

## Kyoto's Cultural Autonomy: A Historical Perspective

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Kyoto, as the historical capital of Japan, has always insisted on going its own way. When the centre of power shifted under the Tokugawa shogunate, Kyoto continued to retain a good deal of its autonomy and circumvent the monopoly of power emanating from Edo (now Tokyo). In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Date Masamune sent an illegal diplomatic mission to Europe in defiance of the Sakoku (closed country policy of the Shogun). Date, better known as the *One-Eyed Dragon of Oshu* was the founder of Sendai city and had a turbulent relationship with the Tokugawa government, and sent a group of 180 people as form of embassy to Mexico, the Philippines, Spain and Rome. The group returned with many gifts including three precious Gobelin Tapestries, woven in Paris. Every July, these tapestries (currently in replica) are paraded through the streets of Kyoto at the front of the *Niwatori Boko* as part of the Gion Festival and a reminder of Kyoto city's long history of pushing for autonomy from centralized power.

My interest in the study of Kyoto, focuses on the late twentieth century, but the echoes of Edo era defiance are still to be heard. Indeed from the Meiji period, Kyoto developed its own distinctive culture and the history of Kyoto University and Yoshida Dormitory is an important aspect of what made Kyoto culturally unique in relation to the rest of Japan. Kyoto was the centre of Japanese counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was the destination of choice for beatniks and other dropouts from the post-war generation. Thanks to autonomous and self-governing institutions such as Yoshida Dormitory, Kyoto University's campus became a centre for performance and meeting spaces where students, artists, and others could get involved in political debates, play music or simply party and interact with one another. Clashes with University authorities formed an important part of pushing the culture forward, although not often to extremes as when students barricaded themselves into the campus in the summer of 1969, leading to violent clashes with the police. Even under the under extreme conditions of a full-scale campus occupation, students organised music events and festivals the Bari-Sai of 1969 (Barricade-Matsuri or Barricade Festival).

In a 1971 special issue focusing on Kyoto as a revolutionary city (revolutionary in the cultural sense) Kyoto's reputation as a counterculture capital, the magazine *Heibon Punch* described the area around Kyoto's campus as representing Japan's San Francisco. This drew the connection between counter-culture in Kyoto and the hippy movement in the USA. In terms of Japan's music scene Kyoto University was the place to be in the 1970s. Inspired by the Newport Folk Festivals in the USA, Hideki Kimura (Ki-Yan) established a series of music festivals at Seibu Kōdō (Kyoto University's Western Auditorium, it is the old looking building next to Kyoto University Renais Coop Cafeteria and Bookstore.) Ki-yan became fascinated by the American hippy and folk movement and wanted to bring that festival culture to Kyoto. He named the events Mojo West which continued through the 1970s. One of his first big events was held on 31 December 1970, titled the *FUCK 70* event it was an all-night heavy rock festival held at Seibu Kōdō. As the title indicates it was a defiant event to counter the annual NHK concert broadcasts but also as a criticism of *EXPO 70* held in Osaka that year. Thanks to Ki-yan Kyoto University became an important venue not only for national but also international acts. He brought such artists as Frank Zappa, the Stranglers, Talking Heads, and Tom Waits to Kyoto. remained an important space for experimental theatre and lectures on radical politics, inter-mixed with the experimental rock bands.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is still important that young people have autonomous spaces to organise and develop their own culture. The historical traditions of Kyoto's autonomy are clear to see in the city's annual events calendar such as the parading of illicit good as the Gobelin Tapestries. Indeed, the cultural importance of the Gion Festival is recognised as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. In modern rock music, the festival culture on Kyoto University's campus did not always work in harmony with university authorities, but it created a valuable cultural legacy of Kyoto city that should be celebrated. Yoshida Dormitory is an important centre for the protection and development of Kyoto's counter-culture and I hope that you, new students and residents, will make your own unique contribution to it.