

International Workshop “Consumption and Consumerism in Japanese Culture” (The 6th Consortium on Global perspectives in Japanese Studies)

Foreword

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Consumption is an inseparable part of our everyday life. It has existed in the world as long back as the history records and can be found in every part of the habitable globe. Although consumption in a broad sense and consumerism as a social and economic order based on fostering a desire to purchase goods and services in ever greater amounts is usually referred to the modern, Western-type economic society, people purchased and consumed material and intellectual “goods” in Japan from the dawn of civilization. Since one can hardly deny that what you buy and consume is increasingly defining who you are or who you would like to be, the changing patterns of consumption furnish evidence of substantial metamorphosis in material and intellectual culture. Such transformations have recently re-entered intensive debate within the academic milieu, engaging not only historians, economists, and political scientists, but also cultural and social anthropologists, linguists and literary theoreticians.

The papers published in this issue are the outcome of the international research workshop, “Consumption and Consumerism in Japanese Culture,” which was organized by the Institute of East Asian Studies (Charles University in Prague) in collaboration with Ochanomizu University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) and Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7 from November 14 to 16, 2011. The workshop was part of project No. CZ.2.17/3.1.00/31190, “Innovation of the Bachelor programs through the implementation of subjects focused on the modern history of East Asian countries,” funded by the European Social Fund, Operational Program Prague – Adaptability.

Eighteen selected papers describe the phenomenon of consumption in Japanese society and culture from various sides and angles. The papers focus on broad topics including the relationship between consumption and literature both in ancient and contemporary Japan or the reflection of consumption in modern language. Several papers discuss how the problem of the phenomenon of consumption influenced everyday life in the Nara period or how consumption facilitated the democratization of inter-war society. Some contributions touch questions related to consumer behavior in postwar Japan, while others describe the present situation in Japanese household expenditure.

I am most grateful to all the participants for participating in the international workshop, presenting their contributions and submitting their papers. I also appreciate the cooperation of each local staff in Tokyo, Beijing, London, Paris and Prague for their cheerful encouragement and support, and firmly believe this workshop will become the initial step towards further joint research into consumption in comparative perspective.

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