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Tea Ceremony

The tradition of tasting tea originated in China in about the 8th century and was brought to Japan by Zen Buddhists priests at the end of the Heian Period (12th century), who used it to prevent drowsiness during their long hours of meditation. The popularization of tea-drinking among the people began early in the 14th century.

A Zen priest named Sen Rikyu (1521-1591) established the tea ceremony in present form under the protection of Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Sen Rikyu had the idea of Wa Kei Sei Jaku as the essentials of the tea ceremony. This is the embodiment of the Japanese people's intuitive striving for the recognition of true beauty in plainness and simplicity. Such terms as calmness, rusticity, gracefulness, or the phrase "aestheticism of austere simplicity" may help to define the true spirit of the tea ceremony.

In the Edo Period (18th century), many schools of tea ceremony sprang up, differing from each other in the details of the rules, but maintaining the essence of the ceremony which the great master had instituted.

Koto Music (Japanese Harp)

The Koto, a thirteen-stringed instrument, was imported from China about 1300 years ago. In the beginning, this instrument was used at the Imperial Court for the playing of Gagaku, the special court music.

People have loved the courtly and sonorous solemnity of Koto music for many years, and even today the classical harmony charms the people. In recent years, the Koto has been used in combination with western instruments, thus creating a new field in music while maintaining the original noble atmosphere.

Flower Arrangement

We human beings have a long history of loving and appreciating flowers. In Japan, people have put flowers in bottles or vases ever since the 6th century, around 1500 years ago when Buddhism first came from China. Flower arrangement in Japan started from the altar flowers put before an image of Buddha or ancestors to console their spirits. In the Momoyama Period (16th century). It became fashionable to use flower arrangements in the tea ceremony house, but it was necessary to create suitably simple, natural, and symbolic arrangements. The style which is produced in this movement is Nageire ("throw-in") style. Artistic, spiritual and religious elements were used in the techniques of arrangement and through them the importance of symbolism in Japanese flower arrangement grew.

In the Meiji Period (19th century), Moribana, meaning "in abundance", was newly added and developed as one of the traditional arts.

Gagaku (Court Music)

The word Gagaku literally means "elegant music", and it is the broad designation for ancient Japanese music. The word also covers classical dancing and singing as well as instrumental music.

Gagaku dates back to ancient China, during the T'ang Dynasty (7th—9th centuries). China was the cultural center of all Asia. This court music was introduced into Japan in the 8th century. This court music seems to have died out on the mainland with the fall of the T'ang Dynasty, but in Japan it continued to flourish among the members of the imperial family, the nobles, and other upper circles of society, especially during the Heian Period (9th—12th centuries). It was performed at court banquets and at sacred rites in shrines and temples. Gagaku has been modified to suit the taste of the Japanese people and, as a result, is now truly a Japanese classical art form.

Kyogen (Ancient Comic Play)

Kyogen is a kind of comic play performed as an interlude for Noh plays and spoken in the everyday language of the time.

Kyogen pieces have been handed down from the 15th century. It may be regarded as a form of art consisting of a primitive dance including acrobatic stunts performed at the time of rice planting or in supplication to the Gods for a rich harvest at shrine festivals. After the 16th century, Kyogen became exclusive among the people especially in the warrior class as one of their accomplishments under the patronage of the Shogunate at that time.

Its realism—directly opposite from the symbolism of Noh as well as its dialogue content have begun to attract the attention of dramatic critics.

Today, two schools of Kyogen are extant—the Okura and the Izumi schools. Masks are used only in a few Kyogen pieces, unlike in Noh plays.

Kyomai (Kyoto Style Dance)

The Japanese dance occurs as two kinds. One, which originated in the Edo Period (17th century), is called Odori. It grew out of Kabuki Drama and expresses man's feeling very strongly in each action.

The other kind is called Mai, and it started in the western part of Japan. It is generally performed in Japanese rooms instead of the stage. It was influenced by the Noh Drama. Kyomai (Kyoto Style) dance was born in the 17th century and it developed during the very courtly culture of the Tokugawa Period. Kyomai adopted the elegance and sophistication of the Imperial Court manners.

The Miyako Odori, which is held every spring, is based on the Kyoto Style Dance. These performances by Maiko and Geisha attract the people with their beauty, colorful costumes, and gorgeous staging.

Kyogen "BOSHIBARI"

—The Cudgel Play and Servants—

Persons on the stage Conversation & actions

Feudal Lord	He is going out to the neighboring village for his business. But he is afraid that his sake in the stock house may be stolen while he is out by his servants, Taro and Jiro. So he makes up his mind to tie them up and calls Taro.
Taro	He comes in Lord and Taro figures out how to tie up Jiro. Taro suggests that his master tie up Jiro while they ask him to show his skillful demonstration of cudgel play, and he does it.
Jiro with a cudgel	Jiro shows them some of the different kinds of cudgel play. Lord and Taro tie up Jiro. Taro kids Jiro who is tied up.
Lord	The lord ties Taro's hands behind his back, too. Now he has no need to worry about his sake. He goes to the village.
Taro and Jiro	They are talking about the ways they can steal sake from the stock house. Fortunately, they can move freely their fingers, so they open the door of the stock house, steal sake and drink it triumphantly from a large cup. Gradually they feel the effect. At last they sing some songs and begin dancing.
Lord	He comes back from the village and finds his servants have stolen his sake, drunk it and even danced. He stands just behind them and reflects his face on their cup.
Taro and Jiro	They are surprised to find their lord in their cup. But they think that they see an illusion of their lord who is always worrying about sake.
Lord	The lord reflects his face on the bottle again.
Taro and Jiro	Seeing the lord's face on the sake bottle in the stock house, they say "What a grim face my lord has!"
Lord	Lord gets angry hearing their words and beats them violently.
Taro and Jiro	They try to escape from their lord.
Lord	He runs to follow his servants to catch them.

----- Curtain -----

Bunraku (Puppet play)

Bunraku, puppet play, developed over a period of more than twelve centuries as the popular entertainment of the people. In Kamigata (the Japanese used this term in speaking of Kyoto and its vicinity—meaning the place of the capital and its neighbor-

is), this Bunraku art was established in the Eiroku Period (16th century) by Takemoto Gidayu, who is known as the founder and the greatest contributor to the Gidayubushi, which is the music and dialogue of the puppet plays.

Gidayubushi is based on the daily life of merchants in Osaka, the biggest commercial city in Japan at that time, and Gidayubushi had the greatest success there.

The reason it was so popular in Osaka is that vivid and dynamic life of the merchants required interesting and melodramatic entertainment rather than a more sophisticated type. In Gidayubushi, the common feelings of human nature, such as joy and sorrow were realistically portrayed. The great skill of the manipulators of the puppets has enabled Bunraku to flourish even until today.

The plot of the Bunraku Puppet-Play “DATEMUSUME-KOI-NO-HIGANOKO” Scene “Oshichi at Fire Watch-Tower”

This is a very famous love story which was adopted from a true story and first performed in 1773 in Osaka.

Kichiza, a page boy of the Kisshoin Temple, and a pretty girl Oshichi love each other, they are the main characters of this drama. The page boy, Kichiza has to sacrifice himself in order to follow his master Saemonnosuke, because his master could not find a valuable sword within an appointed date.

The sword was entrusted to the master for safe keeping by the Shogunate.

Oshichi's parents wished their daughter to get married with Buhei and discussed this with her. The parents had borrowed a large amount of money from Buhei, and he also wanted to marry Oshichi. Kichiza, who came to his sweetheart's house to say good-bye, could not help overhearing this conversation. As he never expected such a thing, he left a letter to Oshichi and went away without meeting her.

At the same time, Oshichi found out that the sword, which was stolen by somebody, is now possessed by Buhei. She got it back from Buhei and tried to give it to Kichiza. But at that time, all the gates of the city were closed at night and nobody could enter or go outside of the city.

She thought over and over how to find a way to tell Kichiza about the sword. Finally she made up her mind to climb up a fire watch-tower, and stroke the firealarm-bell wildly pretending that she had found a fire in the city.

She was praying that Kichiza would be aware of the emergency and come to her while she struck the bell. She was not afraid of the punishments she should receive after what she had done.

On a chilly snowy night, she went on striking the bell until the gates were opened, and Kichiza came to receive the sword.

