

# Kyoto, the University and the City



## Establishment of Kyoto University

Kyoto University was established in June of 1897 as the second national university in Japan. The first reason for the founding of the new university was the increasing number of people who hoped to matriculate at the University of Tokyo, the only imperial university at that time. The second was the need to foster talented leaders urgently in need as a rapidly developing industrial nation.



## History of Kyoto

Kyoto was the capital of Japan from 794 to 1868. At the time of its establishment by Emperor Kammu, Kyoto was called Heian-kyo which literally means, in Chinese characters, a “peaceful and tranquil capital.” It is surrounded by mountains on three sides – north, west and east. Because of this geographic location, the people of Kyoto are able to enjoy nature in its four very distinct seasons reflected in the rich cultural history of seasonal rituals and festivals that remain vibrant to this day.



After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the capital was transferred to Edo, which was soon renamed Tokyo. It was a sudden change and the population once dropped dramatically and the city entered into a state of depression. But Kyoto soon flourished again, not as a political center but as a cultural, educational, and economical center with progressive development in the industrial sector.

[top] The Clock Tower, as seen in 1925  
[middle and bottom] The original university library (built in 1899)  
\*Photos are preserved in the Kyoto University Archives

Kyoto was the place for Japan’s first elementary and junior high schools, the first kindergarten, and the first public library. Development of the first hydroelectric power plant and trams as well as Japan’s first industrial exposition was conducted.

## Kyoto, the Old and the New

As a city associated with a distinct nostalgia, its citizens are often understood as traditional and conservative, but in fact, they also have innovative mind for adopting new ideas. On one side, Kyoto is characterized by its long history and its importance as a cultural center can hardly be exaggerated. On the other, it is also well known as a modern city with a progressive outlook and numerous high-tech companies. Such elements are supported by the fact that Kyoto has long been a city of academics, and a university town with a large student population. Of the approximately 1,470,000 people living in Kyoto, some 10% are students of the city’s thirty-seven universities and colleges.

## Style and Characteristics

Kyoto University is a national university which places particular emphasis on the tradition of academic freedom and self-reliant learning. At its official opening, the first president of the university, Hiroji Kinoshita, delivered a speech declaring that “this university is neither a branch nor a small-scale model of its forerunner, the Imperial University of Tokyo”, and expressed that the ideal university is to have a unique character. Academic freedom and an educational system centered on student autonomy are the chief characteristics of our university. His beliefs have been passed on to each of our students and have inspired the lives of many.



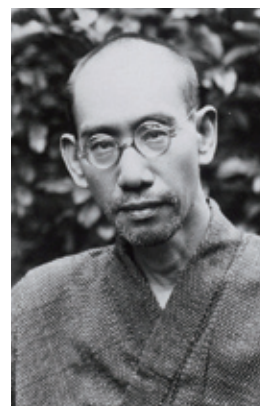
“Self-reliance and self-respect”  
Calligraphy by Professor **Hiroji Kinoshita**,  
founding president of Kyoto University.

## Sight Visit: The Philosopher’s Path

About a 15-minute walk from Kyoto University takes you to Ginkakuji (Silver pavilion), a World Heritage site, and just before you reach the pavilion, visitors are met with the north end of a path. It lies beside a branch of the Lake Biwa Canal running from north to south for about 2 km along the stream, attracting many tourists throughout the year with its seasonal beauty: cherry blossoms in spring, fireflies in summer, colored leaves in fall and camellias in winter.

The Philosopher’s Path was named after an episode of well-known philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945), who used to stroll along this path and ponder over material for new poetry. Originally, it was first known as the path of meditation.

In prewar days, a small group of philosophers including Nishida and his colleague, Hajime Tanabe formed the Kyoto School of Philosophy to advocate the incorporation of Western philosophy into Eastern thought and seek the balance between the two ways of thinking. The conflict between non-Western peoples and the globalization of Western culture has lost none of its potency. The varied and mutually stimulating philosophers of the Kyoto School still exert a strong attraction today.



Photos: [upper-right]The Philosopher’s Path in spring,  
[Lower-right]Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945)