



Roppongi Art Night 2014
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Culture and the Future of Tokyo

Tokyo Vision for Arts and Culture

Tokyo is a city steeped in history and filled with diverse culture. Foreign tourists are surprised to discover that modern and traditional culture coexist here. With the aim of strongly developing Tokyo's distinct culture and values into the "Tokyo brand" and promoting the brand domestically and abroad, and establishing Tokyo as a truly culturally mature city, we have formulated a new cultural vision composed of eight strategies.

With a history spanning over 400 years from the establishment of the Edo Shogunate, behind the culture of Tokyo lays the traditional Japanese spirit. Driving the modernisation and westernisation of Japan, Tokyo imported the most advanced forms of arts and culture through exchange with countries around the world, further developing them into forms all its own. As a result, Tokyo has become a city of culture that is diverse and complex.

Today, Tokyo attracts global attention as a source for new trends in creative industries such as *anime* and *manga*, fashion and design. While these cultural and creative products, standouts on the global market, are extremely contemporary and cosmopolitan in nature, the traditions and culture developed by Japan and Edo (Tokyo) over the course of history are still deeply rooted at the core.

In 2020, Tokyo will host the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In order to return to the original principles of the father of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, and fuse sports with culture and education, we will advance preparations for an arts festival of unprecedented scale and content. It

will be an event that welcomes the world and can only take place in Tokyo – where tradition meets modernity and East meets West.

Arts and culture are indispensable for the future of urban development. In recent years, arts and cultural programmes implemented in fields such as education, welfare, community revitalisation, and cultural tourism have produced significant results all over the world, and the scale and social impact of these programmes are attracting a great deal of attention. We will strengthen cooperation with major overseas cultural agencies and organisations engaging in such advanced initiatives, proactively develop international arts and cultural exchanges in a variety of areas, including artist-in-residence programmes and art by those with disabilities, and promote city diplomacy in the field of culture.

Japan will soon become an ultra-aging society, one without precedent anywhere in the world, and its population will begin to decline. This is an issue that many nations will eventually face. We must face this reality head-on, and build a completely new kind of mature society. The creativity and innovative spirit inherent to arts and culture will become an important key to this transformation.

Taking the opportunity presented by the Games, we will collaborate with cities all over the world. By opening up the future starting with culture, we will make Tokyo the best city in the world, a city filled with inspiration and dynamism; and pass this legacy on to the next generation. This is central to Tokyo's cultural vision.

Tokyo: A Diverse and Profound Cultural City

Diversity of culture cultivated through history

Tokyo is a city full of diverse cultures. In recent years, Tokyo has become known as a trendsetter for new cultures, including the latest fashion, design, and *anime*. However, international tourists who visit Tokyo with such impressions may be surprised to see next to new cultures the wealth of ancient shrines and temples, and many traditional arts and culture, including *noh* and *kabuki*, and *rakugo*, as well as traditional craftwork and festivals.

While Tokyo accounts for over half of the sales of the software and information industries in Japan, it also has a concentration of cultural institutions for the traditional performing arts, such as Kabuki-za and the National Noh Theatre.

Tokyo's concentration of various cultural elements is also manifested in the city's composition. There are many culturally distinct towns such as Harajuku, Akihabara, and Asakusa, each displaying a unique dynamism.

Tokyo's culture is often described as a comparison of contrasting elements such as "the coexistence of the traditional and the modern." However, this does not say it all. Indeed, the unique Japanese sensibilities displayed in areas in the global limelight such as fashion, design and pop culture, have actually been cultivated against the backdrop of tradition. Tradition and the modern in Tokyo thus have a spatio-temporal continuity.

Since time immemorial, Japan has suffered from numerous natural disasters such as earthquakes and flooding, and each time the Japanese people have strived diligently to reconstruct their lives. The natural bounty of the ocean, mountains, rivers, and land has been harvested through the respectful approach to nature taken by the Japanese and their persistent efforts to live. This history gave birth to the spirituality of *"Michi wo kiwameru (mastering the way)"* and ritual performances praying for good harvests.

Moreover, within this distinct climate of the country, while taking in outside cultures of both the east and west from time to time, Japan created, matured and developed own traditional culture. The spirituality of

accepting various things, having respect for nature and all creation, and seeking integration and harmony within diversity lies in the source of Japan's creative culture.

Cultural bonds among citizens

The culture of Tokyo carries on the cultural traditions that flourished in the Kansai region, such as Kyoto and Osaka, from the medieval era through early-modern times. Temple architecture, kana literature, picture scrolls, tea ceremonies, and *noh* plays are some of the best known examples. Edo, the former name for Tokyo, was a city of *samurai* warriors but it maintained peace for a long period of time, a distinct culture of the merchants thrived—particularly famous are kabuki theatre and *ukiyo-e* prints. It is a culture to be called exceptional in the sense that it blossomed from the lives of commoners to become a globally-recognised sophisticated culture.

A large part of the development of culture in the Edo period was supported by the extensive bonds among ordinary citizens. Apart from political systems, cultural bonds play a major role in the shaping of society that is called the "Bonds of Civility*1." They are one of the reasons for the courtesy, sincerity and delicate sensibilities of the Japanese. It is probably connected to *omotenashi*, the Japanese spirit of showing sincere hospitality to visitors.

During the Edo period, citizens with shared interests in areas such as *haiku* and other forms of Japanese poetry, tea ceremonies, and flower arrangement formed numerous groups where they were able to hone their aesthetic sensibilities. Their shared interests also led to interactions that transcended social status.

Ukiyo-e prints and *kabuki* were born out of the lives of commoners, in other words, the popular culture of the Edo period. Because of this, there was a robust market, which enhanced the quality of the culture. In the beginning, they were not considered as high art, but developed over time in response to local customer demands for more sophisticated techniques and content, leading to the birth of globally remarkable art forms.

The technical prowess of artisans and the discerning eyes of consumers during those years live



on today. Tokyo boasts the largest number of artisans and craftsman in the traditional arts in Japan. It has led to the birth of high-quality industrial goods and design.

Brisk "creator equals consumer" culture

Tokyo's history is one in which each citizen is both an artist and art appreciator/consumer.

Since the Emperor Meiji moved the capital to Tokyo from Kyoto, which had been the residence of emperors for over a thousand years, the population of people learning flower arrangement and tea ceremonies increased significantly. These creative activities of the citizens continue to flourish today. For example, the presence of *haiku* columns in major Japanese newspapers reveals many readers are also *haiku* poets. There are many children learning to play piano, violin, ballet, or Japanese calligraphy from early childhood. There are active movements for citizens to display their creative works. It could be said that *manga* and *anime*, now the focus of great attention, were born out of the everyday lives of the populace. Large-scale exhibition and fairs of self-published fanzines are held in Tokyo, providing a platform for interaction among people sharing the same interest and also helping to raise the next generation of writers and artists. Thanks to the presence of this huge cultural foundation, new works of art are emerging one after another.

Tokyo: A city presenting the new power and possibilities of culture

Tokyo is a city that presents many proposals for culture. No single centre or norm overwhelms

the others. As it is called "techno-animism," it shows an interest and affection towards many things, from nature and animals to machinery and technology. The generosity and freedom in the culture are the main characteristics of Tokyo.

Enjoying traditional culture and accepting other countries' cultures flourish within this flexible Tokyo. For example, traditional events continued since the Edo period, such as the Sumida River fireworks display, a traditional atmosphere appears with people in the streets dressed in *yukata* (a casual *kimono*) and carrying paper fans. Traditional festivals are held throughout the year in all parts of Tokyo, and the *Bon* festival dances revitalise the local communities. Tokyo's diverse and sophisticated food culture, rated highly by Michelin, is the fruit of acceptance, research, and modification of food from around the world.

In an increasingly globalised world, along with the generation of new bonds between people through culture, the mode of culture fostered by Tokyo, which creates new things while taking in diverse value, would appear to have an even more important meaning. Tokyo has a major role to serve as a city that can present the new power of culture.

*1 Ikegami, Eiko. 2005. *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press