

Preface

This is a report of the 21st International Research Symposium, entitled 'Urban Morphology and the History of Civilization in East Asia,' held at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) from December 9 to 13, 2002.

While we move about a city in the course of daily life, we don't really see it in its entirety. We are only conscious of the particular landscape that surrounds us, and don't think of correlating it to the whole city. Discussions around the concept of urbiculture nevertheless tend to seem plausible enough, in spite of being based on such piecemeal impressions. And it is not uncommon to ignore the relationship between the development of the roadways we move about on and the course of a city's history.

The process of developing a city starts, however, with the imprinting of a physical plan on the ground. When such plans are expressed in one of the basic patterns of a particular civilization, they are solely an outcome of that civilization, and emerge as symbols that identify it. Indeed, a plan that embraces the basic pattern of a civilization, adjusted to suit the characteristics of an individual terrain or laid out from the beginning to conform to that terrain, will itself come to be accepted as a sort of cultural symbol.

Informed by this perspective, the symposium set out to identify the meanings of the various forms that cities have taken, albeit only within the confines of East Asia.

The discussions extended to a look at the ancient civilizations of China, in which the various states surrounding the dynasties centered their cities and towns around fortified citadels, and adjusted layouts to suit the local climates. The symposium also explored the more recent tendency among colonial states to imprint symbols of western civilization rather than their own cultures. At the same time, however, the power of a sovereign can have a great deal of influence on the formation of a city, which consideration opens discussion of city development to the political perspective. This report is a record of the broadly diverse discussions of the issues described above at our international research symposium on aspects of cities in East Asia from ancient to modern times.

This report is being published in both English and Japanese, the official languages of the symposium. Some of the papers presented at the symposium have not been included here at the request of their authors.

I would like to express my appreciation to the staff of the Research Cooperation Division and Office of Research Exchange for their dedicated support and assistance in realizing this symposium.

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