applications is March 31 2001.**

**The CSJR studentship may be awarded to candidates proposing to register full-time for a research degree (MPhil/PhD) at SOAS in September 2001, and to those who enrolled full time in September 2000 or after for a research degree at SOAS.**

Candidates must have applied for a research degree at SOAS by March 31, 2001 in order to be considered for the CSJR Research Studentship.

Application forms and further particulars are available from:

The Registrar, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornough Street, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG.

For informal inquiries, please contact Dr. John Breen, CSJR Chairman, on [jb8@soas.ac.uk](mailto:jb8@soas.ac.uk)

**The MA Programme in Japanese Religion**, now in its second year, is the first European taught graduate programme devoted to the study of Japanese religions. The degree provides an overview of Japanese religion, both past and present, and supplies the tools of analysis for further research in the field. The degree comprises four components: three taught courses and a dissertation and may be completed in one calendar year (full time), or in two or three calendar years (part-time).

The programme centres around the course "Religious Practice in Japan: Texts, Rituals and Believers," which presents religious phenomena in Japan in their historical context and devotes attention to specific themes relevant for the understanding of the social aspects of Japanese religion and the influence of religion upon Japanese culture.

Students have the opportunity to select other courses, depending on their specific interests and previous knowledge, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of Japanese religion. Options include the study of Asian context, contemporary developments outside

A previous knowledge of the Japanese language is not required for entry. However, students with a sufficient knowledge of Japanese and an interest in approaching primary sources will be able to take "Readings in Japanese Religions." In addition, the degree offers language courses in modern Japanese. Students on the programme will benefit from seminars, discussion groups, guest lectures, and international workshops organized by the Centre for the study of Japanese religions.

Application forms are available from the Registrar, SOAS.

For further information, contact Lucia Dolce, Dept. East Asia/Study of Religions  
LD16@soas.ac.uk