

Foreword

The International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), over three days (22–24 August) in 2012, hosted its Nineteenth Overseas Symposium—“Rethinking ‘Japanese Studies,’ from Practices in the Nordic Region”—jointly with the Section of Japanese Studies and the Asian Dynamics Initiative (ADI) at the University of Copenhagen. This volume contains papers that were presented at the symposium, which were revised based on discussions at the site.

Following its mission, Nichibunken has held overseas symposia annually in different parts of the world since 1995 to encourage academic exchange through Japanese Studies. In 2012, one such symposium was held in the Nordic region for the first time. It aimed to bring together scholars at the cutting edge of Japanese Studies, not only from the host country Denmark, but also from other Scandinavian countries in order to pursue and develop academic discussions with Japanese scholars and those further afield, and to build long-lasting networks. The symposium also aimed to provide an opportunity for academic exchange among scholars within the Nordic region, a seemingly infrequent occurrence. I believe the symposium achieved its aim thanks to the help and cooperation among all those concerned.

In the year preceding the symposium, I visited the Nordic region and its neighboring countries to learn about the circumstances under which Japanese Studies were pursued. As the person in charge of the symposium, I was very impressed to see that the courageous attempts undertaken by Japan scholars to overcome conventional disciplinary divisions or established divisions among Area studies, centered on main universities of each country, were producing tangible results. Some scholars also told me that the Nordic region was geographically distant and its scholarly conditions are different from conventional Japanese Studies centers, such as those in the United States and some Western European countries, where there was a long history of Japanese Studies and a large number of scholars, and therefore it was easier for Nordic scholars to try out new frameworks for research. They added that they found their strength in this and wanted to make the most of their environment. I also observed that the new generation of researchers was nurtured with passion and belief in such strength of the region.

The main theme of the symposium—to rethink Japanese Studies from practices of the Nordic Region—was born from this context. Following its spirit, two sessions—“From Religion to Popular Culture: New Readings of Texts and Spaces” and “Japan and Europe: Leading to Globalized ‘Japanese Studies’”—were set up to make the most of concrete research themes pursued by scholars in the Nordic region and to highlight their direction. The Nineteenth Overseas Symposium Committee set up at Nichibunken, led by the Chair, Professor Yamada Shōji (at the symposium, Professor Liu Jianhui assumed the position because Professor Yamada was on sabbatical), engaged in serious and meaningful discussions to determine the content for the symposium. I believe these discussions also reflected the passion of the Japan scholars in the Nordic region.

Needless to say, there were lively discussions on large and small points at the symposium. Regarding the big issue of “rethinking ‘Japanese Studies,’” a view that it was important to relativize “Japan” as a place or a case within a global context while focusing one’s research on “Japan,” was expressed repeatedly from various angles. In editing this volume we followed the structure of the symposium with two sessions, but made some changes to the order of the papers in an attempt to better organize the content. The publication is different from the symposium which also included discussion sessions to exchange views. Please note that the “mini keynote lectures” by Professors Mark Teeuwen and Yoichi Nagashima, who served as the conveners for each session, and the welcome speech by Professor Ulf Hedetoft, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Copenhagen are included as spoken on the spot, with each author’s consent.

Lastly, I would like to thank once again the authors who contributed to this publication. I would also like to acknowledge those who took part in the symposium as commentators or discussants (names are listed in the symposium program at the end of the volume). I extend my special appreciation to Professor Yoichi Nagashima of the University of Copenhagen who, for a long time, was in charge of preparations on the Copenhagen side, and also to Professor Marie Roesgaard, who introduced ADI of the University, as Head of its steering group, to this symposium, as well as Ms. Mary Yoshida, Coordinator of ADI, who took charge of the logistics at the symposium in a perfect manner. From Nichibunken, without the help and cooperation from Mr. Yuki Toshitake and Mr. Okamura Tomoaki of the International Projects Unit, none of this enterprise—from organizing the symposium to publication of this volume—would have been realized. We also received indispensable help from Ms. Shiraishi Eri of the Publications Office at Nichibunken in preparing this volume.

Thanks to the help and teamwork of all the people involved, it is my pleasure to bring to you, the reader, this volume filled with attempts to review the possibilities of Japanese Studies.

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