

ANNUAL UPDATE

JAPANESE JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES



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The following is a summary of activities and circulation of the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies during the 2025 academic year. This update includes table of contents for published issues in 2025, an overview of online engagement with articles, and notes on plans for the journal.

LAST YEAR was another busy year for the *JJRS*. We published a special issue commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the journal. The research articles were based on papers given at the Fiftieth Anniversary Symposium the previous year. The special issue includes personal reflections on the *JJRS* from longtime contributors and editorial board members. We also published an outstanding at-large issue featuring articles on Oda Nobunaga, *saimon*, reform movements in Buddhist universities, and Inari origin stories. Bryan Lowe contributed a valuable review article of recent books on the topic of esoteric Buddhism in Japan (see table of contents below for details).

The number of successful DOI attempts from April 2025 to March 2026 doubled from the previous year with approximately 126,000. This number perhaps reflects an increase in searches in databases and academic content providers such as Project Muse and Ebisco Host. The number of searches on JSTOR was back up to 106,616 after a decline in 2024. By far, most *JJRS* articles on JSTOR were accessed by unaffiliated users with Stanford University coming in second place. The journal's SCOPUS ranking, or "impact factor," was an all-time low in 2025 at .2, placing the *JJRS* in the thirtieth percentile of religious studies journals. Finally, according to Google Analytics, there were 30,145 direct engagements and 277 downloads from the *JJRS* page on the website of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture (<https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/journal/6>).

It should be noted that, despite the deep affection that university administrators have for the above data points, they are mostly meaningless. The "impact factor" changes monthly, and a journal's ranking can fluctuate considerably throughout

the year. In 2023, the *JJRS* had a .8 rating, which placed it in the top twenty percent of religious studies journals. Furthermore, as an open access journal, the *JJRS* is freely available to anyone, including large language models (LLMs, popularly referred to as AI) such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Anthropic's Claude. These nonhuman agents can and have consumed *JJRS* articles for training their models. Therefore, some of the data noted above may reflect the activity of bots rather than actual human engagement.

Although most *JJRS* readers access the PDF version of the journal, the *JJRS* is in fact a "print" journal. All articles are typeset as a traditional print journal and then shared online in PDF format. However, for paperback aficionados, print versions are available to order print-on-demand from global Amazon Marketplaces. In 2025, eight copies were ordered online, six of which were ordered by the editors.

Over a decade ago, the NIRC stopped taking subscriptions and made the print copies of the *JJRS* available through a company called CreateSpace. This company was soon bought by Amazon and turned into KDP Amazon. The method of making the journal available as PDFs online while retaining the possibility of ordering print copies through a print-on-demand service was forward-thinking at the time. Always the masters of innovation, Paul Swanson and James Heisig realized well before most people that print culture was on its way out. However, due to the lack of sales and the amount of labor that goes into producing the print copy, we are reconsidering this system. Furthermore, as anyone who has tried to contact customer service at Amazon can attest, the print-on-demand service has become extremely difficult to use due to the enshittification caused by the company's policies. There is also the ethical problem of providing content for a company that constantly violates workers' rights and, according to a recent report from *404 Media* (Emanuel Maiberg, 17 August 2026), has been destroying rare books to feed their content into Amazon's AI. We may cut the print-on-demand option or move to a more expensive but ethical company such as Lulu, through which we recently published *Nishida Kitarō: Zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu*.

Perhaps we will try a new system for the current issue. At the moment of writing this update, a special issue celebrating the career of Jacqueline Stone, a longtime *JJRS* editorial board member and frequent *JJRS* author, is near completion. The issue includes nine articles by former students, which reflect the range of her influence across time periods and genres. Stone also contributes to the special issue with a monumental article, addressing long-debated topics related to medieval Japanese Buddhism.

An at-large issue is also in the works, which will be published in December. Due to a shortage of quality manuscripts, this year's issue will be rather slim. During the COVID19 shutdown, we were overwhelmed with manuscripts. However, the flow of submissions has recently dried up. Perhaps this slowdown is due to the

JJRS's longer-than-average publication process. There are certainly journals with a much faster turnaround from submission to print. However, we believe that our hands-on approach to editing, which requires extensive back-and-forth between editors and authors, is what makes the *JJRS* the top journal in the field of Japanese religions. Contrary to assumptions of some authors—and the dreams of editors—editing is not magic; it takes time to produce quality articles.

Another reason that we have received fewer submissions might be due to the increased precarity in academia, especially among scholars in religious studies, history, literature, and area studies. Austerity measures at universities, spawned by anti-humanist politicians and their allies in university admin, have left a generation of scholars without job security. It is typically tenure-track and recently tenured scholars from whom we would expect to receive high-quality manuscripts. As one colleague put it when I asked if they were considering publishing their research with the *JJRS*, "How can I find time to produce new research when I don't know if I will have a job next semester?"

The impulse to reduce faculty and eliminate job security is not only a US or UK phenomenon, but also hits close to home. The current administration at Nanzan University has decided to cut the position of Associate Editor at the NIRC. Since the *JJRS* first came to the NIRC in 1981, the journal has prospered with the assistance of an in-house copy editor. In fact, establishing an official position for an in-house copy editor was a condition for the NIRC to take over the management of the journal. During the past forty-five years, several Associate Editors have gone on to become Senior Research Fellows at the institute, including the *JJRS*'s longest serving editor Paul Swanson. After the most recent Associate Editor, Kaitlyn Ugoretz, returned to the US at the end of last year, the university decided that the position was no longer necessary. We have been assured that the decision was not financial and have been promised adequate funding to outsource the work previously provided by the Associate Editor. Until that promise is kept and essential funding is allotted to the *JJRS* budget, the future of the journal is uncertain.

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