



Tradition, Democracy and the Townscape of Kyoto: Claiming a Right to the Past (Japan Anthropology Workshop Series)

Christoph Brumann

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As the historic capital of the country and the stronghold of the nation's most celebrated traditions, the city of Kyoto holds a unique place in the Japanese imagination. Widely praised for the beauty of its townscape and natural environments, it is both a popular destination for tourists and home to one and a half million inhabitants. There has been a sustained, lively debate about how best to develop the city, with a large number of local government officials, citizen activists, urban planners, real-estate developers, architects, builders, proprietors, academic researchers, and ordinary Kyotoites involved in discussions, forming a highly peculiar social arena that has no match elsewhere in Japan.

This book, based on extensive fieldwork and interviews, provides an ethnographic study of this particular social field. It analyses how people in Kyoto deal with their most cherished traditions, such as the traditional town houses and the famous Gion matsuri festival, which calls into question several of the standard social scientific assumptions about the functions of cultural heritage for present-day societies. The book looks at the way concerned citizens, government bureaucrats, and other important players interact with each other over contentious modern buildings, often with the best intentions but constrained by set role expectations and by the superior power of national-level regulations and agencies. This book contributes to debates on the social uses of tradition and heritage, and the question of how to create sustainable, liveable urban environments.

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