“Tradition” as a Solution to the Crisis of Japanese Sake Industry

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Since ancient times, sake has played an important role in the Japanese culture. It has not just been drunk for pleasure, but for centuries was a significant component of religious and secular ceremonies, was offered to deities, and utilised in purification rituals.

However, a gap between the symbolic significance of sake in Japan and its popularity as a beverage is growing dramatically. The number of small local sake makers declines each year, and large producers in Hyogo and Kyoto are also facing hard times. With the rising popularity of wine, beer, and whisky, Japanese consumers seem to be abandoning their own, traditional drink. Few years ago, Japanese government officially recognized the sake industry as the so-called fukyo gyoshu (a depressed industry).

While facing this crisis, however, more and more Japanese sake makers manage to survive. In this paper, I will demonstrate various strategies that are employed by them in order to regain their share of the market. Some efforts are directed toward reviving traditional brewing methods; others concentrate on conquering overseas markets. Ironically, the declining popularity of sake leads to the revival of the traditional sake making, and may possibly result in the widening potential of its consumption.

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Immediacy and Cinema: Re-“appropriation” of the World through Films

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According to Bergson, in our daily life we see people and things around us through our framework of habits and language, and are thus separated from the immediate manifestation of the reality itself. For him, we can only restore immediacy through some activities exterior to our daily life, one of which —and probably the most remarkable— is art. And now the question is: can the cinema play such role? On the one hand, as W. Benjamin pointed it out, the cinema, for all the sensation of reality it creates, may rather deprives us of immediacy since it tends to show, instead of presenting us the living reality, nothing more than stereotyped images taken out of it. Nevertheless, we can also affirm —and Benjamin himself hinted at this possibility— that beside these corny images another cinema exists: there are films that break precisely with those clichés and offer us a fresh vision of reality. This cinema may well be called the "cinema of immediacy".

In this essay I study thus the "cinema of immediacy" that helps us recover the direct contact with things and people in our present day world. Through filmic works and spoken words of the directors like...