

(From Essays on the Theme of De-Exoticizing Japan)
Tokyo versus Osaka: A Modern Perspective on Cultural Identity

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I. Introduction.

1. Some Thoughts on the Toby Factor.

Early Modern Issues of Ethnic and Cultural Identity: Food for Thought.

Early Modern vs. Modern

2. Osaka Gaku (Osakaology) as a place-based social scientific *gakumon* (Otani Koichi).

chimei expresses *gakumon* (Osaka gaku); place defines people.

Osakaology as a (pseudo-) social science: Otani claims dispassionate objectivity, but practices passionate subjectivity based “on his unexamined faith in *primacy of place*.”

Otani Method: claims to be inductive, but is actually deductive, yielding “timeless cultural essences” (of Osaka). According to Otani, “I can capture Osaka *in its entirety* and thus present it as a [distinct] body of knowledge.” (*Osaka gaku*, p. 4)

3 On the Politics of Regional Cultural Identity.

Osakaologists describing Osaka Tradition with a capital “T,” claiming that it is formed from the steady accretion of place-bound local habits passed down from generation to generation, BUT they actually create “an intoxicating cultural cocktail” made from folk wisdom, stereotype, anecdote, superstition, and nostalgia.

Question: Is Osakan culture intrinsic to Osaka (the place)? If we live in Osaka and “drink the water,” so to speak, do we act Osakan?

My Answer: No. The “phenomena” (*genshou*) identified by Osakaologists as timelessly intrinsic to Osakan culture are mostly “epiphenomena” (*fukugenshou*) that evoke “the modern historical rivalry between Osaka and Tokyo.”

4. Modern Rivalry between Osaka and Tokyo.

The *regional* rivalry between Kanto and Kansai may be age-old, but the *urban* rivalry between Tokyo and Osaka is not: It is *quintessentially modern*—a direct product of the creation of a Tokyo-centered nation-state.

In Meiji, Tokyo became the metropole, Japan’s “first city,” and Osaka became its “second city.”

Osaka was therefore subjected to “the gaze” from Tokyo and stereotyped accordingly.

The pivotal moment of *binaristic rivalry* came in 1923, with the destruction of Tokyo in the Kanto Daishinsai. From that point through the mid-1930s, as Osaka actually superseded Tokyo as Japan’s “biggest” city, there was a struggle

that devolved into cultural warfare: Tokyo versus Osaka.

5. Theoretical Frameworks for Deconstructing the Binaristic Rivalry of Tokyo and Osaka

“custom” versus “tradition”: (Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm; for Japan, Stephen Vlastos et al)

Custom: “popular and capable of being mobilized by groups at society’s base”

Tradition: “identified with superstructural institutions and elites”

Invented tradition: “distinguished from other (genuine?) traditions by the fact that continuity with a historical past ‘is largely fictitious.’”

Osakaologists, for their part, obscure the critical distinction between custom, tradition, and invented tradition

6. Tokugawa-era Osaka was not a rival of Edo; rather Edo/Kanto versus Kamigata.

7. How and why did the binaristic rivalry between Tokyo and Osaka appear in the Meiji Era?

Okubo Toshimichi’s call for *senjo*—with Osaka as the new capital of the modern nation-state—sets up a potential rivalry.

Later, Osaka as commercial/industrial metropolis versus Tokyo as political capital.

TOKYO PERSPECTIVE: the withering gaze down on Osaka: 1893 *Commercial Documents*:

civilized things *not* found in Osaka, used as evidence of cultural superiority of the metropole.

1930s: JNR travel brochure: Osaka is “an ideal city to get away from.”

OSAKA PERSPECTIVE: 1899 Nakahashi Tokugoro’s *Osaka senjo ron* revisited
Debate in 1916 in *Osaka asahi shinbun* on “Osakaism”—begins to sound like sibling rivalry of “big brother” and “little brother.”

8. Intensification of Osaka-Tokyo Rivalry after Kanto Daishinsai (1923).

Tanizaki Junichiro (1925): Osaka as “uncultured”

Oya Soichi (1929): Osaka as Nippon no Beikoku; Oya (1930) : fear of *Tokyo no Osakakai*: consumerism especially; Oya (1930): *Osaka bunka no Nippon seifuku*

In short, Oya and others, at a time when Osaka seemed to loom over Tokyo, feared the Americanization of Japan—the rise of a *seikatsu bunkai*.

Mizoguchi Kenji, the filmmaker, echoed Oya’s fear of the spread of Osakan values in *Osaka erejii* (1936), where men and money destroy a young woman who becomes a *moga*.

BUT some, such as Tanizaki, later backed down from their anti-Osakaism.

The war briefly submerged the rivalry.

9. Postwar Resurgence, then Irrelevance, of the Tokyo-Osaka Rivalry.

The “urban legend” of Oda Sakunosuke’s death in 1947: “*Tokyo no yatsura ni*

korosareta.”

Tokyo Centrism of Postwar rendered the Osaka-Tokyo rivalry irrelevant, but Osakaologists have revived it with a new twist.

Rather than seeing Tokyo as a “world city,” it is Osaka that Otani and others depict as such. –*manga example*: Osaka as a city just like New York, Hong Kong, and Damascus and *only unlike* Tokyo. Osaka is not merely a “world city, however, it Japan writ small. As Otani claims, his book is entitled Osakaology, but it might as well be called Japanology because Osakan culture represents Japanese culture.

10. Conclusion.

“As we contemplate the culture of Osaka, we need to keep the invented traditions of the nation-state squarely in our sights. For it is in resistance to the universal cultural claims of the metropole that Osakans have *invented traditions of their own*. The ringing rhetoric of multiculturalism to the contrary, Osakan culture is no more natural than the Tokyo culture it rejects. No less than the national culture that Tokyo is said to represent, the local culture embraced by Osakans is a complex amalgam of customs and traditions whose roots are not to be discovered in the soil of ancient Naniwa but in the politics of culture of the modern nation-state.”