

More and more learned periodicals publish theme-focussed issues. Thus the *Cahiers d'Extrême-Orient* (see NUMEN xxxiii, 1986: 262) have already planned in advance numbers devoted to Korean Studies (1990), Zen (1991) and Chinese divination (1992). *The Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*<sup>29</sup> has published two double numbers on Tendai Buddhism and on Shugendo and Mountain Religion in Japan respectively. The contents are varied and unequal, and by definition there cannot be a central thesis emerging out of a collection of papers in a journal. But the richness of the contents and the awareness of the multi-faceted variety inherent even in a very specific theme which these special numbers convey, are a blessing beyond the value of the individual articles.

Passing from Buddhism to Shinto, a special number has been put together by our Chicago counterpart, *History of Religions*.<sup>30</sup> The difficulties of pinpointing Shinto and of dealing with it have been ably surveyed by Michael Pye in his review-essay in the journal *Religion* xi, 1981. The number under review has a good introductory chapter by J.M. Kitagawa and an article on Heian Shinto by Alan Grapard. An interesting article on the *Gion matsuri* still leaves us in Heian. Of the other three articles, all dealing with Shinto in the Meiji period, Helen Hardacre's on Shinto priesthood in early Meiji is perhaps the most thought-provoking.

↓ Old and hoary commonplace truths nevertheless surprise us whenever we actually encounter them. One of these truths is that important insights often come from the most unexpected quarters and from experts in completely different fields. Few students of Japanese folk religion are aware of the importance of the contributions made by the Swiss architect Nold Egenter, founder and director of "Documentation Centre for Fundamental Studies in Building Theory". During his repeated and prolonged periods of fieldwork in Japan, he was struck by the rôle played by "artificial" trees erected for certain *matsuri* and burned (like other paraphernalia of the *hi-matsuri*) when the celebrations are over. (A natural tree would never catch fire immediately like a torch (*taimatsu*) and burn down). This led him to a more intensive study of temporary structures built for special, non-domestic purposes and the use made of reeds, rice-straw and bamboo in all sorts of "ritual" building, including the temporary "seats of the gods" (*yorishiro*). The ethnologist Egenter applies the training of the architect Egenter to pursue his researches (carried out with the help of the Mombusho and in conjunction with the Dept. of Architecture of Kyoto University). The field-work was done mainly in villages in the vicinity of Omihachiman near Lake Biwa. Egenter's method is based on an analysis of the form of the structures, the materials used, and the ways they are being used. The first major publication resulting from this

research appeared in connection with an exhibition "Seats of the Gods and Human Dwellings" held by the ETH (the prestigious Federal School of Technology in Zurich) in 1980.<sup>31</sup> The next volume, following hard on the heels of its predecessor, dealt with a more specific subject and was published in a bi-lingual (German and English) edition.<sup>32</sup> This volume too analyses in great detail the structure, form and symbolism of the bamboo/reed structures erected in connection with the *taimatsu* (torch) festival in Ueda village (Shiga Prefecture) and its constituent hamlets. It was preceded by an article in *Asiatische Studien* xvi, 1981: 34-54 "Die heilige Bäume um Goshonai: ein Bauethnologischer Beitrag zum Thema Baumkult", which already adumbrated, in condensed form, the author's main theses. There are column or hut-like types of fixed trusses (*okimatsu*); high-column, movable as well as stable trusses (*kasa-taimatsu*). It is when we come to a discussion of the symbolism that the historian of religion may want to demur. Egenter is no doubt right in insisting on the decisive importance of *Sachtradition* i.e., the materials and the techniques of construction. These latter possess a permanence through time which the concomitant "interpretations", changing throughout history in accordance with cultural and religious developments and influences, do not have. Hence it would be a waste of time to question your village-informants about "meanings". Just stick to the *res* that you can objectively analyse: material, techniques, form, measurements etc. There is a "genetic" underlying groundstructure (or should we say "underground structure"?) which provides the key to the "relative symbolism". To study things the other way round would be putting the cart before the horse. This is a methodological *credo* with far-reaching implications, and not everyone will agree with what are for Egenter axiomatic truths e.g., the assumption that through the study of the *Sachtradition* you can penetrate to the original significance, or the assertion that a type of structure found over a larger area is necessarily secondary whereas those found only in one locality must be primary. But Egenter's presentation and discussion are invaluable, not only because of the wealth of material, the penetrating analyses and his bold hypotheses, but also because he teaches historians of religion to re-think their own matter-of-course axiomas and assumptions.

### *Oriental Studies*

There is a (possibly "apocryphal", see above p. 122) story about Stanley Arthur Cook, the famous Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University, who is said to have expressed his disapproval of the eagerness