

CLARK CHILSON

*University of Pittsburgh*

SCOTT SCHNELL

*The University of Iowa*

## Editors' Introduction

WE ARE pleased to present this special double issue of *Asian Folklore Studies* in honor of Professor Peter Knecht, who has stepped down as the journal's editor after a highly successful tenure of twenty-six years. Peter's departure is lamentable for many of us as readers, contributors, and collaborators who have greatly benefited from his editorial expertise. We can take heart, however, in the recognition that this by no means marks the end of his career, and that he will now be free to focus more heavily on his own research, unencumbered by the many responsibilities that being an editor entails. Given his penchant for modesty, Peter will no doubt be embarrassed by even this small attempt to honor his service, but we felt it was important to give readers some sense of the man they may only know indirectly through his largely anonymous contributions as an editor.

Peter grew up in the small farming village of Niederweningen, Switzerland, about twenty-five kilometers outside Zurich. At the age of twelve he left the village to attend the Gymnasium Marienburg in Rheineck. It was there, he recalls, that his interest in Japan began, inspired by the illustrations in a book he was reading. Several years would pass, however, before he could actively pursue this special interest.

At the age of twenty, Peter entered a Roman Catholic seminary in Vienna, Austria to begin preparing for the priesthood, and two years later took his initial vows to become a priest. In 1959, at the age of twenty-two, he went to Rome to study theology at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana. In February 1963, shortly

before his twenty-sixth birthday, Peter was ordained as a Catholic priest at Nemi, Italy, the place that had inspired J. G. Frazer's classic ethnological study, *The Golden Bough*.

It was around the time of his ordination, Peter recalls, that he first informed his superior of his long-standing interest in Japan. The news was met with approval because, in those days, Japan was a country to which few priests wanted to go. For the time being, however, the Gymnasium Marienburg back in Rheineck was in need of a teacher, so Peter was initially sent there to teach French, Latin, and medieval German literature. After three years as a school teacher, he was finally allowed to go to Japan in 1966.

From the time of his arrival, Peter dedicated himself to the study of Japanese culture, which would eventually become his life's work. In 1970, he entered the graduate program in anthropology at the University of Tokyo under the guidance of Ōbayashi Taryō. With Ōbayashi's encouragement, he began reading the works of Orikuchi Shinobu and Yanigita Kunio. This inspired him to learn more about traditional Japan, as embodied in the rural villages of the Northeast. When it came time for him to settle on a field site for his doctoral research, a Japanese friend introduced him to the village of Hanayama in Miyagi Prefecture, about three hundred kilometers north of Tokyo. He and the people there took a liking to one another, and he has been conducting fieldwork in Hanayama intermittently ever since.

While completing the final year of his doctoral course in 1977, Peter started teaching anthropology at Nanzan University. The following year he joined the anthropology department as a full-time faculty member. Nanzan also happened to be where the editorial headquarters for *Asian Folklore Studies* were located. Peter had known the journal's founding editor, Matthias Eder, from his earlier time in Tokyo. In fact, the two had at one point occupied the same boarding house in Ebisu.

Upon the unexpected death of Eder in 1980, Peter assumed the editorial responsibilities of the journal. He continued in this role for more than two-and-a-half decades, maintaining the journal 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. For Peter, an important function of the journal has been 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. Editing the journal was fulfilling for Peter because he got to know people through it and because he enjoyed watching articles take shape and develop into important contributions.

During his three decades of teaching anthropology at Nanzan University, Peter was a well-liked and respected professor who sincerely cared about his students. Students often sought his instruction outside of class. When they came to his office, even without appointments on occasions when he was engaged in a pressing task, he welcomed them and gave generously of his time. As a former student of Peter's himself, Clark Chilson remembers how on one occasion, when Peter was busy with many other commitments, several of his students asked him to come to the university on a Saturday to give them a two-hour lecture on the Hana Matsuri in Aichi Prefecture, which they were planning to attend. Not only did he graciously agree to do so, but he showed up well prepared, gave a fascinating analysis of the *matsuri*, and answered students' questions that kept him well beyond the scheduled two hours. His teaching and enthusiasm for the anthropological study of religion inspired a high percentage of his students to pursue advanced degrees in one of the social sciences.

As an anthropologist, Peter has long been widely admired by his colleagues around the world. During the many years we have known him, we have continually benefited from his scholarship, guidance, and encyclopedic knowledge of all things related to Japanese culture. Scott Schnell has occasionally spent research leave at Nanzan, occupying an office just down the hall from Peter's. In pursuing his own research, Scott would often encounter some compelling yet obscure aspect of Japanese tradition and think to himself, "I could spend hours poring through library books to find out more about this topic, or I could just go down the hall and ask Peter." It will come as no surprise that he usually chose the latter option, not only because it was faster and easier, but also because of the illuminating insights and relaxed congeniality that a visit with Peter almost invariably affords.

In July 2006, after a long and successful career, Peter officially retired from the Nanzan Anthropological Institute and from his position as editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*. Even so, he continues to teach at the university level and is actively pursuing a number of research projects. As a reflection of the breadth of his interests, his fieldwork has expanded into Northern China. We wish him all the best and look forward to his scholarship and guidance.

Because Peter has been so helpful to us over many years, we wanted to do something to honor him upon his "retirement." We had originally planned a Festschrift, but in the end felt it would be more appropriate if we dedicated to him a special issue of the journal to which he dedicated so much of himself.

When we invited scholars who had worked with Peter in the past to submit papers for possible inclusion in this issue, we were gratified by the response. The willingness of so many to contribute to the issue, under rather restrictive deadlines, is testimony to the gratitude scholars have felt for Peter's efforts. We feel that the articles in this issue, which deal broadly with narratives and rituals

in Japan, Korea, China, and India, are representative of Peter's many interests. We also have included an article by Peter himself that, despite its importance for understanding rice culture in Japan, had yet to be published. Because his major concern has been advancing the work of others in the journal (as evidenced in part by the more than sixty book reviews he has written for the journal over the years), he was somewhat reluctant to have his article included. We are pleased that he finally conceded to our pleas and allowed us to publish it.

The production of this issue involved the work of many who wanted to honor Peter's career, including those whose names do not appear in these pages. We would like to thank foremost all the contributors for making this issue possible. We would also like to express our gratitude to Benjamin Dorman, James Heisig, and Edmund Skrzypczak for their editorial and technical assistance.

This double issue of *Asian Folklore Studies* is the only one that will appear for the year 2007. From 2008 the journal will return to publishing two issues per year, and will continue under new editorship, hopefully maintaining the standards that Peter has established. We appreciate your interest in this journal and hope you will continue to support it as it enters its sixty-seventh year.