

EDITORIAL

In April 1996, the International Society for Narrative Research (ISNR) met in Beijing. It was the second time that the Society's regular congress was held outside of Europe or North America. I remember how surprised I was when a European colleague told me that some European members had refused to accept the invitation of the Chinese folklore scholars because they felt that the congress was primarily concerned with European matters and that they need not go beyond the boundaries of Europe. Despite the absence of some European members, the meeting in Beijing turned out to be a success, as was the one held in Mysore, India, the first to be organized in Asia.

The success of ISNR meetings in Beijing and Mysore shows that with some effort it is possible to achieve a meaningful exchange of opinions even if the barriers of an unfamiliar language pose inevitable problems in communication. In spite of linguistic difficulties, the organizers and the representatives of the ISNR seem to feel that it is now time for folklore studies to begin looking beyond national and cultural boundaries—a sentiment that *Asian Folklore Studies* has long supported.

For participants of the ISNR congress in Beijing, some Chinese colleagues arranged a special performance of Beijing opera at the palace of Prince Kung. While wandering through the magnificent garden of the palace and gazing at the exquisite buildings before the performance, I had a feeling that this was place I somehow knew. After the visit I mentioned this to a friend, and at that moment I suddenly realized that the founder and first editor of this journal, the late Dr. Matthias Eder, had sometimes spoken

about this beautiful palace. In fact, it was the very place where the Museum of Oriental Ethnology, and a bit later the museum's journal, *Folklore Studies*, was housed as part of what at the time was the Catholic University Fu Jen of Beijing. I felt ashamed and happy at the same time. Ashamed for not immediately recognizing the palace that was so significant for our journal, and happy for having had an opportunity to return to the journal's roots some fifty years after it had been launched from this historical spot. (For a wonderful article about this palace by H. S. Ch'en and G. N. Kates, that I learned of after my visit there, see *Monumenta Serica* 5 [1940], 1-80.)

With the present issue we begin the sixtieth volume of our journal. The occasion is cause to reflect with gratitude and to resolve anew for the future. Anyone familiar with Far Eastern thinking knows that for people here a year is more than a simple series of hours, days, and months. Each year has its own specific character and value, as do smaller units of time within a year. The journal was founded in 1942 under the title *Folklore Studies*. That year was a year of the horse according to the Chinese and Japanese calendars. People say that the horse is an animal with a fiery and energetic nature, and that people born in this year or things started in it acquire this nature. Looking back at the journal's history it is sometimes difficult to discover the "fire," since there were moments when the fire was in danger of going out altogether. And yet, "energy" and effort allowed the journal to overcome numerous difficulties and become healthier with the passing of years.

A unit of sixty years constitutes a complete cycle of years in the Far Eastern calendar. Each year is identified by two factors, a series of twelve animals (the twelve "stems"), and a series of ten "branches" based on the five elements, each of which has a yang and yin aspect. In the course of sixty years, the combinations of "stems" and "branches" run their full course, so that in the sixty-first year the combination of "stems" and "branches" is the same as they were sixty years prior, at the beginning of the previous cycle. If a person in Japan lives long enough to complete a cycle, the event is celebrated as *kanreki*, "fulfillment of the calendrical cycle," and the person might be presented with a red cap and a red jacket or some similar items. Red is the color that is ordinarily used for babies. When somebody reaches the age of sixty years, the person is expected to retire and start a new life similar to a "new born." The completion of the current volume will mark this event for *Asian Folklore Studies*. Next year will again be a year of the horse just as it was sixty years ago, and we hope that it will be a good and energetic beginning of a new cycle.

Eder finished his postgraduate studies of ethnology in Berlin months before the outbreak of World War II. It is, therefore, not surprising that his ideas about the purpose of the journal were influenced by some of the top-

ics that were discussed in prewar Europe, and in particular Germany. From the point of view of the current debate in folklore and anthropology, what he wrote in his Editorial in the inaugural issue sounds dated. We believe, however, that the three guiding principles that he then set out for the journal are still worth considering. They were (1) that anthropology and folklore should not be considered as two independent disciplines when studying Far Eastern cultures, but instead should be regarded as two mutually supporting fields of research with the purpose of achieving an integrated and holistic understanding of these cultures; (2) that folklore research should not focus its “attention on the lower strata of a given culture” to the exclusion of that culture’s “higher strata” as if the latter belonged to another area of research; and (3) that research should be done in pursuit of a truth that “rises above all peoples and races and is grounded in... human nature.”

The third principle may smack of hyperbole today as it does not readily fit with current ideas about methods and the purpose of ethnography. However, I think that Eder advocates an openness of mind in his Editorial that has been a cornerstone of the editorial policy of the journal through its history and will remain so for years to come.

In 1963 the journal’s title was changed from *Folklore Studies* to *Asian Folklore Studies* on the suggestion of the late Richard Dorson, and two years later the original policy of publishing also in French and German was quietly abandoned. Although the current monolingual format may seem to impose some limitations on the scope of the journal, we believe that, quite to the contrary, it helps to better focus the journal’s purpose and to foster a wider range of accessibility since English is a lingua franca among scholars who have no access to French or German.

A more serious challenge has been posed by the question of what is the “standard” for including contributions in the journal. This has long been a difficult question because of the different conventional standards in the different areas from which contributions originate. We do not wish to impose a standard conventional in one area as a universal standard, but instead prefer to preserve a certain degree of flexibility. The editorial policy of *Asian Folklore Studies* is to be open to contributions about Asian traditions and topics of general concern from scholars everywhere, whether they be Asian or non-Asian. It is quite evident, though, that standards of scholarship are not unified throughout the world, but differ significantly from area to area. We, therefore, believe that the journal should have the freedom to consider each contribution for its own value and on the basis of its own merits, rather than force it on some Procrustean bed that is supposedly a “universal” or “international” standard. This is particularly important because the journal does not limit its scope to the publication of analytical contributions only but is

open to contributions of a descriptive or mainly documentary kind that introduce material often not available in English. Instead of emphasizing a “universally” accepted standard, we prefer to insist on responsible scholarship in the sense that any author is expected to be able to guarantee the veracity of his or her contribution’s content. At the same time we also wish to be flexible and open-minded, so that we can respond to the unique qualities of each contribution. We believe, after all, that the manner in which a scholar writes is part of “folklore.”

At the conclusion, then, of our first cycle of sixty years, and at the threshold of a new one, we wish to thank our faithful contributors and readers for their long-standing and unflagging support throughout the years. On our side, we promise to continue to make every effort to properly respond to the expectations and needs of an international community of scholars concerned with an ever better understanding of Asian cultures. We hope that the journal will continue to provide a forum for true intercultural exchange for many years to come, and as such be an element in the building of an international world that respects local expressions.

Ad multos annos!

Peter KNECHT
nuai@ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp