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Editorial

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I am pleased that we published the first issue of our electronic journal thanks to the dedication and efforts of our managing editor, Ioannis Gaitanidis.

We have a short history in a way, and a long history in another. It was in 2015 at Heidelberg that Prof. Boaz Huss and Prof. Wouter J. Hanegraaff kindly advised me to form a research group affiliated to ESSWE. I agreed with them but it seemed not an easy task. Though research of esotericism in traditional Buddhism and Shintoism is well established in Japanese academia, modern transformations or offshoots of esotericism have not been paid due attention. Nor were the influences of Western esotericism on Japanese culture, religion and politics. Yet, there have been a few researchers of modern esotericism. So we had to start with a modest plan of setting up a network of researchers from several disciplines and, if possible, a journal. So it is more than I expected that our journal is published. This might reflect the recent increase of interests in this field

However, as I wrote, we have a long history in a way. The historical descriptions of occultism started in Japan in the latter half of the 1970s, when interest in occultism arose, influenced by the vogue of occultism and the New Age in the western world. But, even at the time, it was rather surprising that Takeda Yoichi (now Takeda Sugen), an editor and publisher, started publishing the journal *Fukkan Chikyū Roman* (meaning Global Roman New Series) for six issues as early as in 1976. It lasted for only a year, and he went on to publish another journal dedicated to the history of occultism titled *Meikyū* (Labyrinth) for three issues from 1979 to 1980. These two journals did not have a commercial success, but they made a breakthrough by showing the possibility of a historical approach. Stimulated by these journals, students at Kyoto University formed a group which jokingly called themselves “Kindai Piramidō Kyōkai” (Modern Pyramid Society). They published five issues of a small magazine on the history of occultism, which was titled *Piramiddo no tomo* (lit. Pyramid Companion), from 1977 to 1980. Most members were influenced by academic authors like Frances Yates, C. G. Jung or Mircea Eliade and also by British writers such as Francis King, Ellic Howe, and James Webb. Some were interested in 18th century esotericism through the works of Viatte and Faivre.

The members of the Modern Pyramid Society published three books within the next decade. First the late Imura Kōji wrote, *Reijutsu-ka no kyōen* (Shinkōsha, 1984). This book uncovered the long forgotten boom of “reijutsu” in the 1910s and 1920s. “Reijutsu” could be

translated as “excellent technique” or “spiritual technique”, approximately corresponding to “mind cure” in the contemporary US. Secondly, the group edited a collection of papers, titled *Okaruto mūbumento* (Occults Movement, Sōrinsha, 1986). In this book, Yokoyama Shigeo wrote an introductory history of 19th century Western occultism, Yoshinaga Shin’ichi a paper on the early history of the Theosophical Society, the late Tanaka Yoshihiro wrote about Fabre D’Olivet, Saint-Yves D’Alveydre, and Rene Guenon. Next, Yokoyama Shigeo published *Seibetsu sareta nikutai* (Body Sanctified, Shoshi kaze no bara, 1990), which dealt with the race theories of occultism and the Nazis, discussing Guido von List and *völkisch* occultists and Japanese ultra-nationalistic occultists. These books caused some reaction but to a limited extent. Imura’s book inspired some sociologists of religion, including Nishiyama Shigeru (Toyo University), to look at the occult boom between the world wars. Ichianagi Hirota (Yokohama National University), a professor of Japanese literature, followed Imura with books on occultism in Japan like “*Kokkuri san*” to “*senrigan*” (Kokkuri divination and clairvoyants, Kodansha, 1994). However, it cannot be said that these books opened the door wide to such research, as not many follow-ups appeared during 1990s.

Things have been changing in the 21st century. The influence of Theosophy on Japanese Buddhism during 1880s, which had been ignored by historians of modern Buddhism, came to be given attention. And New Age movements and the vogue of spiritual/spirituality came to be studied by leading historians of religion, like Shimazono Susumu. Of course, it will take some more years to have the research of modern esotericism fully established in academia. But I believe that this is surely a small but good first step towards it.