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THE DANISH PAVILION IN KYOTO: TRACING THE LOCAL CAREER OF A WORLD FAIR EXHIBIT

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THE international gatherings known as world fairs are often branded 'trade fairs'. The implication is that they are essentially commercial: the national pavilions are shops in which national goods can be bought and national industries invested in; only incidentally are they about cultural diplomacy. I attended the 1992 Seville Universal Exposition with just this attitude. The degree of corporate sponsorship of the pavilions, the involvement of trade ministries in running them and the fact that in some pavilions almost every 'exhibit' had a price-tag would seem to confirm such a belief. However, pavilion directors and exposition staff were at pains to deny the charge, at least in its stark form. I was regularly reminded that this was a Universal Exposition, the highest grade of fair, which serves to celebrate a particular aspect of human achievement, and which is held only occasionally. Thus 'Seville '92' commemorated Columbus's voyage five centuries earlier and was devoted to the theme of 'discovery', providing a licence for each nation to present its own unique contribution to the world. 'Trade fairs', by contrast, are the lowest grade of fair, organized with much greater regularity and accorded much less international attention. The Seville Exposition was, therefore, at least as much a matter of national prestige and international education as it was a matter of international commerce.

That the Seville Exposition was not simply a trade fair is something that I now fully accept. While it certainly was commercial, *as an event* its overall functioning was quite different. It was less a market for goods than a forum for identity-fixing. It was first and foremost a place of international exhibition, an arena for the display of nations. It does not follow that because goods were sold in the

pavilions, the pavilions were simply a means to sell goods. Rather, it would be more apt to see the goods as part of the national presentations and of the international competition between them. The 'trade fair' appellation is misleading because the rationale of the fair had much more to do with the selling of nations, their identities and their differences, than with the selling of particular products.

What convinced me that the fair was more a market of nations than of goods was a chance discovery of a rather literal instance of the sale of national identity: the purchase of the Danish pavilion by a Japanese rural municipality, Tamba Chō. In common with most other rural areas in post-war Japan, Tamba Chō has lost much of its population through migration to the cities. For many rural areas, this trend has been of such a scale, and has been sustained for so long, that depopulation has resulted, threatening the very social reproduction of some villages. That Tamba has been less affected than most is largely to do with its relative proximity to the Kansai metropolitan area, particularly to the city of Kyoto to which some of its population commute. It is, however, much more than a suburb of Kyoto, and has sought actively to develop itself as a distinctive 'town' in a number of ways. One of these, as we shall see, has involved the adoption of foreign motifs and even of foreign national identities. But Tamba has also drawn on a more recognizably Japanese source of identity in inviting other Japanese to make Tamba their 'second hometown' (*dai ni furusato*).

One notable feature of Japanese urbanization has been the tendency on the part of many migrants to remain connected to their natal village. While varying with income, sibling status and distance of outmigration, in general migrants return once a year or more to the village, visit ancestral graves with their parents, and join in village festivals. For many rural migrants the *furusato* left behind is the real home to which they hope one day to return. This involves a feeling of nostalgic longing that has been much written and sung about in post-war Japan. But in the 1990s, there are many Japanese for whom a remote little village of paddy-fields and persimmon trees, fireflies and cicadas, forms no part of a personal childhood past.

In offering itself to the population at large as a rural hometown, Tamba would appear to be directing itself to this new generation of metropolitan Japanese who, city born and bred, are no longer directly connected to the countryside through their life course. This self-marketing by rural places as villages-to-be-adopted, an increasingly common form of recruitment of tourists (as well as of customers for rural foodstuffs) in the 1980s and '90s, has become an important aspect of strategies of rural revival and development. Urbanization may have denuded such places of their population but they retain an appeal—and even appear to enhance it—albeit now as a place to be visited rather than actually lived in. Moreover, those who visit are not just first-generation migrants, but also other urban Japanese who, as '*furusato* members', are in effect symbolic migrants. But Tamba Chō's

development strategy is rather more complex than this would suggest. For it does not present itself as the little village in the mountains where visitors can find the 'heart' (*kokoro*) of Japan (a much-used term in this context). This is a *furusato* whose appeal lies elsewhere.

World fairs are the beauty contests of nations. In Universal Expositions it is the pavilion *buildings* that are the main focus of aesthetic judgement. At Seville '92 there were many exotic buildings, ranging from Arabian palaces and Southeast Asian Buddhist temples to high modern glass-and-steel boxes with cascading water walls. One of the more successful buildings of the fair—on the basis of much media comment at least—was the elegant Danish pavilion. The official guide described it thus:

> The Pavilion of Denmark is a reflection of the Danish landscape, characterized by its many islands. When the horizon is broken, it may well be by white sails. The Pavilion itself lies like an island, surrounded by water in a pool. It is like a sailing ship with sails 32m high.... The Pavilion is an example of Danish design and craftsmanship. Inside the pavilion, Danish culture, technology and art are shown through a gigantic multi-media show.

Upon entering the pavilion, visitors were told to take a cushion, find a place to lie down, and look up at the ceiling. The main lights dimmed and three mobile sails on the ceiling were illuminated; for the next twenty minutes a film on the natural beauty and agricultural productivity of Denmark was shown. Compared to some other pavilions, packed with exhibits and featuring crowd-pulling 3-D, wraparound or giant-screen (Imax) cinema (see Knight 1992: 22-3), this 'Danish experience' was low-key. While its building was striking, its queues were not long and its restaurant/bar was noticeably empty. I recalled my earlier conversation with staff in the Norwegian pavilion who complained that the Spanish visitors thought Norway a province of Sweden, couldn't tell one Scandinavian country from another and only came to get another stamp for their exposition passports.[1] In this 'festival of nations' some were better known than others.

Yet I soon discovered that the Danish pavilion was the object of international attention from a specific quarter. For while speaking to pavilion staff I learnt that the Danish pavilion had been bought by the Japanese town of Tamba in Kyoto Prefecture, where it would be reassembled after the exposition. The town had even sent a young man, Hiroshi, to work in the pavilion, to learn about it and about Danish things in general. It was through a long interview with Hiroshi, along with

1. Most visitors carried with them a 'passport' in which to document their world journey around the site. Some even used their real passports.

some official pamphlets he provided, that I learnt the story of the Danish connection of a rural Japanese town.[2]

Hiroshi had just left university, where he had studied German, and had returned home to Tamba. The mayor's son, whose idea the purchase apparently was, was a friend of his and encouraged him to go to Seville for a three-month spell. He explained to me how central 'internationalization' (*kokusaika*) was to the future of the town, and how even before its interest in Denmark, Tamba had established an 'international exchange programme' with an Australian town whereby youngsters from one town visited the other and were hosted by local families. Tamba also had connections with a German town and had sent there one of its young people—the mayor's son—to do a full year's apprenticeship in German wine-making. He returned to establish a local wine-making factory, which now produces 'Tamba hock', *Tamba hokku*! Other Japanese towns and villages have been successful in their wine-making, and my strong impression was that neither the Australian nor the German ties had proved wholly satisfactory. This did not diminish the mayor's son's belief in the relationship between 'internationalization' (*kokusaika*) and the 'revitalization of the town' (*machi no kasseika*). The mayor had sent him to study at a well-known American university and was apparently grooming him for the mayoral succession. The years abroad had made the mayor's son fluent in both English and German and had also inspired him with a 'vision' for the future, one which now centred on the Danish connection.

The Danish pavilion would be used in Tamba in a number of ways. First, it would be a venue for weddings. Secondly, it would be a restaurant serving authentic Danish food. Thirdly, and more generally, it would be a tourist attraction. By providing the town with a landmark, it would attract the metropolitan population of the Osaka–Kyoto region. They would admire the strangely shaped, boat-like building with its 'sails' and its architectural allusions to the island character of the Danish landscape (a point in common with Japan), and they would have the chance to try Danish cuisine.

Senior pavilion staff in Seville, for their part, saw the deal in terms of cultural diplomacy. They were relieved at and proud of the deal. Unlike most pavilions in the fair, theirs would live on and continue to exemplify Danish genius. The building would henceforth serve as a sort of outpost of Denmark in Japan and contribute to Japanese understanding of Danish culture. Among some of the younger Danish pavilion staff there was amusement at the thought that the building would be used for Japanese weddings, as well as excitement among those who would have the opportunity to visit the pavilion in Tamba.

While for the Danes the translocation of the pavilion had international significance, for Tamba it formed part of a strategy to establish a specific cultural

2. This article is based on three principal sources of information: the long interview with Hiroshi, pamphlets on Tamba Chō, and my own familiarity with similar development strategies in other parts of rural Japan, especially Wakayama where I did two-and-a-half years' fieldwork in the late 1980s. I have never visited Tamba Chō.

identity for the town in its competition for tourists. The *furusato* theme cannot by itself confer a *distinctive* identity on a town or village. Hence rural municipalities are engaged in a highly competitive struggle to develop 'brand-names' (*burando*) as a basis for marketing their goods and attracting visitors. The Danish pavilion would contribute greatly to the development of a distinctive 'Tamba brand'.

To date, the most common means adopted to achieve this sort of diacritical identity has been for each municipality to exploit its own particular traditions. For example, Hongū Chō in Wakayama, where I have done fieldwork, while projecting itself as 'a little *furusato*' (*chiisai na furusato*), also proclaims to would-be visitors its 1000-year-old pilgrimage tradition, along with the mythological importance of the wider Kumano area of which it is part. The visitor is reminded that the founder of the Japanese imperial line passed through here as he fought his way to the Yamato plain where he established imperial rule. Hongū, in common with many other remoter places, also emphasizes its identity as a place of refuge for defeated warriors in the Middle Ages.

Tamba's promotional literature also proclaims the depth of its past. It is a place of antiquity, for people have lived here 'from the beginning of Japanese history'. Another example of the depth of its tradition is the Katsuragi autumn festival, which has been held 'for over a thousand years without change', and in which local men (many of them migrants who return for the occasion) carry the palanquins bearing their local deities around the town. Yet this kind of distinction is set to be replaced by one very different in nature. Instead of depth in time, Tamba increasingly prefers distance in space as the source of its self-definition *vis-à-vis* its neighbours.

The mayor of Tamba, prompted by his son, argued that what the town needed was a clear, attractive image in contrast to that of the 'dark countryside' (*kurai inaka*) that had driven Tamba's youth to the cities. What Tamba needed was an image appropriate to the twenty-first century, and to this end it had decided to remake itself into a Danish town. A construction programme had been launched whereby such public buildings as schools, health centres and post offices were built or remodelled according to a 'Danish style'. A new residential area of Danish-designed houses was also under construction. A new 'urban resort recreation area', to be known as the 'Kyoto Denmark Park', was also being planned, of which the Danish pavilion would form the centrepiece.

An ambitious programme of 'social welfare', aimed to raise Tamba to Danish levels, was also being enacted. First, the standard of municipal hygiene was to be raised by connecting all households to a piped sewer system. Secondly, the care of the elderly was to be improved—not by hiring more professional personnel but through such motivating measures as a one million yen reward for those who reach 100 years of age. Thirdly, civic apathy was to be countered and the civic participation of Tamba citizens boosted by the establishment of a municipal fax network, in which fax machines would be installed in all households. This new enhanced communication between the town office and its citizens was vital to the future, for only if the town acted 'as one' would there be progress.

What is being addressed here is the central problem in rural revival efforts in Japan today: the apathy of much of the local population in response to town office initiatives. Notwithstanding Tamba's own claims to civic enthusiasm for its projects—its brochures mention local Australian netball teams and Danish folk dance troupes—the fax initiative suggests a local government rather desperate to achieve a greater degree of mobilization.[3]

Tamba is set to become a Japanese rural town with a Danish landscape at its core. But why Denmark? The official view would seem to be that Denmark serves as a model of a place that is at once agricultural and technologically advanced, whose people are active citizens, and in which care is provided for local people through advanced public welfare policies. Tamba—or at least the local government and other supporters of the scheme—is adopting Denmark, not so much because of any objective present-day similarity between the two places but because Denmark offers the municipality a model for its future. Denmark is both the key source of distinction for the new 'Tamba brand' and a template of self-imagination for municipal development.

There are many other examples of such international borrowings in the intense inter-local competition that is 'village revival' (see Knight 1993). The generalized rural decline in Japan is likely to be intensified by the prospective decline in agricultural support from central government. Tourism is seen as the way forward by many rural municipalities, but requires that they establish an effective appeal in a highly competitive market. One increasingly common strategy for establishing a distinctive brand-name has been for rural towns to take on identities from the international arena. In some cases, the idiom of nationhood is adopted in a direct and imitative manner: 'passports' are produced and 'kingdoms' and 'republics' proclaimed.[4] More often it is a matter of borrowing particular themes and features. Thus domestic Japanese tourists find themselves beckoned by a Dutch village in Nagasaki, English farms in Hokkaido, Alpine meadows in Nagano, Swiss pensions in Wakayama, American ranches in Oita...and a Danish town in Kyoto!

3. That this sort of preoccupation on the part of Japanese municipal authorities is no recent development is suggested by Dore's reference to village offices in the 1950s that 'installed universal broadcast relay systems by which every house has loudspeakers—and often talking back apparatus' (Dore 1959: 356-7).

4. These are generally done in a lighthearted way and are usually a means of highlighting other local characteristics. Thus the city of Kaya in Kagoshima, whose main product is the sweet potato, proclaimed itself the 'Sweet Potato Kingdom'. Ideally the name should pun with that of a real country, but sometimes this can backfire. When Susami Chō in Wakayama, a producer of domesticated boars, declared itself to be the 'Kingdom of Inobutan', punning the word for pig, *buta*, with the name of the country, Bhutan, the Bhutanese government objected—not least to the passport's logo in the form of two pigs!

One striking feature of the Seville world fair was the way many national pavilions stressed internal diversity as a positive feature. Many nations appeared to be drawing on their constituent regions or localities in a much freer way than one imagines was formerly the case. The implication was that national identities did not have to be at the expense of local ones, and could instead draw on them. Here I have presented an example of a locality putting to its own use—albeit in the name of 'internationalization'—a foreign national identity. Two distinct theatres of difference come together, as one makes use of the ready-made identities of the other.

The domestic appropriation of a regime of extra-domestic difference is by no means unfamiliar. The ethnic trend in Western clothing fashions is one example, and the rise of international tourism as a domain of conspicuous consumption another. Indeed, that international fields of difference may be domestically applied is an argument that has been used to account for the *raison d'être* of anthropology itself. Thus Boon (1982) has accused anthropologists of being in effect traders in exotic difference who exaggerate the cultures they introduce to domestic clients. Moreover, recent anthropological studies of consumption have shown that the creative domestication of the foreign is not confined to those Western countries in which anthropology arose but also extends to the non-Western world that anthropologists have traditionally studied (e.g. Friedman 1990). Yet the example presented here of a Japanese town purchasing a national identity at a world fair and putting it to a very specific use shows that the domestication process extends beyond the domain of individual consumption of foreign goods to that of local institutional deployment of foreign images. In regional Japan at least, there exists a vibrant local market for global difference.

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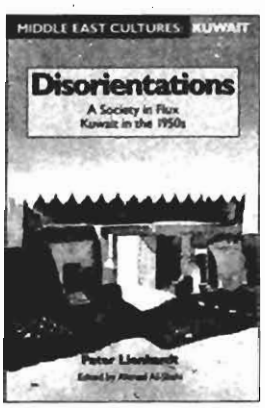

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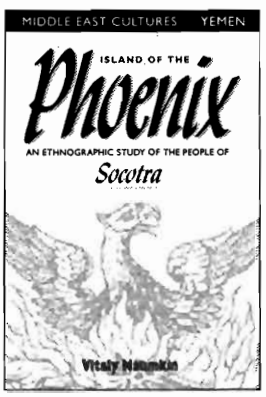

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