

RELIGION AND CARICATURE

Introduction

The current issue of *Japanese Religions* features the theme “Religion and Caricature.” The occasion for taking up this subject was the dispute about the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad triggered by the publication in a Danish newspaper in fall 2005. The provincial dispute developed into a major international conflict, involving politics and diplomacy, economic boycotts, huge demonstrations, and eventually violence and deaths. It was not always easy to clearly identify the two sides struggling with each other: Was it Orient vs. Occident, Arabic vs. European countries, Islam vs. Christianity, religion vs. secularism, or religious fundamentalism against secular fundamentalism?

Public opinion in western secularized countries had assumed that Enlightenment had banned religion (at that time Christianity) into the private sector once and for all. Since in recent decades many Muslims have migrated to Europe, Islam now seems to challenge such assumptions here. Islam had not undergone the traumatic experience of secularization to the extent Christianity had experienced in European history. And Moslem immigrants are probably not aware that many Europeans have the deep fear to lose their autonomy again. The worldwide revival of Islam, often combined with reversing secularization processes, sparks the fear of a new kind of religious heteronomy in Western countries.

The extent and intensity of the cartoon conflict certainly require thorough and comprehensive investigations. The three articles on this subject published here are attempts to understand and explain the subtle and complex conflict. The article by the editor provides first a summary of the events and developments. Then it attempts to analyze the incident from the perspective of communicational structures and processes in order to clarify the factors which drove a local conflict into a global crisis. In the second essay, Prof. Tim Jensen describes his personal involvement in the dispute, especially his being utilized by Danish media for certain purposes. This account provides a valuable documentation of how mass media use scholars for their own agenda. In another article, Prof. Jensen elaborates the political background and factors of the cartoon conflict in Denmark, especially how conservative media and politicians pursue a common political agenda under the disguise of a “fight” for freedom of expression.

Readers of *Japanese Religions* may ask what the Danish cartoon conflict has to do with the scope of this journal. The editor is convinced that the underlying problems, such as protecting freedom of expression, or deliberately hurting the religious feelings of others, pertain also to Japan. These articles provide rich material which facilitate interesting comparisons with the Japanese situation. Further, the cartoon dispute is part of the wider problems of modernization (including secularization)

and globalization. These aspects suggest viewing the cartoon conflict in broader perspective. The final essay by the editor is such an attempt to provide a Japanese perspective for the problem of “religion and caricature.” In presenting the topic “Japanese Buddhism and cartoons,” a number of insights may be gained, such as religious artists themselves enjoy creating caricatures, but they maintain also certain limits of ridicule.

Last, not least, it has to be mentioned that the three essays about the Danish cartoon affair originally have been written or solicited for a Japanese publication on this topic, edited by Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions (CISMOR), Doshisha University. Since this volume is in Japanese language, and only the first article by Prof. Jensen and the section on Germany of the editor’s essay were included, I decided to publish the three articles here completely in English. I would like to thank Prof. Mori Koichi, Director of CISMOR, for kindly granting permission to publish those English texts which are going to be printed in Japanese translation.

It is my hope that the publication of these articles in *Japanese Religions* will stimulate the discussion on the topic and for its part, in a modest way, may contribute to peaceful solutions of the problems which linger worldwide.

Editor