

“Silk Road Culture and Architecture” Lecture Series

For four years running, three times a year, Mukogawa Women’s University has presented the lecture series “The Preservation and Restoration of Our Country’s Modern Architecture” at The Industry Club of Japan Hall, near the Marunouchi exit of Tokyo Station. Since the Meiji Era, the introduction of modern architecture into Japan’s living spaces has led to the development of two cultural styles, Japanese and Western. Each style seems like a flip side of the other, yet both coexist in splendor.

Beginning this fiscal year (2015), we have added a new lecture series titled “Silk Road Culture and Architecture,” with lecture meetings planned for at least once a year. The Silk Road has a long, dynamic history of cultural exchange that has bound our country to the Mediterranean Sea. We’re looking forward to this new series.

Shigeyuki Okazaki
Professor, Mukogawa Women’s University

Even while epitomizing the expression of history itself, the words “Silk Road” conjure up an air of romance. Geographic references to silk and silk products are in the Book of Han, compiled during China’s Spring and Autumn Period in the early part of the seventh century B.C.E. During the Warring States Period two centuries later, the circulation of trade goods certainly expanded into surrounding regions. As silk became the star of East-West trade, Rome likely influenced Asia in profound ways. This interchange of East-West cultural assets worked like a turntable with respect to the effects they had on Asia, contributing significantly to cultural diffusion across borders regardless of the distances and disparities between states and peoples. Japan’s Shoso-in holds many of the treasures from this cultural splash.

Many of the ruins in the regions surrounding the core of the Silk Road are registered as World Heritage sites, and now attract global interest. Isn’t it time for the Japanese, who have been among the first to recognize the value of these remains and the most persistent in preserving the crown jewels of Silk Road culture, to take a closer look at this concentration of history and reflect on it?

Kosaku Maeda
Professor Emeritus at Wako University

The Silk Road inspires curiosity and a spirit of inquiry among people worldwide, not just among the Japanese. Because of Japan’s location at the eastern edge of the Silk Road, many Japanese people have gazed on it with longing. In the regions along the Silk Road, many civilizations have flourished just as dynasties have risen and fallen repeatedly, their names etched in history. The people of these regions not only adapted to diverse natural environments but also created rich, magnificent cultures.

The Silk Road has been a stage on which people have lived and died for thousands of years. Throughout, the Silk Road served as a route of exchange and commerce. With globalization the shout in the 21st century, these lecture meetings are a precious opportunity to reconsider how the Silk Road interlocked key parts of the world.

Kazuya Yamauchi
Head, Regional Environment Section
Japan Center for International Cooperation in Conservation
National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo, Japan

“Silk Road Culture and Architecture” Lecture Series #01

World Heritage Silk Road and Islamic Architecture

Date : February 28 (Saturday), 2015, 13:00~
Venue : The Industry Club of Japan Hall (Tokyo, Japan)
Lecturers : Mr. Kazuya Yamauchi (Head, Regional Environment Section, Japan Center for International Cooperation in Conservation, National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo, Japan)
Dr. Naoko Fukami (Adjunct Researcher, Waseda University, Japan)
Performers : Chalpasah (Japanese Afghanistan Music Duo)

This seminar, “World Heritage Silk Road and Islamic Architecture,” was the first in a new series of lecture meetings titled “Silk Road Culture and Architecture”. The seminar was held Feb. 28 (Saturday), 2015, at The Industry Club of Japan Hall, in the Marunouchi district of Tokyo. Many of the ruins identified in the regions that formed the core of the Silk Road are registered as World Heritage sites, attracting global interest. Isn’t it time for the Japanese, who have been among the first to recognize the value of these remains and among the most persevering in preserving the crown jewels of Silk Road culture, to take a closer look at this concentration of history and reflect on it? People have lived and died on the Silk Road stage for thousands of years. They not only adapted to diverse natural environments but also created rich, magnificent cultures. This lecture series addresses the long, dynamic history of cultural exchange that bound our country to the Mediterranean Sea via the Silk Road.

This first seminar was memorable, featuring guest lecturers Kazuya Yamauchi, head of the Regional Environment Section of the Japan Center for International Cooperation in Conservation at the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, and visiting research scholar Naoko Fukami of the Waseda University Organization of Islamic Area Studies. Also upon invitation, the duo Chalpasah (Keiichi Sato and Chisato Yagi) performed traditional music from Afghanistan.

The lecture meeting began with Chalpasah doing “Leili-Jan” (made famous by the late Afghan national singer Ahmad Zahir), an instrumental by rubab master Ustad Mohammad Omar, and popular tunes from the western Afghan city of Herat. Afghan music is a type of Persian music rich with meaning. Its iterations have influenced northern India and central Asia. Keiichi Sato played the rubab (Afghan stringed instrument of the lute family), accompanying Chisato Yagi’s singing voice and rhythms on the tonbak (goblet-shaped drum of Iran). Their music resounded through the hall.

Kazuya Yamauchi spoke of “The World of the World Heritage Silk Road.” He detailed the process of getting the “Silk Road: Routes Network of Chang’an—Tianshan Corridor” registered on the World Heritage List at the 38th World Heritage Committee meeting (June 15-25, 2014, Doha, Qatar). This region includes portions of the Silk Road and straddles three countries: China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Action to list the Silk Road as a World Heritage originated with a 2002 proposal to the United Nations and UNESCO by the late UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Ikuo Hirayama. During the 12 years before the listing, Japan supported the proposal through various activities. Yamauchi

described the natural environment and the human livelihoods pursued along the Silk Road, and introduced the more important of 33 cultural sites registered on the World Heritage List, including the Jiaohe castle ruins.

Naoko Fukami lectured on “Islamic Architecture of the Silk Road,” touching on basic ideas under four headings: “About the Silk Road,” “What Is Islamic Architecture?,” “History of Islamic Architecture Along the Silk Road,” and “Network Connections for Islamic Architecture.” Islamic architecture itself has not moved, but the migration of people, technology and information have spread it to various regions. Fukami pointed to traces of technology transfers involving arch nets and domes, wherever there was Islamic construction.

(Reported by Junko Morimoto)



Second-floor auditorium
at The Industry Club of Japan



Chalpasah duo performs traditional Afghan music



Mr. Kazuya Yamauchi



Dr. Naoko Fukami

“Silk Road Culture and Architecture” Lecture Series #02

The Gandhara Buddhist Ruins and Silk Road Merchants

Date : May 30 (Saturday), 2015, 13:00~
Venue : The Industry Club of Japan Hall (Tokyo, Japan)
Lecturers : Dr. Masaya Masui (Professor, Kyoto University, Japan)
Dr. Yutaka Yoshida (Professor, Kyoto University, Japan)
Performer : Mr. Ryohei Terada (Tuvan Music Performer)

This seminar, “The Gandhara Buddhist Ruins and Silk Road Merchants,” was the second in a new series of lecture meetings titled “Silk Road Culture and Architecture”. The seminar was held on May 30 (Saturday), 2015, at The Industry Club of Japan Hall, in the Marunouchi district of Tokyo. Guest lecturers were Kyoto University Graduate School professors Masaya Masui and Yutaka Yoshida. Also upon invitation, Ryohei Terada performed traditional throat-singing music from the Russian Federation Republic of Tuva.

The seminar opened with a Tuvan throat-singing (khoomei) performance by Ryohei Terada. The khoomei method stresses singing by controlling high harmonic overtones with the throat vocal cords. The rich sounds of Terada’s singing voice, accompanied by string melodies played on the igil and the doshpuluur, filled the hall.

Professor Masui’s talk, “Investigating and Preserving/Restoring Gandhara Buddhist Ruins,” introduced us to the work going on at the Gandhara ruins, the focus at Pakistan’s Ranigat site with which he has been involved since 1983. The efforts not only deal with the contents of international archaeological digs but also the problems of excavation site management, restoration and preservation techniques, and academic research. The work is multinational rather than an example of Japanese team research alone.

Professor Yoshida lectured on “The Identity of Sogdian Traders Who Supported the Silk Road.” Sogdians were an ancient Iranian people of a region centered in today’s Samarkand, Uzbekistan. They prospered by doing business in castle towns near the Silk Road. Introducing various documents and artifacts, Yoshida characterized the Sogdians as traders. He described their writings, items traded, and their connection with Japan.

(Reported by Junko Morimoto)



Dr. Shigeyuki Okazaki



Mr. Ryohei Terada performs



Dr. Masaya Masui



Dr. Yutaka Yoshida



Second-floor auditorium at The Industry Club of Japan

“Silk Road Culture and Architecture” Lecture Series #03

Shaping of the Silk Road West-East Connection

Date : February 27 (Saturday), 2016, 13:00~
Venue : The Industry Club of Japan Hall (Tokyo, Japan)
Lecturers : Dr. Kosaku Maeda (Professor Emeritus, Wako University, Japan)
Dr. Yasuyoshi Okada (Professor, Kokushikan University, Japan)
Performers : Ms. Pouri Anavian (Persian Santur Musician)
Ms. Dalia Anavian (Guide to Persian Culture, Music and History)

This seminar, “Shaping of the Silk Road West-East Connection,” was the third in a series of lecture meetings titled “Silk Road Culture and Architecture”. The seminar was held on February 27 (Saturday), 2016, at The Industry Club of Japan Hall, in the Marunouchi district of Tokyo. Guest lecturers were Kosaku Maeda (professor emeritus, Wako University) and professor Yasuyoshi Okada (Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq, Kokushikan University). Also upon invitation, traditional Persian music was performed by Pouri Anavian (Persian santur musician) with Dalia Anavian serving as our guide to Persian culture, music and history.

The seminar began with traditional pieces performed on the Persian santur by Pouri Anavian. The santur is a 72-string-beat instrument shaped like a trapezoidal box. It is played by striking metallic strings with narrow mallets. The instrument is said to have developed into the piano after it circulated in Europe. Dalia Anavian introduced santur history and stories behind the music.

Professor Maeda lectured on the “Journey of Heracles: Encounter between East and West.” Beginning with an introduction of his many years of involvement with the excavation research, preservation, and restoration of the Bamiyan ruins (central Afghanistan), Maeda described how the Shukongoshin statue in Hokke-do Hall at Todaiji Temple was modeled. He said close analysis of drawings engraved on images and coins excavated from various historic-ruin sites indicates a process by which the figure of the mythical Greek hero Heracles transformed into Shukongoshin as travelers carried images of Heracles eastward along the Silk Road.

Professor Okada talked about “Comparative Dome Architecture Theory: Rome and the Silk Road.” A variety of shapes emphasizing the masonry-piled Roman pendentive and Islamic squinch domes were shown. He commented on clues to discovering influential relationships between the Roman and Silk Road worlds, holding up examples of dome remains from Jordan, Syria and Iran.

(Reported by Junko Morimoto)



Pouri Anavian performs on the santur.



Dalia Anavian provides commentary.



Dr. Kosaku Maeda



Dr. Yasuyoshi Okada



Introduction of the santur, a traditional Persian musical instrument.