Contemporary East-Asian Cities’ Experiences and Current Events

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This issue focuses upon east-Asian cities with all the articles dealing with the events and experiences in that part of the world. Some were presented on November 22, 2010, at an international symposium, “Cultural Policies in East Asian Cities,” organized by the Rikkyo Institute for Global Urban Studies. It was held at the conference room of the Rikkyo University’s Ikebukuro Campus in Tokyo, commemorating the Institute’s 40th workshop since 2007.

This symposium sought to engage in social-scientific discussion regarding contemporary cultural policies in east-Asian metropolises and to evaluate the effect of these from a global perspective. Three specialists from Japan, Korea, and China in urban regional studies were brought together to present their papers: Professor Wonho Jang of The University of Seoul discussed “Urban ‘Scene’ and Creative Place: A Case of Mullae-dong of Seoul”; “Urban Regeneration and the Creative City: Making Creative Neighborhoods in Yokohama” was the contribution of Professor Yasushi Matsumoto of Rikkyo University; and “Rediscovery of Historical Value in Globalizing Shanghai: Urban Renovation from Demolition to Preservation” was the paper of Professor Hai Yu from Fudan University. Each speaker examined cultural policies or other related activities and programs of three specifically selected world cities - Seoul, Yokohama, and Shanghai, all of which are outstanding east-Asian business centers which also manifest vital developments in municipal cultural policies.

To illustrate a local community’s development of cultural programs and activities, Professor Wong presented a detailed description of a new ‘arts area,’ the Mullae-dong district in Seoul, within a conceptual framework designated ‘urban scene’. Professor Matsumoto analyzed causes and effects of several major projects taken by Yokohama c.t.y. In fact, that City’s plans gave expression to cultural policies actually restored sluggish areas and revitalized the city center with a newly built complex of traditional and modern-style edifices. That represents a contemporary example of creative city planning in Japan. The final paper, presented by Professor Yu, focused on the changes of Shanghai since the 1990s. His address took into account commercial developments, and the new
streams of city planning by Xin Tian Di and Tian Zi Fang and so on. For instance, in Shi Ku Men, in downtown Shanghai, the traditional model for developing a community’s distinctive style has been replaced, though some attempt has been made to renovate historical housing.

The following day, having become alert to key policy issues from the stimulating discussion, the panel of speakers, together with other staff of the Institute and, several post-graduate students from the College of Sociology, Rikkyo University, went on a scientific excursion in the Yokohama district. This involved visiting several sites of symbolic significance, since Professor Matsumoto is also presently head of the research project funded by Japanese government’s Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research exploring Yokohama’s rich potential as a city of creativity.

All of the above mentioned papers have been revised for publication in this issue. In addition, we have also included another article in the English language from Professor Bart Wissink of University of Hong Kong who has compared the ‘urban form’ of Bangkok with Tokyo. All the articles in the Japanese language have examined contemporary issues in Japanese cities, including Yokohama. I was very glad to convene the above symposium and deem that these articles will contribute to studies on east-Asian cities, and link such research more broadly to global urban studies. Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the authors for their co-operation and contributions.