

Chapter 7

Supplement for Chapter 6: The Wisdom of Traditional Kyoto Culture

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As the consequences of globalization, reductionist philosophy and excessive individualism are being traced back to the development of certain Western ideals, Eastern values which are deeply rooted in its historical tradition are being reconsidered. These ideals were first developed in India and made their way into the ancient capitals of Nara and Kyoto via China and Korea. Zen is a good example of this cultural importation. Manami Oka's essay explores how the Eastern intellectual trends developed historically while situating the role of Kyoto culture in a global context. Oka investigates how the city as a whole confronted and adapted to continental influence. Throughout its history, Kyoto has benefited from its natural surroundings. Much of its cultural development was born out of the wisdom that people gained through their adoration of nature. In sharing their natural resources, the people of Kyoto have tried to consider what they should and should not do.

The religious festivals that were performed in Buddhist temples and shrines enhanced the wisdom that was gained through single-minded nature worship. They also functioned as a link between commerce and aristocratic culture while forming the identity of the local people.

The Yasurai festival of the Imamiya shrine is a good example of a procession that is intended to ward off pestilences. Through these activities, the local people increased their awareness towards various diseases that were circulating at the time. The shrine also promoted the Tanabata festival that benefited merchants who specialized in designing elaborate clothing. The merchants expressed their gratitude toward the gods by producing gifts that were submitted as offerings. These

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merchants were able to gather together and humbly perform the prescribed rituals of worship.

One idea that can be promoted from Kyoto is the importance of transmitting specialized aesthetic skills. The Kyoto artisans have managed to develop a productive system that emphasizes coexistence with nature. Due to the influence of logical positivism and an overemphasis on individualism, nature began to be viewed as something to be conquered around the time of the industrial revolution. Since religion started to be viewed as something unscientific, its importance diminished in the local community and “the individual” became estranged. Fortunately, the merchants and artisans of Kyoto maintained their traditions because they were faithful to the wisdom that their ancestors had accumulated. They understood that they could not afford to be distracted by short-sighted individualistic goals. Some of the traditions of Kyoto may seem to be unscientific, so it is necessary to examine why these customs and traditions have survived despite the flux in the social fabric of Japanese society.

Oka has analyzed the role of women as transmitters of culture and wisdom within the local community. They are responsible for instructing children about ethics and morality and have frequently introduced important innovations. When devising a division of labor, the women of Kyoto have chosen to play an active role outside of the household. Their success often resulted from altering the status quo.

Recently, people have begun to examine the role that diversity plays in the process of creation. Men and women are biologically different so they are inspired to create unique forms of art. Drawing on feminine inspiration, the women of Kyoto have definitely enhanced the creative process. It is not an exaggeration to say that the women of Kyoto have cultivated profound knowledge that they accumulated through the ages and have applied it to business. The concept of *en* plays an essential role in bringing people together. Also, the recognition that the individual is fortunate because basically he or she is “allowed to live in this world” gives one a sense of consolation and humility. The wisdom of such trust and humility are some aspects of wisdom that Kyoto could offer the world today.