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<td>発行年</td>
<td>1986-03-22</td>
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<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10502/477">http://hdl.handle.net/10502/477</a></td>
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Preface

This volume is a report on an international symposium held in March, 1984, on the theme of “Comparative Studies of Cities and Urbanization: Japanese Civilization in the Modern World.” The symposium was co-sponsored by the Japanese National Museum of Ethnology and the Senri Foundation, with the generous support of the Taniguchi Foundation. It was the second in a continuing series of symposia on the theme of “civilization” and its comparative relevance to Japan.

We wish first to express our gratitude to the Taniguchi Foundation for making possible this series of symposia. The Taniguchi Foundation, under the leadership of Mr. Taniguchi Toyosaburō, has supported a variety of international symposia on behalf of the National Museum of Ethnology, beginning in 1977 with a series on general topics in ethnology and anthropology. This new series on the study of civilization began in 1982 and is projected to continue over a period of ten years.

Some brief explanation of the aims of this series of symposia may be in order. At the heart of the project is the concept of “civilization” as it has been formulated by Umesao over a number of years. The theoretical framework which underlies this concept is touched upon in the Keynote Address in this volume, and further elaboration may be found in the first symposium report mentioned below, as well as in the various citations of Umesao’s writings which appear in the reports in this volume. Suffice it to note here that Umesao has been striving to shift the emphasis of the traditional disciplines of ethnology and anthropology by focusing on greater relevance to the modern world and by adopting a more interdisciplinary approach.

More specifically, this series of symposia has placed particular emphasis on the technique of comparison as a tool of analysis for understanding different civilizations. A second and equally important emphasis has been a focus on Japan as an object of comparison, in the hopes of advancing the field of Japanese studies as a whole.


The choice of cities as the theme for this second symposium emerged naturally from the debates conducted in the first symposium, in which issues of urbanism and urbanization appeared with surprising frequency. In terms of Umesao’s theory of civilization as well, the city is a logical starting point, since it constitutes a single massive “device” (sōchi), housing a myriad of complex “institutions” (seido). In the English language, the close linkage of cities with civilization is built into the very words: “civilization” is derived from the Latin civis, or citizen, and many theories of civilization equate the origins of the city with the beginning of civilization itself. Whatever the exact relationship of cities and civilization, a consideration of cities in
comparative perspective seemed a logical focus for this second in the series.

Following this second symposium, a third in the series has already taken place, in March 1985, on the theme of governmental institutions. The fourth symposium, for which arrangements are currently being made, will deal with economic institutions, while the fifth will focus on knowledge and education.

It would not be out of place to reiterate our thanks to Mr. Taniguchi Toyosaburō personally. From the beginning, he has shown a special understanding of “civilization studies” (Bunmeigaku) as a new international and interdisciplinary method. It is also at his insistence that the actual conduct of these symposia has stressed personal friendship and interaction as well as academic encounter. The participants shared both meals and lodging throughout the seven days of the symposium, and debates during the formal sessions were often following by more relaxed—but equally fruitful—exchanges on into the late evening.

We owe finally a word of deep appreciation to the staffs of the Senri Foundation and the National Museum of Ethnology who were responsible for the impeccable planning and execution of the symposium. Without such support, neither the symposium nor this publication would have been possible. In particular, we wish to thank Mr. Shōji Hiroshi for overseeing the detailed conference arrangements.

The Japanese-language version of this report has already appeared as Toshika no Bunmeigaku, edited by Umesao Tadao and Moriya Takeshi (Chūō Kōronsha, 1985). All translations of reports by the Japanese participants were done by Smith. The authors were consulted individually, and every effort was made to insure accuracy, but whatever inevitable errors of translation remain are the responsibility of the translator; those able to do so are urged to consult the published Japanese originals.

The Editors
Senri, Osaka
March, 1986