

Identity and Ritual

Identity and the Role of Community Festivals in Urban Japan

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Traditionally the annual *mikoshi* festivals held across Japan served, in part, to create a community/territorially based identity. Both the neighbourhood association and the *mikoshi* teams were based on the long-term and often multi-generational support of local community members. Through their organisation a festival for and by the community was held. However, with the increasing urban migration seen in recent years, is this still the case? Does the younger generation of *mikoshi* bearers still identify with the area that their *mikoshi* represents? *Mikoshi* festivals across Japan have recently been experiencing a boom in popularity, and yet arguably the traditional reasons for participating in the festival such as small business ownership and family history within the area, are in decline. Alternative reasons for *mikoshi matsuri* participation and the impact of the festival on community identity in urban Japan today will be investigated.

Ritual in the Historical Periodization of Osaka.

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Cities exist on multiple levels, as nodes of economic activity, sites of historical reflection and fields of symbolic struggle. Most residents of a city do not create collective representations of themselves in a straightforward manner. Instead, collective identity may be manifest in a variety of non-representational practices. This is one purpose of ritual: the creation of a historically referential sense of local identity through the punctuation of space and time. In this paper I examine a few recent examples of “semi-religious ritual” in the city of Osaka--including the events surrounding the “Curse of Colonel Sanders”--in order to reconsider the categorical distinction between secular and religious ritual as it pertains to secular and religious time. This will serve as a theoretical prelude to a discussion of the changing role of Osaka within Japan history.

Beyond Tradition as Identity: “Doing Identity” – “Doing Tradition” – “Consuming Tradition.”

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Conventionally considered as a means of enforcing cohesion and thus frequently associated with constraint and authority, tradition and its appropriation have been examined as inextricably linked with identity and place. Approaching tradition as an inherently dynamic, negotiable and multifaceted notion and identity as a positional, rather than an essentialist concept, this paper examines selected cases of tradition perpetuation, the dynamics of external validation and internal perpetuation and ensuing commodification in a contemporary art festival in northwest Japan called the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale. I investigate how ‘vernacular’ traditions that are

on the brink of demise or have been revived are legitimized by what I call ‘aesthetic recontextualization’, i.e. the perpetuation of certain practices in new contexts. I draw on and expand Ananya Roy’s argument that tradition becomes authentic only in the act of consumption, i.e. the claim that there is no intrinsic value to tradition outside such processes of valuation.

Religious Identity and Political Activism: Soka Gakkai Members’ Support for Komeito

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Soka Gakkai is one of a number of new religious movements that came into existence in the early part of the twentieth century and which offers its own reading of Nichiren (1222-1282) that in Japan extends to support for the political party Komeito. Soka Gakkai’s religious practice has often been perceived as one of “exclusivism” in a similar way to how Nichiren promulgated the exclusive practice of faith in the Lotus Sutra in thirteen-century Japan. Yet, Soka Gakkai has been successful in attracting millions of young people, a section of society generally found to be both uninterested in religion and in politics. This paper focuses on the connections between religious identity and political activism and what this means to young people in Soka Gakkai. How do ideas such as ‘Buddhism Humanism’ play out in an organisation where political activism is directed rather unquestioningly to support of one political party.