



Editors' Note

With a healthy amount of pride, we wish to acknowledge that *Asian Ethnology* has reached a significant academic milestone since its inception in 1942. We are marking the eightieth birthday of the journal this year by publishing its eightieth volume.

The publication has had quite a remarkable journey under its various monikers over the past eight decades. In the words of Peter Knecht, who edited the journal from 1980 to 2006 while it was titled *Asian Folklore Studies*, it experienced “a chain of rebirths” (Knecht 1980, 2). It began its lengthy career in China with the first editor, Matthias Eder (1902–1980), under the name *Folklore Studies*. The journal moved to Japan along with its founder when Eder, an ordained priest in the order of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), was forced to leave the country in 1949 during the Cultural Revolution.¹

Although Eder was connected to Fu Jen University in Beijing, he had no institutional connection for a number of years after fleeing to Japan. Japan was recovering from the war and paper was in very short supply, yet he still managed to continue publishing the journal throughout this difficult period.

Another rebirth occurred in 1966 when Richard Dorson (1916–1981), the director of Indiana University's Folklore Institute at the time, invited Eder to conduct a seminar there. Dorson had a number of graduate students from Asian countries whose work he wished to promote and see published. He promised Eder that his institution would provide ongoing funding to the journal, as well as a steady stream of contributions that could be considered for publication.² Part of this agreement included changing the journal's name to *Asian Folklore Studies*. This mutually beneficial relationship continued for a number of years. Eder eventually moved to Nanzan University in Nagoya during 1973, where he remained until his death in 1980.³

His successor was the aforementioned Peter Knecht, who became the second editor of the journal in its newest incarnation. He maintained it “both as an effective medium for promoting a better understanding of traditional Asian cultures, and as a forum wherein Asian and non-Asian scholars could exchange their ideas” (Chilson and Schnell 2006, 2).

Under Knecht's editorship, an important function of the journal was “to present the work of Asian scholars who might otherwise have difficulty publishing

in an English language journal, either due to a lack of facility in the English language, or because the style and structure of their academic writing does not conform to the rather arbitrary conventions of the West” (ibid.).

The journal again experienced another rebirth after Knecht’s retirement. In 2008, Benjamin Dorman, who had worked as the journal’s associate editor under Knecht, became co-editor with Scott Schnell, of the University of Iowa. This marked the beginning of a cooperative arrangement between Nanzan University and the University of Iowa in the United States. The move was designed to ensure a simultaneous, long-term presence in both Asia and North America. Significantly, under Dorman and Schnell’s editorship, the journal’s title changed again, this time from *Asian Folklore Studies* to *Asian Ethnology*. The decision was not made lightly. While being well aware of the political issues and academic debates surrounding the use of the term “folklore,” especially in Europe and North America (see, for example, Dow 1991), a more decisive factor in this decision was that they felt the new title was more representative of

the kind of research and scholarship the journal had 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. (Schnell and Dorman 2008, 1)

Dorman and Schnell also installed an international editorial board and implemented a double-blind peer review system for the evaluation of submissions prior to acceptance. Some of the current editorial board members have been with the journal since the board was founded, while newer ones have come and gone in the meantime. We thank all of them, past and present, for dedicating precious time to our project. Their input is much appreciated.

Frank J. Korom of Boston University replaced Schnell in 2012, and he continues to co-edit the journal with Dorman down to the present. There were still more changes when Korom assumed the co-editorship. The journal was temporarily run at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture from 2008 to 2011, when it moved back to its original home at the Anthropological Institute. We would like to acknowledge the support of these two institutions, both located within Nanzan University.

As a long-term contributor to and supporter of *Asian Folklore Studies*, Korom has not only assisted in maintaining the stability of the journal and the promotion of its growth but also contributed very significantly to its content, as this current special issue attests. We would like to acknowledge the continuing commitment to supporting the journal that his institution, Boston University, has shown over the years.

In 2017, Dorman and Korom began to produce *Asian Ethnology Podcast*, which was designed to present the ideas of scholars who had either contributed to the journal, or whose work aligned with the topical categories covered in the journal. In 2020, Dorman began an *Asian Ethnology Series* of webinars (lectures and symposia) to supplement the journal and podcast.

In 1982, our esteemed predecessor wrote the following:

If there is anything in the academic world that should be buzzing with life and ever fresh energy, it is a journal. . . . As a journal *Asian Folklore Studies* wants to remain ever young and I shall do my best to keep it young. (Knecht 1982, 4)

We wholeheartedly concur with his perspective and are determined to continue our quest to promote innovative ideas, infuse new life into *Asian Ethnology*, as well as to contribute to scholarship on Asia more broadly construed in whatever small ways we can through this journal and its associated activities. We do this not only to honor the contributions of those who have come before us, but also to grow with the community we wish to serve.

Here's hoping for a brighter, post-pandemic future as the journal continues to grow and flourish.

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NOTES

1. Known by its Latin name, the Societas Verbi Divini is a Roman Catholic missionary congregation consisting of approximately 6,000 priests and brothers residing in more than seventy countries. Arnold Janssen (1837-1909) founded it in 1875 while he was residing in Steyl, the Netherlands. Janssen was later canonized as a saint in 2003. For the background, see Fischer and Lynk (2012).
2. Knecht (1982, 5) credits Dorson with saving the journal "in one of its most difficult times."
3. For Knecht's recounting of this exciting time in the journal's developmental history, refer to Dorman (2017).

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