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

## CENTRAL ASIA REDISCOVERED

### Measuring Societies and Life-styles in Central Asia: Beginning of the Process

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"Registan" square in Samarkand, Uzbekistan

# Measuring Societies and Life-styles in Central Asia: Beginning of the Process

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Central Asian culture, history, art, politics and economics are the predominant fields which attract the international community of scholars to this unique region. This interest is enhanced by Central Asia's rich heritage at the heart of the Silk Road as a hive of cultural exchange and a melting pot of various peoples and civilizations. The demise of the Soviet Union and the advent of independence for Central Asian states further opened up the region to foreign scholars, and also motivated regional scholars to intensify their research thereby putting modern Central Asia on the global academic map. Yet the challenges faced by these states are reflected in the relatively restricted conditions and limited opportunities for local scholars to reach their counterparts abroad. The complex economic situation does not leave much latitude for increased public financing to enhance the research resources for local scholars, leaving them to seek funding opportunities from abroad.

On the other hand, foreign scholars face problems in getting first hand information about their respective Central Asian countries: the difficulties are often due to the unavailability of or limited access to various documents in these countries. This is especially true of statistical and social data on the societies in question. These obstacles naturally result in an imbalance of research, favouring areas which do not require statistical and social data, and research work that is thus methodologically easier to conduct in the conditions of Central Asia. The damage is most acutely felt in sociological research where data on incomes, lifestyles, views and concerns of local population is often difficult to obtain due to logistic and other reasons. Consequently, conclusions on the views of population on lifestyles, regional development and future perspectives of Central Asian states are either made prematurely, without the required data, or based on individual impressions gained in the course of field work. While the importance and implications of such findings are unquestionable, there is no methodological guarantee as to whether, for example, they are merely typical for some particular locality of the country concerned or can be made about the whole society as such. In addition, regional generalizations are almost impossible to make due to the high levels of diversity within and between Central Asian countries and their societies. Above all, although such findings may adequately model a general structure of societal life, they are not

conducive to the comparative analysis of Central Asian societies with societies from other countries, and leave scholars, both local and foreign, to make only hypothetical conclusions on the similarities and differences between the particular cultures and their paths of development.

There is thus an urgent and ongoing need to collect verifiable statistical and other types of data in Central Asia for the compilation of open data-bases that will enhance both regional capacity-building processes and international knowledge about Central Asian societies. The two data-bases detailed below - "AsiaBarometer" and "Local Neighborhood Communities - Mahalla", both projects conducted at the Research and Information Center for Asian Research, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo - are constructive responses to this challenging academic agenda and aim to address this shortfall of data and knowledge.

## **The Central Asian Focus of the AsiaBarometer Data-base: Measuring Life-styles and Values in Uzbekistan**

The AsiaBarometer is one of the most ambitious attempts hitherto to build a data-base of values and life-styles in Asia. While its focus goes far beyond the Central Asian region, by encompassing countries of South, South-East and East Asia, this project attempted the rare analytical exercise of looking, firstly, at what the post-Soviet realities of the Central Asian states are, initially exemplified by the case of Uzbekistan and then conducting its comparative analysis with other Asian societies. Methodologically, the AsiaBarometer data-base comprises the results of demographic polling in 10 Asian countries, registering the views of Asian populations on their everyday lives, concerns, dreams and hopes. In 2003 the polling was conducted in each of these countries, including Uzbekistan, following similar procedure and asking (40) similar questions to a limited group of (800) respondents.

As mentioned above, the first Central Asian country to be demographed on the "AsiaBarometer" was Uzbekistan. The main conceptual drive in conducting this survey was to compensate as much as possible for the lack of detailed sociological data and inaccessibility of ordinary perspectives, in order to offer a clearer and more quantifiable picture of the post-Soviet realities, needs,

hopes and aspirations, and also of traditional social institutions and methods that may help to deal with new and global demands. The axiom behind AsiaBarometer's approach to Uzbekistan, as with the other societies covered, is that both imagination and reliable data are required to perceive and understand the essence of the processes taking place in this region.

The main set of questions addressed in the cases of Uzbekistan and the other Asian societies were: firstly, what basic living conditions do residents of Uzbekistan experience in this transitional period? And secondly, do Uzbekistanis feel satisfied in their every-day lives? If not satisfied, what are their main concerns, frustrations, hopes and aspirations? More specifically, how do Uzbekistanis regard their present socio-economic conditions? What are their views with respect to their families, societies, states and the region as a whole? Are these views different from those held by people in the past? If so, how have views changed?

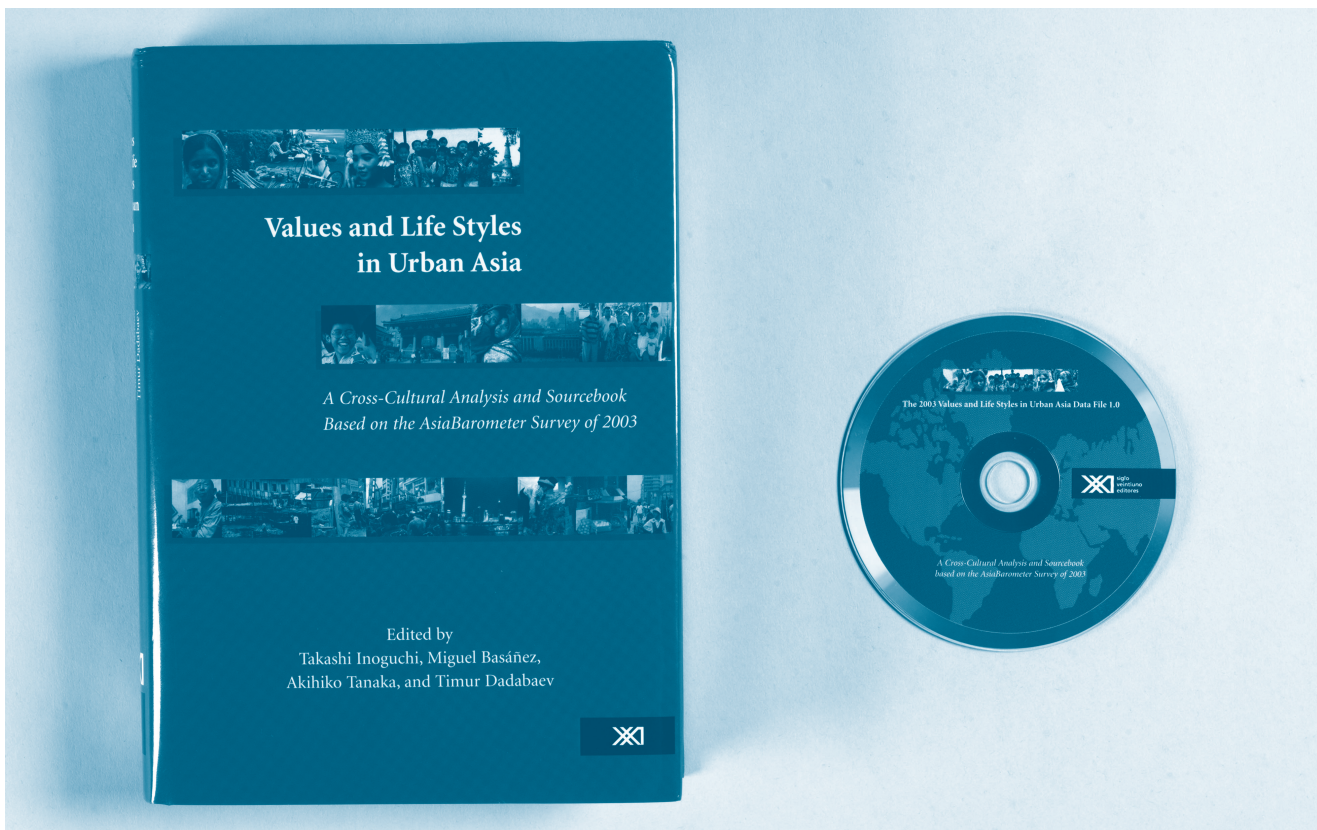
In more general terms, the project attempted to compare Asian societies, including Uzbekistan, and thereby draw a wider regional picture of contemporary Asian society.

Another significant feature of the project is that the questioning

and final analysis of the data-set was not conducted by "outsiders" but by regionally-based scholars in close collaboration with each other. In the process, the AsiaBarometer data-base has grown to become not just a compilation of vital data, but more importantly, a data-processing knowledge exchange in itself, eventually leading to a capacity-enrichment in all countries and institutions involved. As an outcome, the English-language volume *Values and Life-styles in Urban Asia : A Cross-cultural Analysis and Sourcebook Based on the AsiaBarometer Survey of 2003* (Takashi Inoguchi, Miguel Basanez, Akihiko Tanaka and Timur Dadabaev, eds., Mexico: Siglo, 2005) with CD-ROM attachment has been published, which includes not only articles interpreting the data but also the raw data itself (in SPSS format), a feature which will allow other scholars to compare their own perceptions of the data collected.

### "Central Asian Local Neighborhood Community - Mahalla" Data-base

Another data-set which is in the process of being developed is the one on Central Asian local neighborhood communities specifically focusing on the mahalla. The importance of this



project is also rooted in the same reasons for which the AsiaBarometer data-base has been started. The lack of data on local societies and indigenous structures in Central Asia leaves a huge gap to be filled in. While Central Asian societies are seeking new yet tradition-based forms of dealing with their challenges, little is known about the informal indigenous mechanisms and networks which played and still play a vital role in regional societies. These indigenous institutions often prove to be highly efficient vectors of communication and implementation, and offer many options in addressing social, economic and political issues, primarily at the community level. Data on these mechanisms and networks has till now not been properly collected and analysed, and so their implications and possibilities have remained poorly understood.

Methodologically, Mahalla data-base differs from AsiaBarometer in that it builds on the tremendous data-value of social demography by combining original polling with data collection from other regional sources on the local neighborhood community, and also with photographic and archival documentation, both historical and contemporary, on this topic. Eventually, it is planned that this project will feature year-by-year demographic surveys on the role of the mahalla in the Uzbek society, legal documents and relevant amendments to them regarding the status of the mahalla neighborhood community, statistical data on the number of mahallas in Uzbekistan, their structure and the amount of assistance they

provide to the local population. This data-base is also expected to include a detailed description of region-by-region differences between mahallas in various parts of Uzbekistan, details on the local sub-cultures of each of regions, photo and video documents (weddings, religious and other celebrations within communities), as well as a comprehensive bibliography of the literature published in Uzbekistan and Central Asia on this topic. Thus this project attempts to study the mahalla neighborhood community in the context of other social, religious and political institutions operating in the same geographical region. Ideally, the Mahalla project will become a space for students and younger scholars to receive their initial and, for logistical reasons, otherwise often unavailable information from an array of direct sources and use this data for further explorations. This work is already proceeding with help and assistance from local educational institutions in Uzbekistan, providing an academic forum for future research on the mahalla.

Eventually both AsiaBarometer (which is already in a developed state) and Mahalla data-bases are expected to be put on-line to enable scholars from Japan, Central Asia and internationally to take advantage of their findings. It is also planned that the present focus of both projects in Central Asian region on Uzbekistan will be widened and, with time, will include all Central Asian countries.

## Central Asian Studies in Japan

Komatsu Hisao

(Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo)

Central Asian studies in Japan have a rich historiography. The first serious work was undertaken in the 19th century by a young diplomat, Nishi Tokujiro. After working some years in the Japanese embassy in St. Petersburg, in 1880 he travelled extensively in Russian Turkestan. After returning to Japan he continued to study contemporary Central Asia, and in 1886 he published a book, *The Description of Central Asia*, which is not only the first attempt to introduce Central Asia to Japanese readers, but is also distinguished by its detailed analysis. In later years it was translated into Italian, however it had no successor.

It is true that during the 1930s and up till 1945 some Japanese learned societies and institutions conducted numerous studies of Central Asian affairs, dealing with political and economic conditions as well as nationality problems in Soviet Central Asia. However most of them were sponsored by the expansionist policy of the Japanese Empire. Their aim was not to understand Central Asia and its peoples, but to investigate the weak points of the Soviet Union which was supposedly the greatest threat to the Japanese Empire. Japan's defeat in the Second World War put an end to this research trend.

In contrast to this ephemeral strategic research trend, Japanese orientalists have made a sustained contribution to the development of various facets of Central Asian studies, among them its ancient and medieval history and culture. Using their excellent command of classical Chinese, as well as other philological approaches, Shiratori Kurakichi, Haneda Toru and their successors produced highly accomplished work, especially on the historical geography of pre-Islamic Central Asia (mainly Eastern Turkistan). Their research results gave rise to a consolidated school of Central Asian studies after the war. This trend also contributed to the spread of the historical idea of a "Silk Road" extending through Central Asia to Japan.

Since the 1970s some younger scholars have begun to make use of original Central Asian sources written in Persian, Turkic and other languages, and take greater interest in the Islamic period of Central Asian history. This trend produced remarkable work especially in Timurid and Xinjiang studies. Representing this trend, Mano Eiji introduced a new concept: understanding Central Asian history from within. As a specialist in Timurid studies he stressed the importance of the mutual relations between Northern steppes and the Southern oasis area in the development of Central Asian history, rather than the earlier "Silk Road theory" that emphasized the importance of East-West relations throughout history.

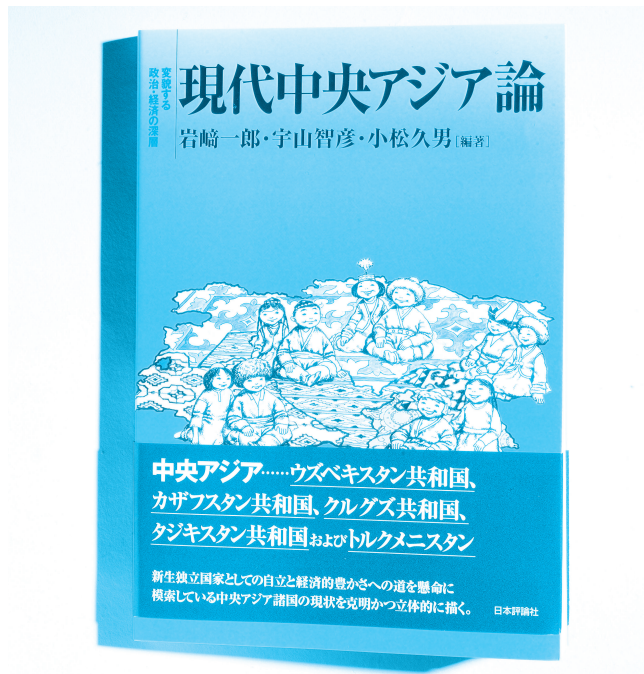
Japanese studies in the modern history of Central Asia have remained a marginal part of Oriental history. Since the 1980s, however, gradual developments in Islamic and Slavic studies have stimulated research on modern Central Asia to augment our historiographical coverage. The great changes in the former Soviet Union have also played a decisive role in the increasing interest in modern Central Asia and the rise of related studies. In our historiographical studies we find the following subjects amongst those researched by Japanese scholars: political relations between the Central Asian khanates and the Ottoman Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries, the Andijan uprising led by Dukch Ishan against Russian colonial rule in 1898, the popular revolts of 1916 which prevailed throughout Russian Turkistan, the reformist movement among Muslim intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century, especially the Alash Orda and the Jadid movements, Muslim national communism elaborated by Sultangaliev, the Basmachi movements against Soviet authorities, the National Delimitation in 1924 and others.

Until the mid-1980s, Soviet Central Asia was rarely studied, because access to primary source materials and the opportunity

to conduct fieldwork in Central Asia was extremely restricted for Japanese researchers as well as Western scholars. However the perestroika dramatically increased Japanese interest in Soviet Central Asia. It brought to light a great amount of source material and stimulated fresh publications that revealed unknown aspects of modern Central Asia. Since the 1990s a number of works on Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia have been published by younger researchers, dealing with nationality politics of the Soviet Union, national identity of Central Asian peoples, minority problems and so on. Amongst contemporary concerns, they treat such issues as the post-Soviet political system, the prospects of regional cooperation and economic integration, the resurgence of Islam, the great transformation in the Central Asian economies since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and ecological problems. Recent years have also seen the publication of ethnographical and social anthropological studies of Central Asia by Japanese scholars.

These scholarly developments document the great progress that Japanese studies on modern Central Asia have made over the last two decades. Although the specialists are relatively few in number, newly obtained source materials and field works make possible the promotion of studies and expand the scope of accessible research fields and specialist subjects. In the past decade, scientific exchange and cooperation with Central Asian institutions and scholars have made great progress, mainly thanks to individual efforts, and have begun to produce valuable results. At the same time, it should be noted that most recent research comes from younger scholars of various disciplines who have studied many years in Central Asian countries. Recently they published a new book, *Contemporary Central Asia: the Depth of Changing Politics and Economy* (eds. I. Iwasaki, T. Uyama, H. Komatsu, 2004), which provides the latest analysis of political and economic changes in Central Asia. An *Encyclopedia of Central Eurasia* is currently in preparation (scheduled for April 2005).

In view of the great improvement in research conditions for modern Central Asian studies, we hope for publication of many more monographs in the near future. Although historical studies have played a leading role in Central Asian studies, in order to deepen our understanding of Central Asia in historic change we need to elaborate a new interdisciplinary methodology for Central Asian area studies. It seems that comparative approaches with historical perspective are helpful in the first stage. And new researchers are required to go beyond the boundary of individual



disciplines such as Slavic, Islamic and Oriental studies.

## British Academic Caravan Returns to the Silk Road

Dr. Siddharth S. Saxena

(Cambridge Central Asia Forum and the UK Committee for Central and Inner Asia)

Central Asia has a mystical resonance in the British imagination, whether through the writings of the Orientalists or the biographers of the Great Game. The colonial withdrawal and Soviet takeover of the region instigated a steady decline in what was once a glorious tradition of scholarship of the region in Britain, as the access to it became restricted. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and liberalisation in China and Mongolia have removed barriers to research in Central and Inner Asia, but the UK academic community is only now beginning to fill this vacuum. In the last decade there have been some initiatives from within the UK (e.g. archaeological work at Merv in Turkmenistan, social anthropology in Central Asian states and Mongolia, research into the politics, international relations and security of Central Asia), and a considerable number of post-graduate dissertations have been, or are being, written on Central

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and Inner Asian subjects. It is now well recognised that the region has tremendous potential for academic research in the arts, humanities and social sciences, as well as being of strong contemporary commercial, political and strategic interest to the United Kingdom. The prospects for research into the archaeology, history, languages and literatures, art and material culture, and contemporary states and societies of Central Asia are exciting, especially when one considers the possibility of collaboration with scholars of the established academic tradition of the region. Central Asian research promises to generate findings that will be of intrinsic academic significance, and to stimulate comparative insights for the study of the surrounding regions. In Britain we are committed to direct collaboration with the colleagues in Central Asia, Russia and China as a priority, and hope to co-ordinate our activities with already well

developed initiatives in Japan, Europe and the United States.

The United Kingdom Committee for Central and Inner Asia ([www.oriental.cam.ac.uk/ccia](http://www.oriental.cam.ac.uk/ccia)) was formed in 2002 and its efforts are concentrated on promoting research within established disciplines, as well as encouraging new multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research on Central and Inner Asia. The three years of the Committee's existence demonstrate the high level of interest in the field among UK-based scholars and students, and suggest that there is a need to build on the work of the initial period to develop a longer term mechanism to support existing initiatives and to promote new work in the region.

Our activities have included two annual lectures given by Professor Denis Sinor, (Indiana University) titled 'A rediscovered world: Central and Inner Asia', and Prof. Franz Grenet (CNRS, Paris) titled 'From Samarkand to Xi'an: the Sogdian Self-Image'. We hosted the 47<sup>th</sup> Permanent International Altaistic Conference in Cambridge which was themed 'Tradition and Modernity in the Altaic World'. In the last three years we have given seed grants to more than eighty projects ranging from the Ethnomusicology of Uighur and Afghan music to conferences on the geopolitical strategies of the Central Asian states. Many of these have already resulted in monographs, publications and doctoral dissertations by both young and established scholars. We have hosted a number of scholars working on Central and Inner Asia related topics from abroad under our auspices. These include some Japan-based scholars, who have been instrumental in consolidating Japan-UK-Central Asia research collaboration. The majority of the funding has come through the generosity of the British Academy and the Research Councils of the United Kingdom as well as sources within the University of Cambridge.

The Committee sees the promotion of bilateral academic relations between the region and the UK as part of its primary purpose. This implies gathering and disseminating information about existing activities both there and here, and sharing this with those who need it. The first edition of the Central and Inner Asia Register of Experts and Interested Parties, maintained by the Cambridge Central Asia Forum, University of Cambridge, jointly with the UK Committee, was issued in June 2003. It seeks to be inclusive, listing not only those with professional academic research interests in the region, in particular research students, but also those in other disciplines in contact with colleagues in the countries in question. The Committee believes

that it will help to promote awareness of the region and to bring together those involved in research there. We have pooled information with the Centre of Contemporary Central Asia and the Caucasus at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

We provided a grant allocation in Central Asia to create a website in Russian providing details of academics working in the region. This exists in draft form and will be known as Academics of Central Asia ([www.a-c-a.info](http://www.a-c-a.info)). The Committee has established contact with a number of bodies in the region. The regional programme of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has asked us to assist in setting up a workshop as part of their "capacity-building" programme for young Central Asian women leaders. We have various links with the British Council in Tashkent (for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and Almaty (for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). We assist with finding UK contacts for academics from the region visiting under British Council umbrella. In Afghanistan we have joined forces with the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit which is establishing an academic library in Kabul, incorporating the books from the old British Institute in Kabul and the Society for the Protection of Afghan Culture and Heritage. The Afghan expedition was a joint effort between the National Museum of Ethnology, in Osaka, the Cambridge Central Asia Forum and The UK Committee. Faculty members and a graduate member from the University of Tokyo's Institute of Oriental Culture and the University of Cambridge participated in a study of social and institutional conditions and their impact on development in a post-conflict society.

Apart from Cambridge and SOAS, Oxford University has launched its own Central Asia society known as The Oxford Society for Central Asia (TOSCA) and is active in organising seminars and activities, while the University of Reading hosts the Centre for Euro-Asian Studies. The Royal Institute for International Affairs and the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London have fully fledged Central Asia focus programmes. The Chairman of the UK Committee is on the faculty of the University of Manchester, while the Universities of Birmingham, St. Andrews, Nottingham, Durham, Southampton as well as Goldsmith's College, University College, King's College, London School of Economics and Politics, the Institute of Ismaili Studies, The British Museum, the British Library and Westminster University in London all have active staff members and research groups involved in Central

Asia related research. The student community has also been very active, and its efforts preceded that of the Committee through formation of the UK Central Asia Graduate Network, which organises its own conferences and a Europe-wide Central Asia Research Network. Bodies like the Royal Asiatic Society, the Royal Institute for Asian Affairs and the Ancient India and Iran Trust have promoted academic and popular interest in the region and hold important archival material.

The recent impetus for academic interest in the region came through the nucleation of the Cambridge Central Asia Forum in 2001, which facilitated the formation of the Committee at the UK level. The Cambridge group is comprised of Anthropologists, Orientalists, Economists, Historians, Educationalists, Geographers, Archaeologists and Natural Scientists who work together on interdisciplinary projects and educational development in the region. We have been very lucky to host both regional visiting fellows and those from Japan who are collaborating with colleagues here on projects on the role of local community structures like Mahalla in Uzbekistan and development models in Afghanistan. More recently, Cambridge teams have been doing field work on projects such as those on the origins and role of cosmopolitanism in Bukhara, education reform in the Central Asian states, and economic policy directives in transition states, conservation of Biodiversity in Ferghana valley, as well as manuscript-based historical work.

We are delighted by the support we have received at individual and institutional levels as this is indicative of positive future for Central Asia related activity in the United Kingdom.



Bukhara and Cambridge: Ancient Academic Centres

## RICAS Activities

- The First Meeting of the Promotion of East Asian Studies was held at Institute of Oriental Culture, the University of Tokyo, on January 18-19, 2005. 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 Fortieth Meeting of Directors of Humanities and Social Sciences Documentation and Information Centers in the National Universities was held at Institute of Oriental Culture, the University of Tokyo, on February 4, 2005.
- The Asia Barometer Symposium was held at the Sanjo Conference Hall in the University of Tokyo on March 15-16, 2005.

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