

PREFACE

著者	Kasaya Kazuhiko
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PREFACE

This volume includes the proceedings of the International Symposium “Courtiers and Warriors: Comparative Historical Perspectives on Ruling Authority and Civilization”. Scholars from Japan as well as abroad attended the symposium which took place during one week from March 10, 2003 at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

The symposium examined the social systems of premodern societies by concentrating investigations on the special elite classes found in those societies, namely the courtiers (aristocracy, nobility) and warriors. The aim was to reveal structural values by asking questions concerning the meaning of their social position and occupational function, the formality in establishing order in their ranks, and social roles.

Traditionally, in Japanese society we find the development of two elite classes, the *kuge* (court nobility) and *buke* (warrior), but our purpose for this symposium was to leave the narrowly defined limits of research of the situation in Japan and broaden the perspective to contexts beyond its shores. Comparing peoples in Asian and European regions we find societies where the warrior classes (knights and professional warriors) developed and others in which literary elite gained prominence. Some of the topics explored for insights into these phenomena are the historical situations, political institutions, ritual, social strata, kinship structure, religion and intellectual tradition.

When this symposium was held in mid-March, the threat of war in Iraq was looming and discussions in the United Nations flared up on whether or not the use of military force was justified.

The relevance of our symposium was therefore directly linked to the tense international situation. The initial “Aims of this International Symposium” clarify its contemporary significance:

“Presently, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world faces a critical situation. The terrorist attacks on the United States have initiated political trends that now have split global opinion on ways to solve problems, such as how to deal with nations with weapons of mass destruction. This has given rise to international discord. Whether to respond with swift military action, or to avoid military intervention and implement a patient process of negotiation, requires careful consideration and illustrates the difficulties of any solution. Although the immediate nature of the problem is military, in the background lay cultural values traditionally nurtured in the histories of the nations involved. It is these differences that have produced gaps that obstruct understanding and sow seeds of contention.

The following issues are important when discussing differences in world views. What are a society’s ultimate values and how did they originate? How are they embedded in structures and systems? Why do some values take precedence over others? How are they related to political goals, principles and responsibility? How and to whom are political leaders accountable? How are the public nature and legitimacy of politics structured and what are the foundations of these principles in the respective nations?

With these issues in mind, this symposium is timely because its focus is placed on the premodern

foundations on which modern nations and their societies rest. It is an attempt to understand the critical differences and clarify to some degree cultural values that are found perplexing.”

The following five sub-themes functioned as starting point for discussions during the week-long symposium and were followed by a concluding debate. “Civilian Type of Society and Warrior’s Type of Society”; “Kingship and Courtesy”; “What is the Noble?”; “Feudalism and Bureaucracy”; “Ideology, Religion and Culture”.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the scholars from Japan and abroad for their participation in this symposium, their enlightening presentations and highly valuable comments. It is my opinion that, thanks to the high academic level of these presentations and comments, included in this volume, and the lively debates, this symposium has achieved its aims.

October 1, 2003

Kasaya Kazuhiko, Chair