

Introduction

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Introduction

The ancient capital of Japan, Kyoto, takes great pride in its millenary tradition and its many craft industries, such as ceramics, silk dyeing and weaving, lacquerware, fans, as well as sweets, which have prospered for a long period of time. However, this long tradition is now facing a period of drastic transition. Some sectors are suffering from the shortage or even the complete lack of raw materials as well as the dissolution of craftsmanship and the difficulty in finding successors. The transformation of the market system and the shift in consumers' demands also pose vital questions about the possibility of maintaining traditional techniques and transmitting them to posterity. In recent years, not only the quantity, but also the quality of traditional crafts is said to be steadily declining.

In the face of such a critical situation, our team research project established three viewpoints in order to look back at the past, to investigate the present problems, and to open the way for possible breakthroughs in the future. Firstly, critical reexaminations of traditional techniques and hand skills are indispensable to ascertain if their survival in the future is feasible. Secondly, investigations into art and technical history alone will not suffice; multidisciplinary researches on the chain of techniques, market structure of circulation, sociological surveys into the commercial conventions and familial structure, as well as critical reassessment of administrative measures and their historical modifications, must be taken into account. Thirdly, the transformation which the so-called arts and crafts had to undergo during the modernization period from the mid-nineteenth century must be clarified in the cross-cultural context of commercial exportation. The so-called "Kyoto tradition" turns out to be less a matter of continuity than an issue of discontinuity resulting from the "invention of a tradition" which the Kyoto arts and crafts had to experience in order to catch up with Western modernity.

In order to see the specificity of the Kyoto tradition, one must make comparative studies with other domestic local industries as well as with competing foreign counterparts. At the same time, the truth of "tradition" must be revealed in confrontation with the avant-garde movement which denies tradition. The validity and limits of such binary oppositions and conventional differentiations in the categories of analytical tools such as fine arts vs. arts and crafts, handmade vs. mechanical production, studio vs. enterprise management, craftsmen vs. artists have

to be critically examined in order to achieve a global perspective of Kyoto craft industries as a living urban tradition.

This is why we welcomed into our team research project not only specialists and scholars in traditional arts and crafts, but also artists and craftsmen themselves, as well as those who are involved with administrative work in the promotion of traditional crafts. Critical commentaries by contemporary artists and designers led to animated discussions. Prior to the international symposium, a portion of these presentations was bound into a volume and distributed to the participants from abroad. It was our hope that these materials would be a source of information for the foreign participants as they developed their critical ideas on the present state of affairs.

It is true that the Kyoto tradition must be fostered by the people living in Kyoto and directly involved in it. And yet a closed domestic circle is not sufficient. Foreign perspectives, critical observations from abroad, and active participation of non-Japanese in the field are essential factors for the tradition to rejuvenate. Encounters with different value judgments, exposure to unexpected and unorthodox insights are keys for reactivating the Kyoto craftsmen tradition. Kyoto, as an international city of culture, sees as its task to respond to voices coming from afar, and then to draw the self portrait of its future, going beyond the watchful expectations of the rest of the world.

By including many participants from abroad with rich experience and deep insights into the Japanese tradition, one of the goals of this symposium was to go beyond the limits of domestic discussions. The variety of viewpoints and comparative studies presented here will hopefully help readers to develop a wider perspective and to gain deeper recognition of the specificity of the aesthetic values and culture of Kyoto, a world heritage. In sum, I hope that the ideas and alternatives presented in this volume will encourage and suggest new directions to explore in order to overcome the stagnation of the arts and crafts tradition in present-day Kyoto. Instead of following the path of the ancestors, as an ancient poet wrote, we must search for the path that our ancestors strove to find.

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