

## Introduction

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The international conference *Reassessing the Field: The Study of Japanese Religion and Thought in the 21st Century*, dedicated to Massimo Raveri and held at the Department of Asian and North African Studies of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice (28-29 October 2018), was an opportunity for friends, colleagues and students to confirm their esteem and gratitude towards a scholar whom they regarded as a point of reference. This occasion was made possible through the coordinated efforts of Bonaventura Ruperti (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Erica Baffelli (The University of Manchester) and Lucia Dolce (SOAS, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), with the indispensable support of the Japan Foundation. The primary aim of the conference was to highlight the international recognition and appreciation of Prof. Raveri's scholarly career. His long and fruitful academic research was officially recognised in 2012 with the awarding of the prestigious national decoration of *kyokujitsushō* 旭日章 (The Order of the Rising Sun), which the Japanese government bestowed on Prof. Raveri for his contribution to the diffusion and promotion of Japanese culture in the world, but also to implicitly recognise his extraordinary sensitivity and ability to awaken the enthusiasm of entire generations of students. Prof. Raveri is someone who sincerely believes in his profession, which has given him the opportunity to unite generations of scholars and span geographical distances.

Indeed, over the course of his long career, Massimo Raveri has shown a strong interest in different disciplinary fields, establishing long-lasting friendships and academic collaborations with scholars specialising in theological, anthropological, philosophical and historical-religious studies. His interdisciplinary vocation led him to specialise in the field of the history of religions in Japan, first at the University of Florence, under the guidance of Fosco Maraini, and then at the Research Institute for Humanistic Studies of Kyōto University and at the Institute of Social Anthropology of the University of Oxford. As visiting professor, Massimo Raveri lectured at the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Copenhagen in 1998, at the SOAS, University of London, in 2001, at the École Normale Supérieure of Lyon in 2003, and at the Université de Genève in 2006.

This book is being dedicated to Massimo Raveri on the occasion of his retirement, two years after the conference in his Honour, and has been made possible by the participation of scholars, friends and colleagues from many different countries. The essays collected in this book express the interdisciplinary recognition of his extensive academic wanderings, which have led him from rural areas of Japan to the classrooms of many Italian and foreign universities and research institutes. Prof. Raveri embarked on his academic career in the late Seventies and initially carried out research on Shinto, analysing the conceptions of time, space and religious power expressed in ritual practices connected to rice cultivation. He also dealt with the imagery of death and ascetic practices in the tradition of Tantric Buddhism, focusing on the construction of an esoteric discourse in contemporary religious movements. His varied interests eventually led him to study many other topics, such as the meaning of play as a cultural phenomenon and the religious power of humour in Japan, the subjects of two volumes he co-edited, respectively, with Joy Hendry (*Japan at Play: The Ludic and Logic of Power*) and with Francesco Remotti and Francesco Bettini (*Ridere degli dèi, ridere con gli dèi. L'umorismo teologico*).

The structure of the present book is designed to recreate the various thematic itineraries that Massimo Raveri has traced and followed in his career. Each of the essays included represents a topic in which Prof. Raveri has shown great interest, paving the way for further studies. In offering these essays to him, his friends and colleagues are both bearing witness to his interest in such topics and contributing to their study. Contributions by former students of Prof. Raveri's further show how these fields of study are being developed in his footsteps.

In their contribution titled "Massimo Raveri, the Oxford School of Social Anthropology and Researching and Teaching on Japanese Society", Joy Hendry and Roger Goodman trace the origins of

Massimo Raveri's approach back to the time he spent studying social anthropology at Oxford, showing how this influenced his work.

Over the course of his career, alongside his great fascination with anthropology, Raveri has shown a keen interest in philosophy, which is the focus of Luigi Vero Tarca's contribution "Philosophical Truth and Buddhist Wisdom. For a Dialogic Dialogue". Raveri's interest in the history of thought has influenced many of his students. A valuable homage to this is Federico Marcon's contribution "The Quest for Japanese Fascism: A Historiographical Overview", which offers a historical survey of the historiographical debate on "Japanese Fascism" worldwide.

The first intellectual itinerary that Massimo Raveri followed in his research concerns the Shintō tradition, and particularly its communal rituals and beliefs. In the present volume, three contributions explore this field. The specific topic of mountain beliefs is addressed in Suzuki Masataka's contribution "The Localization of the Kumano Gongen Cult and Mountain Beliefs: From *engi* to *kagura*", in which the author discusses the Kumano Gongen cult in medieval times. In his essay "The Multilocality of *Satoyama*. Landscape, Cultural Heritage and Environmental Sustainability in Japan", Giovanni Bulian analyses the close interrelation between Japanese landscape, cultural heritage and the social construction of spatial meaning in the context of *satoyama* (mountain villages). Silvia Rivadossi's "Researching Shamanism in Contemporary Japan" takes its cue from Massimo Raveri's studies on Japanese shamanic practitioners, which are broadened through the addition of more recent data, to suggest how a study of contemporary Japanese shamanism could be undertaken.

A second intellectual itinerary that Massimo Raveri has kept to throughout his career is Buddhism, in all its various forms. Lucia Dolce, in her essay "And the *Zasu* Changed his Shoes...': The Resurgence of Combinatory Rituals in Contemporary Japan", discusses three case studies in order to offer a reflection on the continuity of institutional *shinbutsu* combinatory practices, as well as the creation of new forms of combinatory ritual that have emerged in recent years. Fabio Rambelli's essay "The *Sutra of Druma*, King of the *Kinnara* and the Buddhist Philosophy of Music" presents the *Sutra of King Druna*, a text which proposes the first systematic Buddhist theory of music, while also offering a justification of the activities of musicians and performing artists and providing a model for Buddhist ceremonies involving instrumental music and dance.

Homage is paid to Massimo Raveri's interest in charismatic religious figures by Antonio Rigopoulos' essay "*Mānasa bhajare*: A Commentary on Sathya Sai Baba's First Public Discourse", which focuses on one of the most popular Indian *gurus*, Sathya Sai Baba. This same interest is also reflected by Marcella Mariotti's "My First Steps in Religious Fieldwork: Exploring Aum Shinrikyō in 1995", an

English version of her 1995 paper on the history and development of the religious group Aum Shinrikyō.

Lastly, Erica Baffelli, in her essay “The Android and the Fax: Robots, AI and Buddhism in Japan”, further develops Massimo Raveri’s most recent research on new forms of faith and media languages in contemporary society. By analysing the case of Android Kannon Mindar, she explores the interaction between AI, robotics, and Buddhism in contemporary Japan.