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Research and Information Center for Asian Studies (RICAS)
Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo



From the New Director of RICAS

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From the New Director of RICAS

Hiromitsu Ogawa

(Professor, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo)

The past year has been one of restructuring and attendant changes in regulations for the Research and Information Center for Asian Studies (RICAS), and also a time of intense study for me since becoming its Director on June 28, 2005. Several months after my appointment, I attended, as the first of my major outside duties, the annual meeting of the Directors of the Humanities and Social Sciences Documentation and Information Centers, held February 10, 2006. This consists of five Centers, two at the University of Tokyo, and one each at Kyoto University, Kobe University and Hitotsubashi University. At the meeting, we were formally notified that, due to the amalgamation of several centers, including the Center for Foreign Law Materials, which is attached to the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo, the latter would no longer remain within above framework. This has caused me to think again about the future of RICAS.

The most pressing problem at the Directors' meeting was, inevitably, what the future structure of the group should be. What drew particular attention was discussion concerning the present state of documentation centers. Following the example of RICAS, the Documentation and Information Center for Chinese Studies (DICCS) at the Institute for Research in Humanities at Kyoto University, last autumn announced it would discontinue the practice whereby the Director of the Institute is also the Director of the Center. These two centers, in contrast to the Center for Foreign Law Materials, having made it clear that their intention is actively to strengthen their present position affiliated to Institutes, the Rieb Liaison Center at the Research Institute for Economics and Business Administration, Kobe University, expressed concern about whether or not the remaining Centers would continue with the present arrangement, changing to a four-body framework. Though I was unable to state categorically without reference to the Faculty of the Institute, I affirmed, as Director of RICAS, that we had no intention of removing ourselves from the present framework, and so it was decided to hold an annual meeting next year attended by the Directors of the remaining four centers.

I would like to reiterate my reasons why I consider it important that RICAS remains a member of the conference. All four Centers maintain diverse collections of documentary or artifact materials and are tasked with making them and the vast collections of their Institutes widely available, both in Japan and abroad. Affiliation with an Institute allows them to contribute

not just to the parent Institute but to academic life in general and to society as a whole. In view of this, surely it strengthens the four Centers to be so affiliated. Centers attached to a faculty, however, could leave the framework, because such centers are not always integral to the faculty, which after all has its own core role in the university in terms of research, education and social contribution. The existence of Centers which make positive social contributions is, however, indispensable for the Institutes themselves, since their role is chiefly research, although they are also involved in post-graduate education. If university assessment, currently in abeyance, is reinstated, the research assessment of each individual will naturally be taken into high account. Thus it is obvious that whether or not there are Institute-wide projects, and then how these projects are valued, will be based on questions not only of the level of the project itself but on the degree it might be expected to contribute to society.

The streamlining of the Centers attached to the Faculty of Law was justified in the case of the Center for Foreign Law Materials, that it was more meaningful at the present time to digitize difficult-to-obtain documents, such as judicial precedents, concerning English and American law, than to make them publicly available in their original form. However, an even greater reason is that budgets are decreasing year by year. This is a common problem concerning the remaining four Centers as well. The representative of the Research Centre for Information and Statistics of Social Science at the Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, asked the official from the Research Promotion Bureau at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology who attended the meeting whether the Ministry was could not consider instituting smaller, but more permanent and competitive financing for projects in the Humanities and Social Sciences. I would like to take this opportunity to say that this was received as appropriate by the Directors of the Centers and by those concerned.

RICAS, which was newly established in April 1999, consists of the two sections, written documents and artifacts. It took the place of the former Documentation Center for Asian Studies which had been founded 1966, following the acceptance of a budget request in 1998 to increase regular personnel and expenses. A particular feature of the RICAS is its commitment to making public its collections, both documentary and artifact. It is a great pity for me as the professor chiefly in charge of the

budget request that, due primarily to budgetary restraints, its founding conception as a new Center to collect and publish material has not been realized to the extent anticipated. As I have

already said, if university assessment is reinstated, and RICAS attracts a severe judgement, this will reflect on the Institute as a whole. This is a pressing concern that has to be resolved.

Database Projects for Islamic Art at RICAS

Tomoko Masuya

(Associate Professor, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo)

Recently, the number of the websites on the Internet of the museums with an extensive collection of Islamic art has increased worldwide and the contents of such websites have been enriched to show images of samples of their collections, and sometimes even to offer a database of their objects. In addition, a number of universities and research institutes have constructed, or are currently constructing, databases dealing with various aspects of Islamic works of art. The website of the Historians of Islamic Art, the academic association of Islamic art historians from all over the world, is a useful gateway to these websites and databases (<http://www.historiansofislamicart.org/>).

RICAS has also offered, since 1991, a photographic database of Islamic monuments in India (http://www.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~islamarc/WebPage1/htm_eng/index_eng.html). The Center preserves approximately 20,000 photographic documents and plans of architecture in India, with an emphasis on Islamic monuments from the Sultanate period (the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries), recorded by the Mission for Indian History and Archaeology of the University of Tokyo (members: Tatsuro Yamamoto, Matsuo Ara, Tokifusa Tuskinowa, Asashiro Saegusa, and Taichi Oshima) from the late 1950s to the early 1960s. A project team led by Dr. Naoko Fukami, a visiting lecturer at the Institute of Oriental Culture and a leading specialist in Islamic architecture in Japan, has digitized about 14,000 photographs and catalogued them. The construction of the database is now almost in the last stages of completion.

As well, RICAS has launched two more database projects for Islamic art. I have been responsible for these since 2001.

The first is a database for Islamic works of art preserved in Japan. Even though this is not a widely-known fact, Japan has formed quite large collections of Islamic art. In the beginning, a

considerable number of craft items considered exotic and precious by the Japanese were imported from the Near East before the twentieth century. They included Near Eastern glassware from the fourth to sixth centuries C.E., objects including metal *kashkuls* (dervishes' bowls) from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, and silk textiles and wool carpets from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Around 1910, however, Japanese collectors began purchasing Islamic works of art, especially Persian pottery, at art markets in Japan and abroad. Why Persian pottery was preferred is connected with Japan's tradition of collecting foreign pottery for use in the tea ceremony, and also with a special feeling many Japanese had toward Persia, which specifically reminded them of the international atmosphere of the Tempyo era (eighth century) when a number of Persian objects were brought to Japan via the old Silk Routes.

Islamic works of art are now preserved in more than thirty museums in Japan. Among them, the Middle East Culture Center in Japan (pottery, glassware, metalwork, etc.; Mitaka in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area), the Aichi Prefectural Ceramic Museum (various types of pottery; Seto in Aichi Prefecture), the Inax Tile Museum (tiles; Tokoname in Aichi Prefecture), the MIHO Museum (pottery and a very important carpet; Shigaraki in Shiga Prefecture), the National Museum of Ethnology (carpets etc.; Suita in Osaka Prefecture), the Tenri University Sankokan Museum (pottery; Tenri in Nara Prefecture), the Okayama Orient Museum (pottery, glassware, and textiles; Okayama), the Ohara Museum of Art (pottery; Kurashiki in Okayama Prefecture), and the Marugame Museum of Art (pottery; Marugame in Kagawa Prefecture) are representative of Japanese collections of Islamic art. Unfortunately English descriptions of the collections are offered only by the Okayama Orient Museum (

okayama.okayama.jp/orientmuseum/orient-e/) and the Inax Tile Museum (<http://www.inax.co.jp/museum/english/index.html>) on their websites.

Documenting and cataloging Islamic works of art regardless of their current owner in a database can offer information on how and when the Japanese became interested in Islamic art and what kind of Islamic art has attracted them, in addition to being a useful reference to what objects are preserved where. The number of entries has so far amounted to eight hundred but there are hundreds more to be added. The problem yet to be solved is how to combine the data with photographic images with the permission of all the museums. Although the database is still under construction, I am hoping to develop it into a more complete version to be accessible through the Internet.

The second project is to form a comprehensive photographic archive of Persian tiles in collections worldwide. I have set Persian tiles, especially those from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as one of my main research themes and have personally accumulated information on them. Tiles have

been one of the most important means to decorate mural surfaces of Persian buildings and cutting-edge pottery techniques were applied on them. The tiles are often dated and signed, and thus can give concrete information on various aspects of pottery production in Persia. However, because Persian tiles have been dispersed all over the world since the second half of the nineteenth century, it is difficult to classify them according to period, technique, provenance, decorative motif, and contents of the inscription as a whole. The goal of this project is to form a nucleus for future analyses of Persian tiles from these various aspects.

Currently we are collecting photographs of the tiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, one of the earliest collections of Persian tiles. Many of the tiles have not been photographed until now, and our project would be a start for documenting this valuable collection.

These two projects will certainly be long-term ones but I believe that the steady accumulation of information on the subjects will provide new spheres of research in Islamic art.



Plate: Magic bowl, Egypt 13th-14th century, from a private collection in Japan

Changing Nature of the Mahalla: Outcomes of the project

Timur Dadabaev

(Associate Professor, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo)

The Central Asian states are presently at the stage of implementing structural reforms and in a state of transition to new forms of society-building. They face a number of challenges such as the preservation of peace, and the “de-ideologization”, democratization and “market-ization” of their societies. The majority of Central Asian states follow a top-to-bottom scheme of decision-making in their approaches to dealing with various issues in their societies. On many occasions, this leaves the public disengaged and detached, and, in turn, results in ineffective and counterproductive policy outcomes with respect to initially pursued goals. There are however indigenous institutions in the region, which attract the attention of local officials and scholars as being highly efficient in addressing social, economic and political conundrums, primarily at the community level.

This project focused on one such indigenous institution: the neighborhood community, or *Mahalla*. While Central Asian local communities, like the Mahalla, have gained considerable standing in recent years, there is no consensus yet on what the role of these communities is in the construction of new states and societies in the region. Their potential is not properly projected and therefore, poorly realized.

The main thrust of this project was to suggest that it would not be possible to achieve peace, as well as inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance, in this multi-ethnic and multi-religious region unless stabilization is accomplished at the local community level. With weak and often illegitimate governments in place in Central Asia, the community represents one of the few effective traditional substitutes for uniting representatives of various ethnic and religious groups through the creation of a common identity based on the criterion of shared residence. In addition, while Central Asia faces multiple problems, such as environmental hazards and economic shortcomings, these problems cannot be addressed without localizing public dissatisfaction and creating public consent within smaller communities like the Mahalla. At the same time, while the Mahalla community is highly effective in some areas, its

capacity in others is limited. There is thus a need to analyze the Mahalla’s current social, political and economic standing and investigate Mahalla neighborhood communities in the context of other social, religious and political organizations.

The main set of questions that this project aimed to address was as follows. First, what is the nature of the phenomenon of the Mahalla in Uzbekistan? Second, is the Mahalla a government-affiliated unit or non-governmental (unofficial) indigenous network? If both exist within the same space/locality, what is the relationship and difference between the two? What is the nature of their public support? Is the Mahalla an all-inclusive community? Does it ever exclude people living in a district? And third, what is the correlation between the mosque as an agent of Islam and the Mahalla community network? Does the Mosque represent the center of community life in the modern Mahalla? If not, what is its role?

Historical Overview

The project first highlighted historical aspects of the evolution of the modern Mahalla in Uzbekistan. Covering the role of the Mahalla in such cities as Tashkent, Ferghana, Samarkand and Bukhara, the study suggested that while the role of the Mahalla in each of these cities differed slightly from one another, the degree of its importance for the residents of these cities did not vary much. This was further proved by the historical evidence that even the Russian colonizers of Central Asian cities did not attempt to interfere much with local systems of self-management, of which the Mahalla was a constituent part. Later, the Bolsheviks exploited the Mahalla’s traditional mechanisms for the purpose of Communist propaganda by renaming tea houses (*choihona*) and residential get-togethers (*gap*) ‘red *choihona*’ and *gaps* organized for ‘highly conscious’ local residents.

While much literature exists concerning the pre-Soviet Mahalla, relatively little deals with the Mahalla in the Soviet period. In this context, this project partly touched upon the

standing of the Mahalla in the context of other social and political organizations such as the Communist youth organization (*Komsol*) units seen in the Mahallas in the 1970s, and relations between the Executive Committees of the Communist Party and Mahalla committees.

Traditional and Official Mahalla

Second, this study investigated the expressions of the Mahalla's existence. It attempted to determine not only the forms of an “official” and “unofficial” Mahalla but also the different roles the two play in society: the first, being a part of local government and the second, an identity agent, more “unfocussed”, more tied to particular concerns, and to a certain degree more partisan. The analysis of the traditional aspects of the Mahalla included a description of common spaces that residents share such as get-togethers (*gap*), mutual non-monetary assistance (*hashar*), tea houses (*choihona*), celebrations, funerals and shared facilities (ceremony halls and *guzar*). By looking at these shared social spaces and places where people meet, the project investigated the multiplicity of identities which the Mahalla transcends. Accordingly, it was found that although attachment to the neighborhood among residents cannot be compared to ethnic and religious attachments, it is nevertheless an important part of self-identification, enforced by various interactions within the proximity of one's residence.

This project also tentatively divided post-Soviet institutionalization of the Mahalla into four periods: ① recognition of the Mahalla as a promoter and defender of national values in the initial years of independence in Uzbekistan; ② gradual institutionalization of Mahalla committees and transfer of responsibility for the provision of social welfare of the population to the Mahalla; ③ a partial transfer of law-enforcement functions to the Mahalla and the establishment of Mahalla order maintenance units (*Mahalla posboni*); ④ and finally, the (not yet realized) creation of one all-inclusive Mahalla self-governance unit which is supposed to include not only traditional features, social welfare provision and order maintenance functions, but also functions of maintaining residential facilities within its territory (the *Mahalla-komunalchi* system) as prescribed by the concept “Mahalla of the 21st century”.

Public support for the Mahalla and changing patterns of Mahalla leadership

Third, this study also attempted to determine if the present-day Mahalla featuring both traditional and new functions still has the same enthusiastic support of the community. And if so, which part of the community does this support come from? Several factors seem to influence public support of the Mahalla. For instance, broadly speaking, support for the Mahalla and a community centered life-style is weaker in urban areas, in areas where the Mahalla did not historically exist (Karakalpak Republic, etc) and among residents with higher incomes or of a younger age. Hypothetically, there is thought to be a weaker attachment to the Mahalla among the non-Asian (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian) population residing in Uzbekistan in comparison to Asian (Uzbeks, Tajiks, etc) groups.

In terms of Mahalla leadership, support for it also depends on various factors. As is the case with the general support of residents of the Mahalla, such support of its leadership is to a great extent personalized and depends on various circumstances and the experiences of each individual and on the activities of each leader of the Mahalla community. However, what is obvious is that the composition of Mahalla leadership has been undergoing changes over the past few years with a new pattern of behavior (inner-community oriented vs. outer-community oriented types of leadership), and certain background factors of the new leadership, such as gender (women), age (young Mahalla ‘managers’ as opposed to elders) and occupation (government or party nomenclature, newly formed entrepreneurs and the ‘third group’). Accordingly, this project also described in some detail the strategies of Mahalla management of these leaders, which included mediation in family conflicts, dealing with domestic violence and using traditional mechanisms for achieving present-day goals.

Human Rights, civil society and the Mahalla community

Another aspect of the Mahalla community is its potential for safeguarding citizens' rights and acting on their behalf. Recent years have witnessed the contrary situation where Mahalla committees have often been accused of not respecting residents' HR and controlling and reporting on the activities of citizens to law-enforcement bodies. The findings of this project however suggest that the Mahalla does not commit HR abuses simply

because of its structure or its essence as an indigenous neighborhood network. At the same time, the Mahalla's main goal of existence is to protect community rights even if this sometimes means sacrificing individual HR. While often the protection of individual HR coincides with the protection of community rights, in many other cases Mahalla officials are trapped in the dilemma of whether to respect individual human rights at the possible expense of the community, or the other way around.

Another aspect of this issue is that in some cases, the Mahalla committees and their leadership often have to cooperate with governmental and law-enforcement agencies in light of various circumstances. In this sense, the community itself is frequently a victim of the complicated political situation in the country and not the HR abuser.

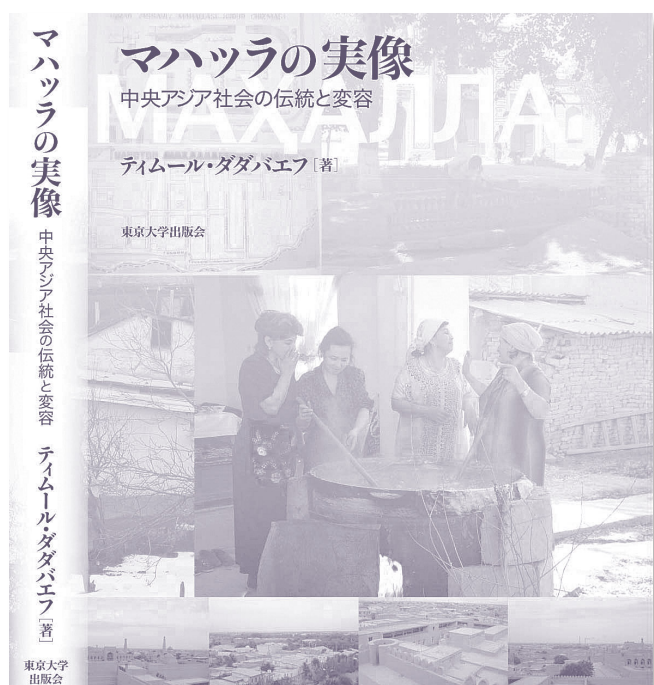
At the same time, in the course of this project examples of the Mahalla serving the purpose of protecting the HR of residents were also registered, in particular, the experimental project which is being conducted in the Ferghana valley in cooperation between the Ferghana Regional Prosecutor's office and local Mahalla neighborhood committees. In essence, this is an endeavor to empower Mahallas to have control over the

provision of goods and services to needy residents by governmental bodies, to check the proper payments of pensions by post-offices, to make sure that gas, electricity and other communal services are provided timely and properly and to guarantee that people with disabilities receive the required thorough medical examination and correct treatment. Under the code compiled by the Prosecutor's office, when irregularities and wrong-doings are revealed, the Mahalla committee is entitled to register those cases and file a petition to the Prosecutor's office or directly to the court on behalf of those residents whose interests were involved. Although the effect of this experimental project remains to be seen in the future, the newly acquired role of the Mahalla can be of much needed help in situations where many residents do not know their rights, do not have financial resources for legal expenses or do not know how to file their claims.

The Mahalla and other organizations

The last part of the project considered the Mahalla in its relations with other organizations. First, the effect of reforms in the agricultural sector and the effect of these reforms on the Mahalla were highlighted. In particular, with the reforms in agriculture, the government decreased the numbers of large agricultural collective farms like *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses* and instead stimulated the creation of three types of agricultural enterprise: large scale (*shirkats*), medium (*fermer*) and small (*dekhqon*). As the efficiency of production in the smaller agricultural producers increases, the dissolution of these bigger units of production increases social and material pressures on the Mahalla community. This is due to the fact that under the old structure of agricultural production *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses* were responsible not only for production but also for the maintenance of the infrastructure of neighborhoods and for the provision of labor places for people. Under the new scheme, where agricultural production is increasingly conducted by smaller producers, these producers do not possess the necessary resources both to produce and to maintain the Mahalla neighborhoods. Thus Mahalla committees either have to address smaller producers with their problems and needs or, more frequently, non-governmental organizations and international institutions.

This analysis was followed by the observation on how the Mahalla interacts with non-governmental organizations



Timur Dadabaev, *Mahalla*, Tokyo University Press, 2006 (in Japanese Language)

(NGO) and international organizations. There are several examples of NGOs such as ECOSAN, Counterpart International and CHF using the mahalla network as a basis for their assistance programs. In addition, this part of the project detailed how international organizations such as UNESCO, UNFPA and others cooperated with local neighborhoods in order both to deliver their assistance programs to residents and to help various mahallas in increasing public health awareness among the population.

Conclusions

The main message of this project is that the Mahalla neighborhood network reinforced in post-independence Uzbekistan has its roots in traditional unofficial neighborhood links based on the voluntary participation and initiative of the population. In recent years, with the legal empowerment of the Mahalla, its nature has changed from that of an unofficial voluntary organization to that of an official organization which not only pursues the interests of residents but also forwards governmental agenda among them. It has both positive and negative sides. What should be understood though is while there are some specific aspects in which the Mahalla is very effective and even indispensable, its capacity for dealing with the other tasks it has been charged with in recent years sometimes lags behind its means. Therefore, the enhancement of a financial resource base for the Mahalla, clearly defining the duties and responsibilities of the Mahalla and other state bodies, and finally, the promotion of the Mahalla as an independent local self-management unit which acts on the basis of voluntary participation of residents are among the factors which will define its future and potential.

RICAS Activities

- The second Meeting of the Promotion of East Asian Studies was held at Putrajaya, Malaysia, on February 16-17, 2006. The aim of this meeting is to promote research and educational programs about East Asian studies and to build the network of researchers in East Asian countries.
- The Forty First Meeting of Directors of Humanities and Social Sciences Documentation and Information Centers in the National Universities was held at the University of Tokyo, on February 10, 2006.
- The Asia Barometer Symposium was held at the Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) February 24, 2006.

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 7-3-1 Bunkyo-ku, Hongo, Tokyo 113-0033 Japan
 Telephone: +81-3-5841-5839
 Fax: +81-5841-5898
 E-mail: ricas@ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp
 URL: <http://ricas.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp>