

## Editorial

# East Asian Voices on Science and the Humanities

### **Editorial & Introduction**

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### **East Asian Engagements with Science**

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## ZYGON GOES GLOBAL: EAST ASIAN VOICES

Voices from East Asia have the floor in this special issue, the first issue of our second half-century as *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. We hear about ways of understanding science (and traditional knowledge) and religion (or should one rather say cultural traditions or values) and the humanities that have their home in China, Japan, and Korea, from scholars who are at home in this part of the world. The natural sciences have become global, at least in the sense that knowledge quickly flows from one university to the other, even if located half-way around the globe. However, though contemporary science aspires to be global, the development and migration of science has reflected dominance due to economic and military power. In this issue, we will hear about some of the migration of scientific knowledge with Western missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to

China (Si Jia Jane and Dong Shaoxin) and Tibet (Zhao Aidong). And in this process, science has had its own interaction with local forms of scholarship, such as those embedded in Confucianism (Hsu Kuang-Tai).

The world within which this knowledge was received, and within which scientists from East Asia contribute to global scholarship, has its own cultural and social history. The first set of four essays can be read as reflections on cultural (and religious) positions and traditions involved. Within that historical context, a Western concept such as “religion” was introduced for some practices, but not for all. The essay by Chen Na speaks of Confucianism, and the way it has been positioned in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as not being a religion—unlike Buddhism and Daoism. That has external reasons and perspectives (Orientalism), but also reflects the ways in which external perspectives have been appropriated internally. Kamata Toji speaks of Shinto as an insider, arguing for its ancient roots and deep connections to geophysical features of Japan, arguing for its potential for the future—not as the nationalistic and militaristic frame it has been, but rather as a holistic and ecological tradition. Kim Seung Chul is one voice from Asian Christianity, as a Christianity that may have originated elsewhere but been transformed deeply by its encounter with other cultural traditions. Lee Yu-Ting’s topic may seem a surprising one, as he does not reflect on one of the great traditions. However, as an academic nomad, trained in Asia and in the United States, he may well represent for the younger generation “where we are.”

How to position oneself, as a thinker from East Asia, in today’s world? We will hear various responses. Inagaki Hisakazu relates the work of Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960) to the modernization of Japan in the twentieth century. Thomas John Hastings, co-editor of this special volume and also of a recent English translation of Kagawa’s *Cosmic Purpose* (Kagawa [1958] 2014) and author of a biography on Kagawa (Hastings 2015) offers further insight into Kagawa’s contributions to a practical Christianity that might be relevant in modern Japan.

Hyun Woosik from Korea offers an original reflection on conceptions of that which transcends the human—which he calls “transhuman.” This refers to worldly options which might be realized technologically, say in “artificial intelligence.” However, it also refers conceptually to that which transcends humanity and worldly existence. In this way, his approach, though clearly Asian, resembles a long tradition of theistic reflection on God, drawing on mathematics and logic, from the medieval theologian Anselm (God as that greater than which nothing can be thought), to modern mathematicians such as Georg Cantor, who showed that one can speak meaningfully of multiple levels of infinity, and Kurt Gödel, who proved that completeness cannot be complete.

Biology, and with it a biological understanding of humanity, is the topic of Kang Shin Ik’s contribution. Speaking of conceptual blending, he draws

on the Asian triplet Heaven-Earth-Person while speaking of the bio-social nature of humans and thus the need for humanities. Fukushima Shintaro moves further into the sphere of the social sciences with reflections on studies of human well-being in relation to economic status. Shin Jaeshik provides a bridge to insiders to the Western “religion and science” discourse, by considering the way one might map different practices such as religion and science, offering an East Asian alternative for schemes and approaches more common in the West, such as those of Wolfhart Pannenberg and John Haught.

Last year, *Zygon* published a series of articles on the interactions of religion and science around the world. This included articles from Europe (Brožek and Heller 2015; Evers 2015; Oviedo and Garre 2015), Latin America (Silva 2015), South Africa (Conradie and Du Toit 2015) but also the Muslim world (Guessoum 2015), Indian culture (Balslev 2015), and China (Li and Fu 2015), and Japan (Kim 2015). As those contributions make clear, and the contributions in the current issue confirm, there is a wide diversity of “discussions” that regard the understanding and evaluation of science in different cultural and religious contexts. Other voices from Asia in recent years included a contribution on Confucian environmental ethics (Wong 2015), on the pluralistic landscape in today’s world, with special emphasis on Indonesia (Bagir 2015), and—showing the migration of ideas—on self-psychology and the experience of the natural world in an American Buddhist center (Capper 2015). We are indeed “Publishing in a Changing World,” as I titled an editorial last year (Drees 2015).

Globalization with respect for particular cultural differences raises practical questions as well. In this issue, we have included titles in other scripts when provided by the authors. We also decided to follow for this issue at various places the practice whereby the last name comes first, capitalizing those last names to make them stand out.

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