

Call for Applications:
Visiting Research Scholar Fellowship 2014-2015
International Research Center for Japanese Studies

The International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Kyoto, Japan) is pleased to announce an opening for a foreign scholar to reside at the Center and participate during the Japanese academic year 2014-2015 in one of the following team research projects:

1. Outline

A. How to Readjust the Orbit? Checking the 20th Century Japanese Culture and Proposing a New Vision for the First Decade of the 21st Century

In the last twenty years, the Japanese society has been confronted with the necessity of modifying and adjusting its orbit. But it had failed to do so. The Great Tohoku Earthquake on March 11, 2011 and the following nuclear accident simply revealed that the inner crisis had been already aggravated without people's keenly noticing it.

In the present group-research, the participants will discuss possible visions for the future. Firstly, the project examines necessary readjustment in researches of Japanese Culture. What kind of cultural heritage can Japan choose from its experience of the 20th century so as to transmit it to the future? Secondly, how would be the future of international or intercultural transactions in the field of researches in Japanese Culture? Critical reexamination of the past, and especially that of the war time (1931-1945) should be indispensable, so as to envision the program. Thirdly, current regime of cooperation among industry, administration and academy in Japan must be thoroughly reexamined in comparison with the cases of neighboring countries. Institutional rigidities should be tested in an international perspective, as it threatens to prevent Japan from catching up with the major current of the world.

Another aspect to be discussed is the transmission of culture and knowledge to the next generation, as it is also facing major crisis. Many academic associations in humanities are suffering from the difficulty of bringing up successors for lack of adequate social system. The increasing number of foreign students and researchers is not properly recruited in the academic market. The academism in Japan is rapidly losing its capability of regeneration. International cooperation must be envisioned.

The above mentioned problems will lead to the readjustment of the future conception of the Japanese culture itself. Let us here point out two concrete questions. One the one hand it is high time to propose an alternative to the mass-production, mass-consumption model so as to rehabilitate the recycling. On the other hand, the tactile approach to the materiality of things must be taken into account so as to get rid of the cerebral hypertrophy in visuality and phono-centrism. These two alone will lead us to a major readjustment of the orbit in Cultural research program.

So as to animate discussions, concrete themes will be proposed. "Is Japan a kind of "Galapagos" in the Human Culture? What future for the Japanese style isolation?" "Characteristics and tasks of Insularity- A key for the conception of a new cultural history of the Japanese archipelago?" are among the possible starting points for discussions.

※Questions regarding the details of the research project may be sent to Professor Shigemi INAGA at the Center address, by e-mail at aurora@nichibun.ac.jp

B. Expos and human history, with a focus on Asian dynamics

It has often been said that the era of expos has come to an end. Let us for a moment accept as standard the following idea of expos: international projects of incomparable scale which, beginning with the 1851 London Expo and extending through the start of the 20th century, provided a stage for the great powers to compete in terms of industrial prowess and thus flaunt their ability to dominate the world; non-Western nations and colonies came under the spotlight on this stage as “others”. If we accept this as the standard for expos, then we can say with some confidence that their role ended with World War II, and that, ever since, expos have existed as just one variety among many mega-events; that they continue in name only, hosted in turn by different nations of the world.

However, expos held recently throughout the Asian region, and in particular the 2010 Shanghai Expo, have shown that these events are far from being in retreat; that, indeed, they inherit the history of the 19th century expos even as they point to the vital importance of their time-space as a mirror that both constitutes and reflects a new phase in world history.

We can see in these Asian events something other than the idea of the expo as the final stage in Asian nations’ “catch-up” in the context of non-Western pursuit of 19th century Western products. The Shanghai 2010 Expo, for example, was organised based on careful reflection of Osaka 1970, the first Asian expo in history. But it explicitly demonstrated, too, China’s interest as a new global power, and the positive reaction to it of other participating nations. We may take the Shanghai Expo as a declaration of the possibilities for a new balance of civilisations in the 21st century. Asia was once trampled by the Western intrusion; it next came to terms with that intrusion, and now it proposes a path towards a new balance of civilisations that transcends the notion of challenging the West.

Drawing on the results of the one year project “International Exhibitions and Asia” (2012) and the preceding symposium “International Exhibitions and Asia: From Shanghai to Shanghai, and Beyond” (2011), the present team research project sets out to consider the evolution of expos, and how they have encouraged human progress, generated friction in human society, and moved world history more broadly and profoundly than has so far been understood. The aim of the project is not so much to pursue the study of expos in their own right and for their own sake, as to re-direct the spotlight on expos as an indispensable reference point for any and all engaged in the study of human history.

We will realise this aim through cooperation between scholars and other interested parties from various fields and different cultures. We will address topics and viewpoints overlooked since the 1970 and 1980s, when expos became for the first time in Japan the object of substantial scholarly endeavour. This scholarship was typically narrow in scope, and often limited to Japan’s engagement with expos. This team research project is an exercise in relativising “Japanese studies”.

※Questions regarding the details of the research project may be sent to Professor Mayuko SANO at the Center address, by e-mail at m-sano@nichibun.ac.jp

C. Japanese Studies through Manga and Anime

Japanese studies overseas flourished greatly in the 1980s. Japanese economic power declined over the “lost two decades,” however, and interest in Japan ebbed slowly. Some universities in the West eliminated faculty posts in Japanese studies and replaced them with specialists on other countries. On the other hand, the number of students who are interested in Japanese popular culture remains at quite a high level in various countries, with manga/anime culture now a “last bastion” of Japanese culture that attracts the young generation overseas to Japan.

The study of Japanese manga/anime is steadily progressing. The number of researchers and outcomes, however, is not very great by comparison with the popularity of the subject. A gap has emerged between Japanese researchers who do not read articles and books on the subject written in other languages, and researchers overseas who do not read materials written in Japanese. Teachers at universities around the world are attempting to use manga/anime in their introductions to Japanese studies. Effective teaching methods of instructing students who know much more about them than teachers, and teaching methods with guidance for teachers are in short supply.

This team research project will discuss and provide material from the academic/educational viewpoint for each work to fill the gap between the manga/anime mediated interest in Japan and current teaching of Japanese studies. The emphasis of this project is not on the text, author, and expression of each work, as is often the case with current manga/anime studies. Some assessment of the accuracy of translation is necessary, but we also need to place a higher priority on the adaptation of the work to overseas circumstances. While some are attempting to use the attraction and economic effect of manga/anime for the development of the nation-state, this project keeps a distance from such endeavors, seeking rather to focus its work on analysis of the activities of diverse actors. Our project will focus on the connection between the “world in the work” and Japanese culture and society; the interaction between the work and the real world, typically represented by “pilgrimage to holy places” depicted in the manga/anime; the diversity of n-dimensional fan fictions created by “users” of the work; and the transformation of the meaning of the “world in the work” in the context of each country and mode of modernism.

Selecting recent works in addition to older works that have not been much discussed by scholars, as the object of discussion, the team research project plans to contribute not only to manga/anime mediated Japanese studies overseas, but beyond that to the advance of East Asian studies by increasing the number of case studies to be referenced by scholars and educators of Japanese culture.

※Questions regarding the details of the research project may be sent to Professor Shoji YAMADA at the Center address, by e-mail at manga_anime@nichibun.ac.jp

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Another aspect to be discussed is the transmission of culture and knowledge to the next generation, as it is also facing major crisis. Many academic associations in humanities are suffering from the difficulty of bringing up successors for lack of adequate social system. The increasing number of foreign students and researchers is not properly recruited in the academic market. The academism in Japan is rapidly losing its capability of regeneration. International cooperation must be envisioned.

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