

## Editors' Introduction

---



THIS ISSUE begins a new phase in the history of a long-established journal. Along with the new title of *Asian Ethnology*, accompanied by a new layout and cover design, we are pleased to introduce ourselves as the new editors. Our hope is to continue the high standards that the journal has always maintained, while responding to the changing demands of the academic and educational communities in an increasingly interconnected world.

Our decision to change the title from *Asian Folklore Studies* to *Asian Ethnology* was not taken lightly. We were, of course, aware of the political issues and academic debates surrounding the use of the term “folklore,” especially in Europe and North America, but these had little bearing on our decision. Rather, we felt we needed a title that was more representative of the kind of research and scholarship the journal has long embodied, situated at the intersection of anthropology, folklore, and Asian studies. Simply put, we wanted to project a more inclusive identity that would welcome the contributions of scholars from various academic disciplines. The unifying factor would be a focus on the peoples and cultures of Asia, especially those existing as smaller entities either subsumed within or transgressing the boundaries of the nation-state. “Ethnology,” the systematic analysis and interpretation of ethnographic data, is an established and widely recognized term that accurately reflects the disciplinary overlap. It also acknowledges the importance of a historical dimension in understanding both how the present is shaped by the past and how the past is reconfigured for present purposes. We want to reassure our readers, however, that folklore—as narratives, performances, and other forms of cultural expression and representation—will continue to occupy a prominent position within the journal’s contents.

This issue also marks the beginning of a cooperative arrangement between our respective institutions. Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan, has generously provided the journal with a home for over three decades. As of this year, Nanzan enters into a collaborative relationship with the University of Iowa in the United States to co-edit the journal. This will ensure a simultaneous, long-term presence on both the Asian and North American continents. Production facilities will continue to be located at Nanzan, and we particularly wish to acknowledge the

significant contributions of the members of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in creating an avenue through which the journal can flourish into the future. We also thank the Department of Anthropology at the University of Iowa for providing us with a “branch office” and otherwise accommodating this arrangement.

It is our pleasure to welcome to the journal a distinguished panel of editorial advisors who come from a range of disciplines and together constitute a great pool of valuable knowledge and experience. They are (in alphabetical order):

Richard Bauman, *Indiana University*  
Clark Chilson, *University of Pittsburgh*  
Hiroko Kawanami, *Lancaster University*  
Laurel Kendall, *American Museum of Natural History*  
Frank Korom, *Boston University*  
Roald Maliangkay, *Australian National University*  
Anne E. McLaren, *University of Melbourne*

We are grateful for their advice and support, although we ourselves take ultimate responsibility for the editorial decisions that are made.

The most obvious role of an academic journal is to convey the results of recent research and scholarship to an interested public. Another important but less conspicuous role is facilitating the development of new ideas by providing constructive criticism—essentially engaging in a dialogue with the authors. This is especially valuable for younger scholars as part of their training in the development and presentation of a persuasive argument. Our objective is to provide useful feedback on every submission—regardless of whether it ultimately appears within the pages of the journal—and in this way facilitate the production and distribution of knowledge. Obviously, achieving such a lofty objective lies well beyond our own abilities as editors, and we respectfully ask for your cooperation in working toward it—especially those of you whom we call upon to help us evaluate manuscripts.

This particular journal has long assumed another vital function—namely, introducing the important work of Asian scholars to an English-language readership. Like it or not, English has become the dominant language of international academic exchange. This places scholars raised outside English-speaking countries at an immediate disadvantage. In a larger sense, however, we all suffer from the lack of exposure to differing perspectives when one side predominates. As in the world of market commodities, the most widely used products do not always represent the highest quality or best design; often they are merely the beneficiaries of the most aggressive promotional campaigns. In any case, the near-monopoly held by the English language is not likely to disappear anytime soon. In the meantime, we can try to compensate for the imbalance by continuing a long-held policy of this journal—to promote the work of Asian scholars by making more of it available in English. Resources permitting, we plan to periodically include direct translations of particularly interesting articles that would otherwise remain unknown outside their original languages.

Speaking more generally, academic publishing may itself be considered a cultural manifestation—there are marked differences within and between the world's regions in the way scholarly manuscripts are written and evaluated. Rather than imposing our own preconceptions as to what constitutes “cutting edge” theory or the most effective means of conveying an argument, we hope to evaluate each submission on its own merits in terms of the significance it holds for our readers and the wider world. This is by no means a matter of lowering standards but of remaining flexible toward differing but equally valid perspectives.

We would like to reach beyond the rather limited range of an academic journal by sponsoring a variety of pedagogical resources for use in the classroom. The journal already follows Nanzan's open-access policy; while subscribers receive standard hard-copy versions, the full texts of all articles, reviews, and other material are freely accessible online (see [www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/AsianEthnology](http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/AsianEthnology)). We anticipate developing an associated website for accessing film clips, sound recordings, supplementary illustrations, and background information to accompany the articles. We also plan to sponsor conferences and symposia to augment the scholarly activities of the journal. Our aim is to extend the journal's influence in promoting not just knowledge of, but greater respect and appreciation for, cultural diversity throughout Asia and the rest of the world. We sincerely hope that you will support us in this effort.

Thank you for your interest in the journal and the articles and reviews contained herein. We appreciate your patience as we work through this transitional period, and we look forward to interacting with you in the years to come.

Scott Schnell

*University of Iowa*

Benjamin Dorman

*Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*

1 June 2008

Nagoya, Japan