

## Preface

The 10th International Symposium of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies on the theme of “*Ideal Places* in History—East and West” was held at the Center in Katsurazaka, Kyoto for four days from Monday, October 2 to Thursday, October 5, 1995. Eighteen scholars in eight sessions presented papers, including key note addresses by Haga Tôru of IRCJS and Gerald Gellespie of Stanford University. The approximately forty individuals, including session chairs, commentators and audience, who were in regular attendance engaged in animated discussions that enabled those who presented papers to gain new insight into interesting or vital aspects of their research.

As was initially expressed in the “Statement of Agenda” that led off the symposium, it seems that humans in all corners of the globe have from antiquity wished to succeed in a quest for, or build themselves, a better, ideal world different from the mundane reality that fills our eyes every day, a world born of the creative imagination of the human mind. This embracing of the vision of an ideal place might even be said to be the affirmation of what it is to be human, since such visions have been elaborated undiminished in people’s myths, legends, religious creeds, poetry, and novels, as well as philosophical tracts and political disquisitions. Though we didn’t go so far as to debate Plato, in this symposium, various provocative details of “aspired spaces” (*Wunschraum*) in their plethora of visionary forms—from the “eternal world” (*tokoyo*) yearned for by ancient Japanese said to lie beyond the mountains and seas, to the East Asian paradise described by T’ao Yuan-ming in his “Record of Peach Blossom Spring” (*Táo-hua-yuan*), to the untiring exposition in Western Europe of “utopia” since Sir Thomas More—were deliberated and made more lucid.

Among these, utopian thinking was analyzed as a discourse embedded in socialist ideology during the second half of the nineteenth century and considered by some to have been brought to actuality with the establishment of the Soviet Union. The “kibbutz” of Israel and Brazil’s construction of its new capital “Brasília” also captured world attention as far-reaching experiments in utopian community structure and rational urbane planning. However, by the end of the twentieth century, the collapse of socialist governments in the Soviet Union and the Soviet block of countries sent shock waves around the world. It seemed that perhaps citizens of the twenty-first century would not be able to envision or revive the utopian dreams of rationalism, utilitarianism, or state controlled cities and countries that had been debated and tested since the days of Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella. One might say

that the early “village of peach blossom” and the modern “utopia”, which so engrossed the human imagination, have grown to be fantasies too distant.

Looking towards the twenty-first century, might it be that individuals have already lost even the capacity of envisioning an ideal place? With the possibility of this critical juncture in mind, we reconsidered together in the course of our symposium efforts made in the past by the human race towards embracing a vision of an Arcadia. Within the history of those visions, high mountain peaks, Iceland, Tahiti, the Northern regions, and even Manchukuo were revealed to have startlingly rich meanings. We only hope that perhaps this volume of collected essays might be read by thoughtful people in various parts of the world and might then be one step towards stimulating the capacity to envision anew an ideal place for the twenty-first century under the specific conditions of the world’s many different locales.

On the afternoon of October 4, the third day of the symposium, participants went together on an outing we called “Field Work Excursion” to an Ideal Place organized by Associate Professor Hayakawa Monta. Our group’s boat skimmed across the waters of the Hozu River of western Kyoto while we shared wine and spirits. After a stroll through Arashiyama, we dined at one of Tenryu-ji’s serene sub-temples. We felt as if we had come ever so slightly a step closer to the Ideal Place that could and should be. Or, perhaps it would be better to say that the symposium itself, where comparative literature scholars from America, Brazil, Israel, Korea, China, Canada and Japan discoursed together under a united theme, was already a moment from that Ideal Place.

As organizer, I wish to express here once again my deepest gratitude and appreciation for the many participants who took time from their busy schedules and came to Katsurazaka, as well as Ms. Okishio Mari and the entire staff of the Research Cooperation Division for managing the conference and making possible the publication of this volume.

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Haga Toru

Professor

International Research Center for Japanese Studies