



# SHIMADAI-JUKU



The *hannari* (gently radiant) Kyoto Shimadai-juku, which began in 2004, is a unique gathering held three times a year in a traditional wooden building that has housed more than 10 generations of silk traders. The event offers Kyoto University researchers a public forum to talk plainly about important issues relating to daily life and the global environment, such as water, soil and food. The researchers share the floor with Kyoto citizens from all walks of life, including farmers, artisans and artists, local government officials and staff from environmental groups. The citizens express their ideas, offer their perspectives and share their experiences of daily life in their own words — words that remind the researchers to question the relevance to the wider community of their hard-earned knowledge of science and technology. Comment and lively debate follow the initial talks from both sides. The speakers' voices mingle with those of the audience and together present a breadth of perspective that is rare in formal academic gatherings.

I first volunteered my services as a photographer to the Shimadai-juku in 2007. Most of the pictures shown in these pages were taken at a gathering

## Audience

held in December 2008 on the theme of *awasewaza* (techniques in harmonious combination). The main speakers could not have been more different: Professor Kazuhiro Mae, a molecular scientist at the forefront of modern technology at Kyoto University, and Mr Kihachi Tabata, a Kyoto *yuzen* artist and dyer, who applies a resist-dyeing technique to designs sketched by hand on kimono silk. Fascinated by their stories, I visited Mae at his laboratory and Tabata at his atelier to discover more about their work. The photographs from these visits are shared here in the spirit of the Shimadai-juku, which has encouraged me — as I am sure it has encouraged others — to look again at the world I thought I knew.

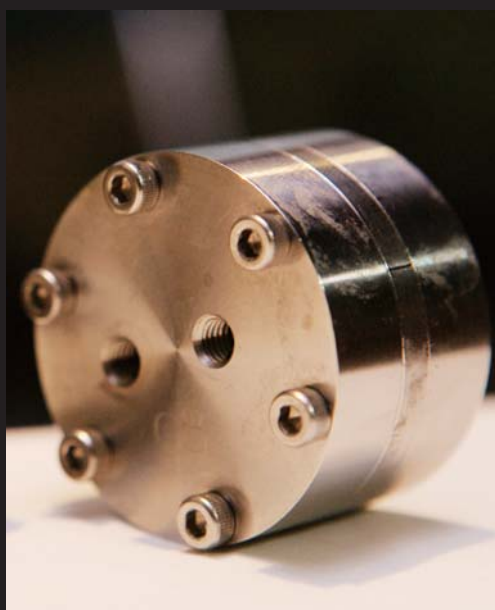
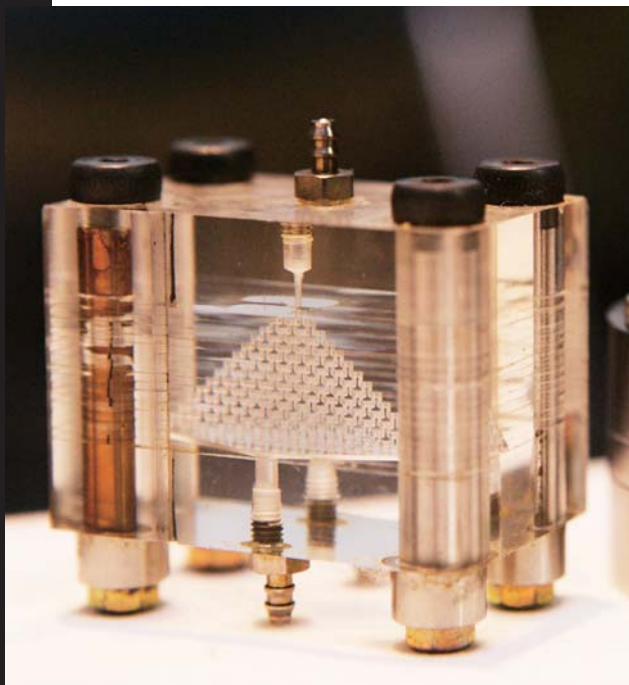
The Shimadai-juku is described here in English for the first time to introduce it to an international audience. It is difficult to show what goes on at the Shimadai-juku in pictures alone, given its emphasis on verbal communication and dialogue, but I hope the expressions on the faces of the speakers and audience members convey something of the atmosphere of this special gathering.

Kenji Yamamoto  
Kyoto, 2009

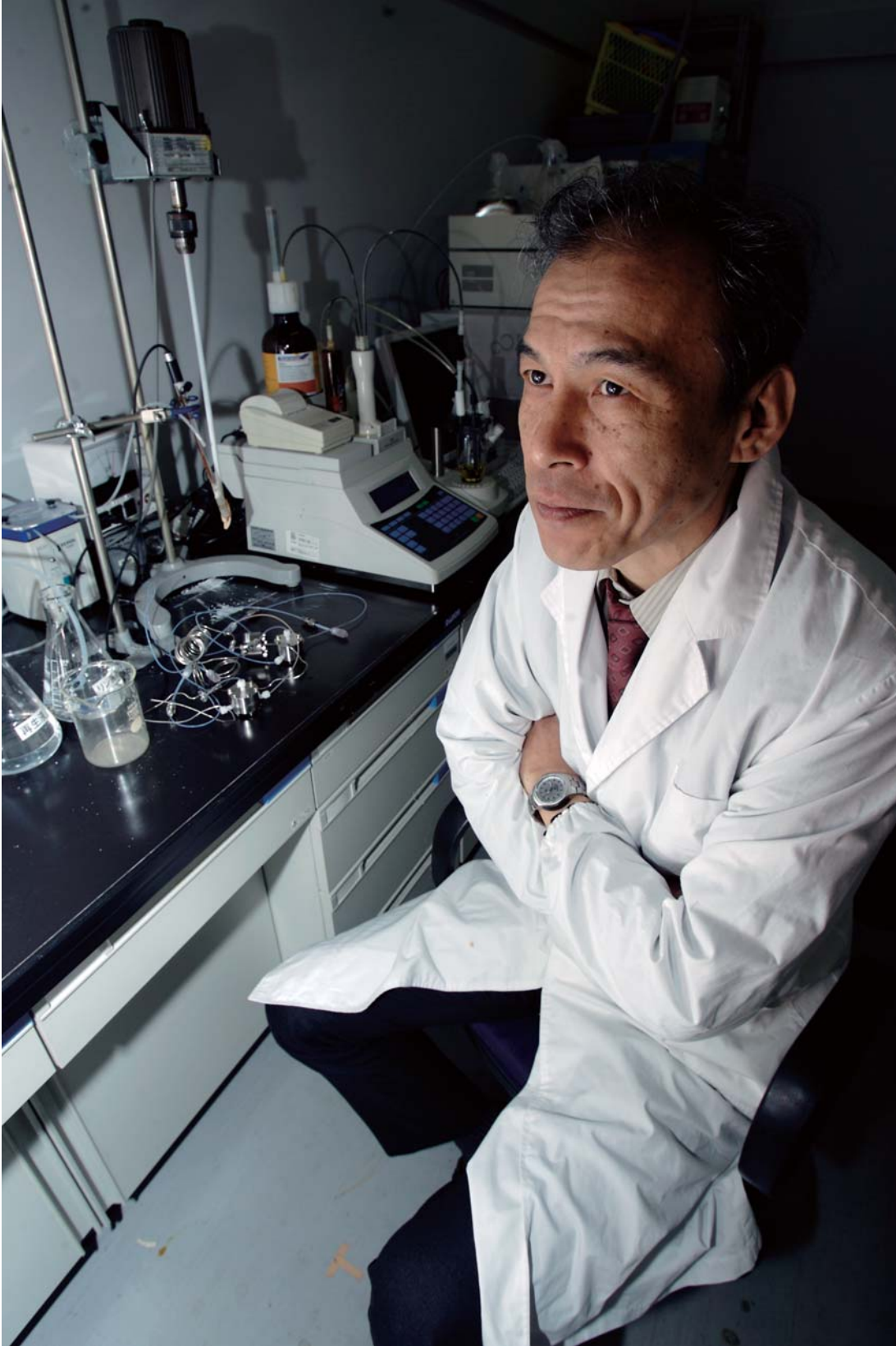


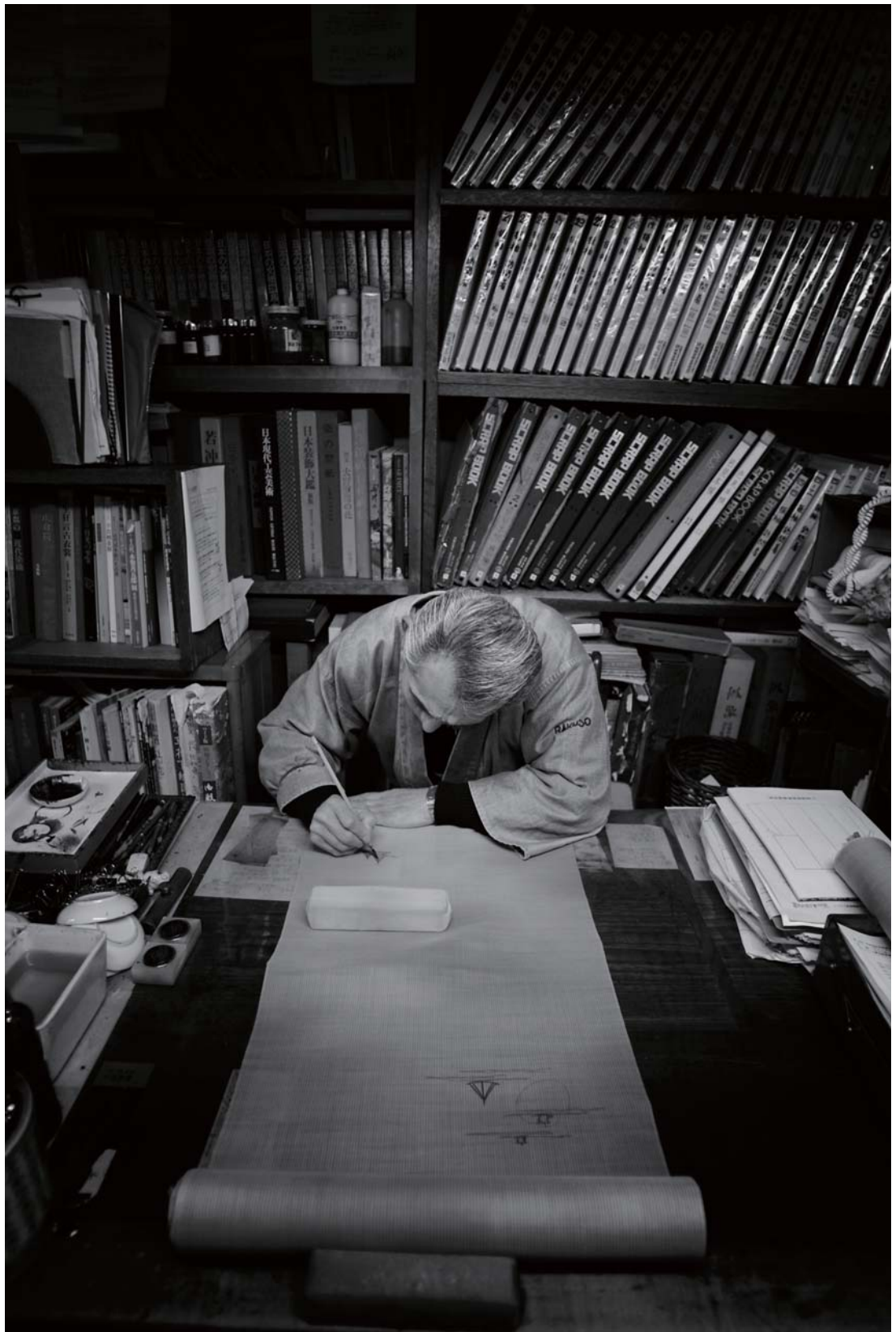
# KAZUHIRO MAE

Professor Kazuhiro Mae, shown in his laboratory (right), speaks in *Kawachi-ben*, the dialect of his native southern Osaka, which is brisk and bold to the ears of outsiders. His animated and top-speed presentation about the micro reactor he engineered and patented (shown left and below) both dazzled and dizzied the Shimadaijuku audience.



This tiny device fits snugly into the palm of a hand. Any two reactant chemicals passed through it can be made to mix perfectly and instantaneously. Small quantities of agents are sufficient for this process, making it energy efficient and eliminating waste. Mae dreams of a time when this technology might be widely used in small, local chemical production facilities, replacing today's huge production plants that consume vast amounts of energy and resources and generate hazardous waste.

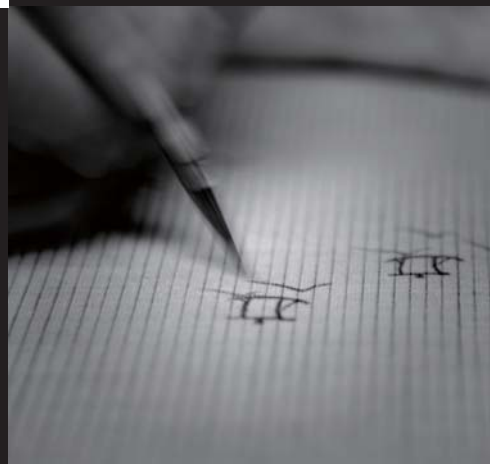




These photographs show Mr Kihachi Tabata at work, sketching a traditional motif used in Kyoto *yuzen* dyeing. They were taken at his atelier, located between the Imperial Palace and Nijo castle, a former stronghold of the shogunate. Both of these institutions extended patronage to Tabata's ancestors. The atelier is situated above the clear ground water which is indispensable for dyeing *yuzen*.



The eldest son in the fifth generation of a family of Kyoto *yuzen* dyers, Tabata fled his “nosy Kyoto neighbours” for a time to study at Waseda University in Tokyo before returning to study *Nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) at the Kyoto City University of Arts. Today he preserves the rich tradition of Kyoto *yuzen* by ensuring the kimonos he creates “combine harmoniously” with their wearers, taking into account details as subtle as the shade of the wearer’s lipstick. His mission is to “make the wearer bloom”.



# KIHACHI TABATA





## Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to thank Professor Kazuhiro Mae and Mr Kihachi Tabata for their generous cooperation both during and after the Shimadai-juku gathering highlighted in this article. I also thank the organisers of the Shimadai-juku and the kind owner of Shimadai for making these gatherings possible. I am grateful to the co-editors of *Sansai*, Professor Toshio Yokoyama and Associate Professor Tracey Gannon, for their patient assistance in preparing the English text of this article.

**Kenji Yamamoto** is a freelance commercial photographer living in Kyoto, who volunteers his services as a self-styled 'eco photographer'. His photographs are featured in *Yoshino no sato no surōfūdo* [Slow Food in a Village in Yoshino] (Heibonsha, 2002) and *Kyoto jitensha seikatsu* [Bicycle in Kyoto] (Mitsumura suiko shoin, 2004). His work for Kyoto University extends beyond the Shimadai-juku, to the mountain village of Hong Ha in Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam, where he is currently helping researchers from Kyoto University and Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry document the activities of a group of women learning to weave *dzeng* textiles, traditionally produced by women of the Taoi ethnic minority group in the central highlands of Vietnam.