

# Calligraphy and Court Culture in Premodern Japan

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## Sponsored by the

**Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University**

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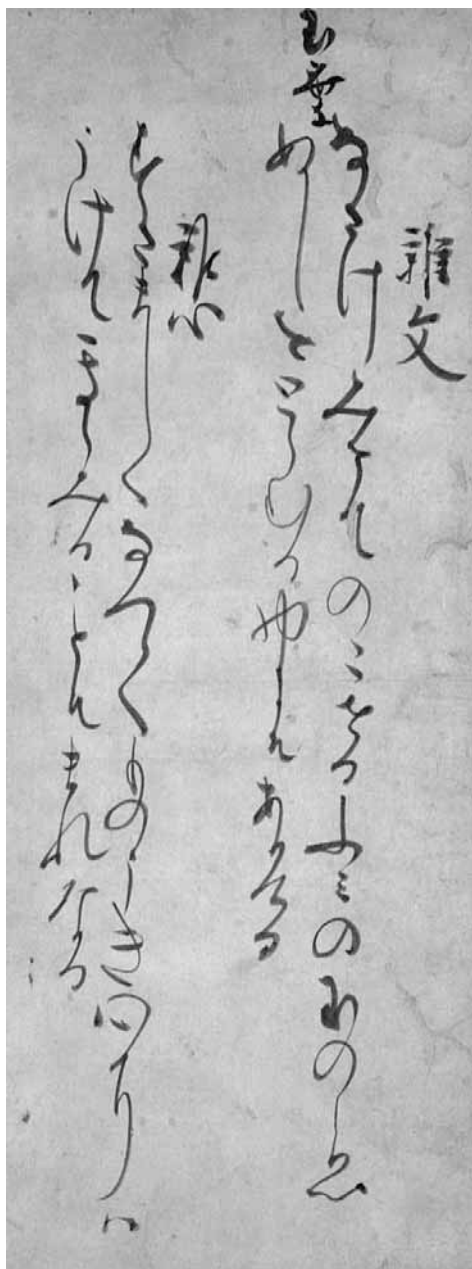
## Overview of project:

This innovative research project will be conducted at various levels of scholarly interaction related to the study of Japanese calligraphy. It will support individual and collective research projects, the development of new courses at the University of London and the international program at Ritsumeikan, as well as colloquies and international symposiums to be held in Kyoto and London. A fundamental goal of the project is to introduce the art of Japanese calligraphy to students and specialists in the West. Although calligraphy is one of the most important traditional arts in the East Asian tradition, it has been neglected even as other related areas of study such as tea culture and performance arts are receiving serious scholarly attention. This project also aims at publishing previously unknown material in both book and online formats.

Workshops and an international symposium are planned to help establish research networks and publicize the findings of this research projects. We are planning an international conference in September 2006, to be held at Ritsumeikan, which will bring together prominent specialists from Japan and abroad to discuss issues related to the history of Japanese calligraphy. Various publications are also planned, including the publication by of a single-author monograph on Heian court calligraphy by John Carpenter in 2006, and a conference proceedings volume in Japanese in early 2007. We are also planning to create a small specialist bilingual catalogue of the *shinkan* (imperial calligraphy) in the Fujii Eikan Bunko collection, which has recently been entrusted to Ritsumeikan University.

## Research Visits to Calligraphy Collections

A crucial first stage of the project is to make research visits to study and photograph works of Japanese calligraphy in public and private collections in Japan, Europe and the USA. Needless to say, Kyoto, as the center of Japanese court culture for over a millennium, has the largest concentration of materials related to calligraphy in both public and private collections. The Kyoto National Museum is also the repository for many rare materials owned by area temples. Research visits will also be made to view other important collections in Tokyo and other areas of Japan. Though the number and size of collections of premodern calligraphy in the Europe and the USA is comparatively limited, still there are several important works outside Japan that should be brought to the attention of specialists.



Calligraphy by Emperor Fushimi, *Hirosawa-gire*.  
Fujii Eikan Bunko Collection, Ritsumeikan.

### Digital Archive

As part of this project, we shall create a bilingual digital archive of selected works of calligraphy for teaching and research purposes. This will be created with the technical support of ARC in connection with government sponsored projects. An immediate goal of the project will be to acquire a good selection of high-resolution images usable for digital projection.

This JLAC project is envisioned as a long-term, ongoing project, with images being added to the site when feasible and permission can be granted. In many cases, museums and institutions already have their own websites or online digital archives, and in such cases this project will create an effective links. The public interface for the digital archive will be the Sainsbury Institute website at [www.sainsbury-institute.org](http://www.sainsbury-institute.org). Part of the project will involve creating a digital collection of the excellent collection of *shinkan* (imperial calligraphy) in the Fujii Eikan Bunko collection and other collections in Kyoto.

## **Postgraduate Course at SOAS on Japanese Calligraphy**

Beginning in January 2005, a new course 'Japanese Calligraphy: History and Reading Practice' will be offered by the Department of Art and Archaeology, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Dr Carpenter will be the primary tutor, with visiting scholars occasionally conducting seminar sessions. The seminar aims at introducing students to the role of brush writing in the history of Japanese culture with focus on the crucial role calligraphy played in the artistic tradition even into modern times. Lectures and discussions will focus on the aesthetic dimensions of calligraphy, and text-image interaction in paintings and prints of premodern Japan.

The course will also have a practical skills dimension in that every week will include reading practice and guided readings in deciphering of premodern scripts, with the aid of specialist dictionaries and cursive-characters and *kana* (phonetic syllabary). Students will learn the basic techniques of deciphering premodern texts.

Topics will include:

1. Written Word as Talisman: Scriptoria of the Ancient Capitals
2. The Wang-Style in Heian Court Circles
3. The Emergence of Kana and *Wayô* Calligraphy
4. 'Scattered writing' and Decorated Papers
5. *Bokuseki*: Calligraphy by Zen Priests
6. Calligraphy and Portraiture in Medieval Times
7. Kyoto Renaissance: Tea Circles, Koetsu and the Rinpa School
8. Late Edo Literati Calligraphy and Painting
9. Image-Text Interaction in Ukiyo-e
10. Calligraphy in the Modern Era
11. Viewing sessions at British Museum, British Library and other UK Collections