

Preface

The 27th International Symposium of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies was held on 8-12 November 2005, with the title of *Traditional Japanese Arts and Crafts in the 21st Century: Reconsidering the Future from an International Perspective*. The present volume contains the papers presented at the symposium as well as critical commentaries delivered after each paper. As the title indicates, it aims at reconsidering the Kyoto tradition in arts and crafts from an international perspective. It has been the conviction of the organizer that the opinions of foreign practitioners and the insights of specialists from abroad are indispensable to formulating a vision for the future of Japanese traditional arts and crafts.

The theme is closely connected with an interdisciplinary team-research project that has been conducted by the organizer at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (IRCJS, called Nichibunken) for the last three years on the “History and Transmission of Japanese Traditional Arts and Crafts in the Kyoto Area” (April 2003 to March 2006). Members included not only researchers in art history and specialists of economic history, but also artists, craftsmen, and cultural administrators. The goal has been to examine the present state of Japanese arts and crafts from multiple viewpoints so as to conceive of possible breakthroughs for the future. For this purpose, historical investigations were set in opposition with surveys of the current situation in the handcraft industries. Creators were actively involved in the project so as to make practical proposals with regard to the promotion of new concepts and development of inventive ideas.

Numerous field researches were carried out with substantial support from subsidiaries allocated by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). This project, titled “Tradition and Renewal in Arts and Crafts: Historical Transitions and Present State of the Handicrafts Manufactured around Kyoto” was conducted from 2004 to 2006 (fiscal years). This funding allowed members to make trips to the studios of potters, lacquer artists, and textile artists both in Japan and abroad. Supported by these experiences, a vast range of issues has been investigated, ranging from the changing interests of the creators to analyses of the mechanisms of merchandizing and examinations of the evolution of the market in transition in connection with consumers’ changing tastes.

The results of the Nichibunken team research project, as well as the outcome of the field work supported by JSPS, were made available to the foreign participants for critical examination prior to the International Symposium. The papers by the participants from abroad, in turn, were discussed by the domestic scholars and creators who were involved in the Nichibunken team research project and who took advantage of the JSPS research subsidiaries. Based on this fruitful exchange of opinions and ideas, the present volume attempts to show multilayered views of the current scholarship on the issue. It is the hope of the symposium organizer that the present volume will serve as a stepping stone for those who are interested in the intercultural collaboration in search of the renovation of Kyoto traditional arts and crafts in the twenty-first century.

A special word of gratitude goes to Professor Patricia Fister, who not only handled international correspondence prior to and during the symposium, but who also willingly accepted the painstaking post-symposium task of editing the English papers provided by non-native speakers and commentators. Mr. Takahashi Yu helped with editing the Japanese papers. Among members of the Center staff, let me also express my thanks to Mr. Nakanishi Takashi, coordinator of international affairs, Ms. Okuno Yukiko, chief coordinator, as well as to Ms. Sasaki Ayako, Ms. Taketani Naoko, and Ms. Takano Chie of the Office for International Exchange. Ms. Okada Aya also efficiently provided assistance during the sessions and Inaga Mari helped with making necessary arrangements during the gathering of the manuscripts. My special thanks also goes to the interpreters at the symposium, Ms. Takemoto Mihoko, Ms. Kawamoto Konomi, Ms. Matsumura Chikako, Ms. Maeda Kahoru, and Ms. Imaoka Chiaki, who brilliantly facilitated verbal communications among participants despite the frequent use of difficult technical terms. Without their dedication, the symposium would not have been successful. Last but not least, let me express my sincere thanks to all the participants and observers who enthusiastically cooperated in the rich and animated discussions during the five days of sessions.

INAGA Shigemi

Organizer of the 27th International Symposium

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